



Spotlight Series >>>



Organizational Journeys in Centering Racial Equity *PART ONE*

JUNE 2023



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION



Table of Contents





Foreword

The board of trustees, leadership and staff of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) are committed to advancing racial equity and racial healing. We work to strengthen the capacity of local leaders and support communities in their efforts to address challenges and create solutions. These actions reflect [our core values](#) and remain integral to everything we undertake on behalf of children, families and communities.

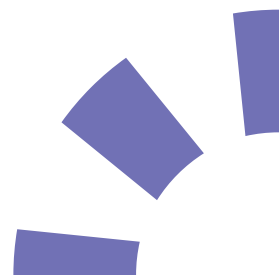
Our commitment began with our founder’s clear vision, in 1930, to promote “the health, happiness and well-being of children” while staying mindful of the connections between children, their families and the communities where they live. Drawing on this vision, and what we’ve learned in more than 90 years of partnership with communities, we recognize that racism is a primary obstacle that keeps children and their families from thriving. For that reason, in 2007, we committed explicitly and unequivocally to being an effective anti-racist organization that promotes racial equity and racial healing as essential for achieving our mission.

Racial healing is a critical pathway to racial equity and the transformation of systems. *What do we mean by racial equity and racial healing?*

Racial equity is the condition where people of all races and ethnicities have an equal opportunity to live in a society where a person’s racial identity would not determine how they are treated or predict life outcomes.

Racial healing is the experience shared by people when they speak openly and hear the truth about the legacy of past wrongs and the systemic impacts of racism. Racial healing helps build trust and authentic relationships within communities, so people can work together across differences to change systems and structures, while affirming the inherent value of all people.

Since 2007, we at WKKF have understood that we can only contribute to a more equitable future if we take an inside-out approach, intentionally embedding racial equity and racial healing practices into our operational and programming practices. We tell our story of becoming an anti-racist organization in *One Journey* in the spirit of partnership and transparency. [One Journey](#) describes our ongoing process of learning and self-examination. It also invites partners to reflect on their own organizational story as we advance racial equity together.





Our partners and peers often ask us for tools and resources to support their organizations' work to advance racial equity. These requests have increased since 2020. Many organizations noted a particular interest in lessons that emerged from WKKF grantmaking that could meaningfully improve their internal racial equity efforts.

Our work to achieve racial equity goes on, and we continue to learn from others—especially our grantees. We invite you to reflect with us on these stories from five different grantee partners. We are deeply grateful for their willingness to honestly share their challenges and successes. Each is on a unique journey—there is no cookie-cutter approach. The openness of these five grantees offers an opportunity for others to draw on key takeaways to guide their own organization's racial equity journey.

These spotlights are just the beginning. We look forward to offering more ideas and stories from our diverse portfolio of partners. Our hope is that through this and future collections of spotlights, we can journey forward in solidarity toward our shared vision of a world in which every child thrives and has an equitable and promising future.

We are deeply grateful to our evaluation and learning partners, Social Policy Research Associates and Eternal Knot Evaluation, for their thoughtful commitment to the authenticity of the interview process, the development of these spotlights and the ongoing participation of the give grantee organizations.

La June Montgomery Tabron
President and CEO
W.K. Kellogg Foundation





Acknowledgements

INTERVIEWEES:

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

- Maha Freij, president and CEO
- Rima Meroueh, director of the National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)

Center for Children’s Law and Policy

- Tiana Davis, policy director for Equity and Justice
- Mark Soler, executive director (now retired)

Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB)

- Felicia Beard, senior director of Racial Equity Initiatives (now vice president of Racial Equity Initiatives)
- Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, president and CEO (now retired)

The Corps Network

- Mary Ellen Sprenkel, president and CEO
- Capri St. Vil, director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (now former)

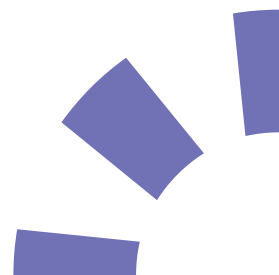
Union of Reform Judaism (URJ)

- Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, senior vice president of URJ and director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

- Yolanda Savage-Narva, assistant vice president of Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI)
- Jaimie Green, REDI director of operations
- Rachel Hall, assistant director of Racial Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (REDI) for the Religious Action Center’s (RAC) Audacious Hospitality team

AUTHORS:

- Traci Endo Inouye, Eternal Knot Evaluation
- Dr. Rachel Estrella, Social Policy Research Associates
- Laura Wong Ravinder, Social Policy Research Associates
- Verenice Chavoya-Perez, Social Policy Research Associates
- Savannah Rae, Social Policy Research Associates





Introduction

The summer of 2020 ignited what has been described as a period of “racial reckoning” for our country. The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd—in quick succession—compelled millions of people of all races to take to the streets, to raise their voices against police brutality and to demand racial justice. At the same time, COVID-19 was wreaking havoc across the globe, and it was becoming painfully clear that communities of color were experiencing higher rates of infection and death from this deadly pandemic.

The disproportionate impact on communities of color led to difficult conversations about the insidious ways in which structural racism has led to persistent disparities not only in health outcomes but in arenas such as housing, education, workforce and economic mobility. In response, public, nonprofit and private-sector leaders around the country took public and often financial stands against racism and in support of racial justice. The momentum of the movement toward racial justice also created an opening for many to reflect on their own beliefs and biases, and search for ways to bring about the change that they hoped to see for the country into their own personal and professional spheres.

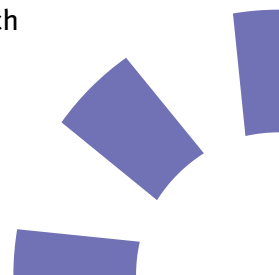
WHY THESE SPOTLIGHTS?

As noted in the foreword, while often asked for resources focused on racial equity and racial healing, WKKF staff began fielding even more requests during this time period, many focused on how to center racial equity

within their respective organizations. How are others approaching this work? How can we do better? Where should we start?

There is no magic formula for how to do this “right.” While many organizations are on a shared journey toward centering racial equity, the different paths that each takes on that journey are necessarily grounded in the rich complexity of organizational and community context. A rich library of useful frameworks, tools and resources exist to help guide organizations on their respective journeys. We also know, however, that many are still craving stories of others’ experiences—particularly from those with similar organizational or community contexts—as a means to inform their own learning and action toward organizational growth and transformation.

This was the impetus for the stories included in this series. In spring 2021, the Kellogg Foundation engaged Social Policy Research





Associates (SPR) to spotlight a diverse subset of organizations in WKKF’s grantmaking portfolio to spotlight their organizational racial equity journeys. The SPR team conducted multiple interviews with leaders of five organizations in May and June 2021 to capture their organizational journeys to that point, hear about challenges and decision points and ultimately surface learning that might support others. The spotlights in this series include organizations of different sizes from across the country with different areas of focus, including a nonprofit organization focused on supporting the Arab immigrant community in Dearborn, Michigan; a policy organization in Washington, D.C., focused on juvenile justice reform; a community foundation focused on addressing social and economic inequality in the greater Buffalo, New York region; a national network of service organizations with members in all 50 states; and a faith-based organization that supports more than 1,200 congregations worldwide.

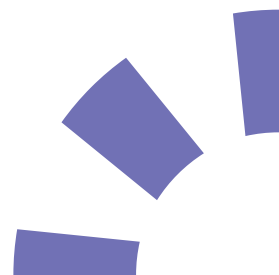
In telling the stories of the profiled organizations, we purposefully led with the voices of grantee leaders. The underlying framework for the series, however, is an updated version of an institutional support framework originally developed to support WKKF in its own journey. The framework was specifically developed to support the foundation in thinking about institutional support for centering its three intersecting approaches: racial equity, community engagement and leadership. Described as the foundation’s DNA, they are interwoven into all of the foundation’s work on behalf

of children, and this framework integrates this with new field-level thinking about organizational development, organizational equity, philanthropic equity culture and organizational change. Each spotlight references one or more of the core elements of WKKF’s institutional Support Framework. The framework is linked [here](#), and briefly described in an appendix to this series.

THE INVITATION

We invite you to engage and reflect on the stories of some of WKKF’s grantee partners, shared in the following spotlights. Precisely because there is no “right” path forward, there is profound value in sharing and learning from the experiences of others. We are deeply grateful for the willingness of those featured here to be vulnerable and to share honestly about their journey such that others may apply the learning to their own organizations.

These spotlights are just the beginning. Recognizing that there is so much more to uncover and share, WKKF plans to produce more learning materials rooted in lessons emerging from its diverse portfolio of partners. The hope is that through this and future collections of spotlights, we can journey forward together toward our shared vision for a world in which all children have an equitable and promising future.





Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)

FOCUSING ON STRUCTURAL RACISM TO CENTER RACIAL EQUITY IN
THE ORGANIZATION. DEARBORN, MICHIGAN

Founded by a group of dedicated volunteers out of a storefront in Dearborn, Michigan's, south end, ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) has been serving the community for decades. First founded in 1971 to assist the Arab immigrant population in navigating life in the United States, ACCESS has since grown to 10 locations and more than 120 programs, offering a wide range of social, economic, health >>>



and educational services to a diverse community that now extends beyond Arab Americans to myriad Black and Latinx families who call metro Detroit home. As the largest Arab American community nonprofit in the country, ACCESS has also earned a national presence, as its network of partners also run three national programs focused on lifting up Arab American history and voices within a larger movement for racial justice.

This spotlight showcases the recent racial equity journey of ACCESS, as it has taken key steps forward in fostering a robust authorizing culture where staff and community partners can meaningfully engage with each other using a shared analysis for what it means to center racial equity in their organization and work. While ACCESS leaders emphasize that they are still very much on the front end of this phase of their journey, key learnings are already emerging that might help other racial justice organizations on similar paths.

ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY

Looking back on ACCESS’ humble beginnings a half-century ago, President and CEO Maha Freij saw a clear through line from the visionary wisdom of ACCESS’ founders to the organization’s racial equity work today. ACCESS’ founders were described as purposeful in cutting across divisive politics and religion, generational differences and nationality to create an umbrella organization that could encompass the rich complexity that is the Arab community. She noted

“ [ACCESS is] developing the Arab American community...with a prism of justice, and a prism of equity. ”

▶ MAHA FREIJ, PRESIDENT AND CEO

that transcending differences and founding the organization not on any one group, but rather on shared goals of equity and inclusion, has been the consistent north star since the very beginning. “Our DNA has always been truthful,” Freij shared. “Even if we didn’t use the terminology...it’s been truthful to ensuring that we are developing the Arab American community... with a prism of justice, and a prism of equity.”

Lighting a Spark for Change

That is why, in early 2018, when an informal group of four staff members volunteered to examine the equity practices of the organization, the effort was quickly embraced. With the launch of new racial equity-focused programming being funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and others, the moment naturally presented itself to look simultaneously inward and ask hard questions about how ACCESS as an organization was leaning into racial equity. This early work was described as informal, exploratory and largely focused on organizational responses





to interpersonal racism—examining human resources processes, assessing client feedback and complaints, reflecting on potential bias in their programming and team dynamics and recommending equity-focused trainings for interested staff.

One of those four volunteers, National Network Director Rima Meroueh, reflected back on the group’s high levels of energy and passion, although limited by capacity. “We were amateurs...and, we did that all on our time, that was all extra work.”

The turning point was bringing in the [Center for Equity and Inclusion \(CEI\)](#) to hold an intensive training in early 2020 with ACCESS’ leadership team. According to Meroueh, the ACCESS leadership team was led through “almost a history lesson of what structural racism looks like in this country...how do we unintentionally benefit from that? How are we continuing to uphold those systems?” She elaborated that, not only did this frame resonate with Arab Americans who

“You asked what needs to happen do this work. And my simple answer is that you must have leadership on board.”

> NATIONAL NETWORK DIRECTOR RIMA MEROUEH



have a long history of oppression within and outside this country, but it created an opening for deep organizational self-reflection rooted in ACCESS’ founding values.

Chief Operating Officer Lina Hourani-Harajli, was scheduled to attend only the first day of this intensive equity training, but was so moved by what she heard that she cancelled all her prior engagements for the rest of her week to attend. She immediately saw the challenge and opportunity before them as an organization, and swiftly stepped in as an internal champion with the rest of the Executive Team and Board of Trustees to continue to focus on and advance racial equity within ACCESS. Having the COO on board was a critical catalyst: “You asked what needs to happen to do this work,” emphasized Meroueh. “And my simple answer is that *you must have leadership on board.*”





Within ACCESS, leadership was not only “on board.” Rather, the level of authorization and engagement of ACCESS’ leaders ran much deeper—not just asking hard questions of the organization, but also being willing to honestly and authentically engage with the answers. Soon after that intensive equity training, the organization hired a consultant to look at outcomes of their programs. The inquiry asked hard questions—do Black men who come through workforce development programs, for example, have the same outcomes as Arab men? According to Meroueh, “Those are difficult questions that a leader either sees as embarrassing, or a threat. Or, they see it as an opportunity to accomplish justice...and live out our mission.” In ACCESS’ case, leadership leaned forward. And the subsequent hard work, seen as fully aligned to operationalizing the core values of ACCESS, was able to take off from there.

Focusing on Structural Racism

The collection of data and telling of stories—not just based on the ACCESS programs described above, but *internal* data and stories centering the experience of non-Arab ACCESS staff—was described as a powerful catalyst for centering racial equity. A majority of ACCESS’ almost 500 full-time, part-time and seasonal staff are Arab American, creating potential blind spots that a majority-White organization might not face. While many assumed that, in an organization composed of Arab staff who have suffered oppression and marginalization, “no one is openly racist,” data created an opportunity to step back and recognize that even within

an anti-racist organization, bias can still shape client outcomes, and culture can still influence non-Arab staff’s sense of belonging.

Listening to staff and client stories with intention and authentically engaging with data—as Meroueh noted in the quote below, not through a defensive interpersonal frame,

“Everything we were doing before was dealing with interpersonal racism... that’s not changing the system. That’s putting a Band-Aid on the issue.”

> NATIONAL NETWORK DIRECTOR RIMA MEROUEH

but *through a frame of structural racism*—was described as key. This allowed for ACCESS to truly place the minority staff voices within the organization at the center and support the most marginalized clients with ACCESS programming.

“I think the most impactful conversations we have are when we talk about racism as a system, as opposed to what we are doing individually,” observed Meroueh. It transforms potential feelings of defensiveness, or “I would never let that happen” into authentic empathy and shared experience. This, in turn, creates space to “not respond, not react, just listen.”



ACCESS staff offered this as another takeaway from their experience thus far. Meroueh elaborated, “Really hearing from people who are most marginalized...sometimes means taking what they are saying, and letting it sit, without comment.” In that space, they have found impacted staff members feeling safe to share, and Arab American staff members able to meaningfully reflect on what they are hearing.

The frame of structural racism has also allowed ACCESS to approach change from an organizational level versus an individual one. Meroueh offered a simple example of how ACCESS’ organizational culture has traditionally acknowledged and created space for staff after incidents like a bombing in Yemen or Palestine, in acknowledgment of the trauma that staff might be experiencing. “What we realized is that for Black staff who are seeing, for example, the murder of George Floyd or any other police brutality...is the space equally there for them to be able to talk about this?” Meroueh shared that these are the types of questions that the organization is increasingly asking itself and its staff now.

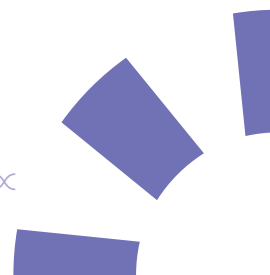
Using a frame of structural racism has shifted their organizational stance toward seeing these as parts of one collective experience rather than focusing on them as separate traumas. As an example, Meroueh described the insidiousness of the Patriot Act, born out of structural racism to surveil and criminalize Arab and Muslim communities and now being used to surveil and criminalize Black-led organizations tied to the Black Lives

Matter movement. She stressed, “All of our destinies are tied through structural racism.”

ACCESS leaders see their organization at the front end of a new phase of their internal organizational journey and are eager for the self-reflection and growth that lie ahead. CEI was contracted for an additional two years to guide the organization through a process of developing an organizational equity toolkit so ACCESS can internally lead this work on behalf of the diverse staff and populations they serve. The organization convened a cross-agency equity workgroup to lead this effort, comprising more than 20 staff from across the organization whose time is no longer volunteered, but factored into their allocation. In the coming months, CEI will engage ACCESS in multi-day intensives and learning sessions, as well as holding continuing sessions with ACCESS leadership.

Consistent Internal and External Conversations

For ACCESS, it has been important that the hard work they have been doing internally is reinforced beyond the walls of their organization. As such, ACCESS staff have been simultaneously engaging their community in very similar conversations about what it means as a community to not uphold systems of structural racism that hold down all communities of color. Meroueh explained, “*How do we tackle structural racism as a society, right? Because we want to make sure that we are a part of the solution, not a part of the problem.*”





Within the last four years, as ACCESS staff have been actively focused on advancing racial equity in the U.S., they have also been holding up difficult mirrors within the local Arab American community. A legacy of colorism and anti-Blackness exists within the complex politics of the Arab community and has forced reflection and reckoning about how the Arab American community may be contributing to and upholding the very systems of racism that they are endeavoring to dismantle. Meroueh reflected that community conversations have been direct and really fruitful, because individuals have reflected on how they interact with each other within and across mosques or churches, or how they overcome the segregated nature of housing in the metropolitan area. “You have

“If we are going to resolve Islamophobia just by resolving Islamophobia, we’re not truly creating a just and equitable society. But if we take on structural racism, we make sure it’s just and equitable for everyone.”

> NATIONAL NETWORK DIRECTOR RIMA MEROUEH

Lebanese and Palestinians in one area,” said Meroueh, “you have Chaldeans and Iraqis in one area, you have the Yemenis in one area. That in itself fits within the U.S. historical context of structural racism. But it is also how we have picked up those systems.”

Similar to the conversations that ACCESS was having internally, at first there was resistance. Community members clung to an idea that “we do not discriminate because we are discriminated against.” However, by virtue of the trusted role that ACCESS has earned in the community over decades, the organization has been able to challenge that notion to get to the level of transformative dialogue and reflection. These are not conversations that could have taken place a decade ago, but rather are a result of service and trust that ACCESS has been building toward for years. “I can’t emphasize the importance of trust and confidence you have with the community enough,” Freij stated. “When you present the hard question, they are not shutting you down totally. They might not be comfortable, but they will not shut you down.”

Beyond the Arab American community, ACCESS has also been in coalition with organizations representing the local Chinese, Black and Latinx communities through a grant from the Kresge Foundation. Over the next three years, each community is deeply exploring their own origin story in America, with plans to come together and engage communities in a cross-racial dialogue that, according to Meroueh, “pushes everyone





out of our comfort zones so that we can say, let's tackle these issues together.”

This cross-racial effort comes full circle to the founding values of ACCESS. “If we are going to resolve Islamophobia just by resolving Islamophobia, we're not truly creating a just and equitable society. But if we take on structural racism, we make sure it's just and equitable for everyone,” emphasized Meroueh.

LOOKING FORWARD

ACCESS leaders talk about their organizational journey in “rings”—starting with centering racial equity within their own organization, then the community that they serve and the partners with whom they work. Going forward, they plan to center on ACCESS' national networks. While this is the least developed and funded at this point, the hope is to eventually replicate the equity-centered work that ACCESS is undertaking with other members of their network. “That way,” Meroueh shared, “it's not just happening here, but happening in Arab American communities across the country.”

The path, according to Freij, has not always been easy. And the road ahead will undoubtedly be riddled with challenges. But having their equity journey rooted in legacy has been a guiding star. “We struggle, and we will struggle tomorrow, but we take it with humbleness,” said Freij. “We stick around because what drives us is justice, what drives us is equity, and what drives us is strengthening the voice of Arab Americans.”

Key Takeaways from ACCESS' Journey

- Meaningfully engage organizational leaders early on as internal champions.
- Be willing to ask hard questions, but also engage with hard answers.
- Leverage data and stories as catalysts for change.
- Use structural racism as the unifying frame—focus on changing the system versus individual behavior.
- Leverage community trust to extend difficult conversations beyond the organization's four walls.
- Lean into organizational legacy as a source of authorization and inspiration.



Center for Children's Law and Policy (CCLP)

CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY. WASHINGTON, D.C.

Founded in 2006, the Center for Children's Law and Policy (CCLP) has been dedicated to reforming the youth legal justice and other systems that impact children and youth. CCLP envisions a world where the response to youth who get in trouble with the law is developmentally appropriate, free of racial and ethnic bias and focused on building strengths to prevent further justice system involvement. As such, CCLP lives out these goals through these core strategies: 1) eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system; 2) reducing the unnecessary and inappropriate incarceration of children; and 3) eliminating dangerous and inhumane practices for youth in custody. Through partnerships with dozens of cities, states and counties, CCLP staff pursue a range of activities, including training, technical assistance, administrative and legislative advocacy, research, writing, media outreach and public education for a more equitable legal system for young people. >>>



The following spotlight tells the story of CCLP’s racial equity journey, as it took the challenging events of 2020—including COVID-19 and racial justice uprisings—to pause and allow space for healing, and to assess internal structures and policies for advancing equitable practices within the organization. The key learnings from CCLP’s journey may prove useful to other small organizations that seek to embark on a similar path.

CCLP’S ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY

Racial equity has always been foundational to CCLP’s work. CCLP grew out of the Youth Law Center, a San Francisco-based organization that utilized a multi-strategy effort to reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. Upon relocating to the East Coast, Executive Director Mark Soler founded CCLP in Washington, D.C., to have a broader national footprint in reforming policies and practices that have had disparate impacts on youth of color in the justice system. By providing training and technical assistance to local jurisdictions, CCLP offers data-informed practices to support efforts for more equitable justice systems in communities across the country. Understanding the systemic, disproportionate impacts the justice system has on youth of color provided the foundation for CCLP to build on efforts to advance racial equity within and outside the organization. For CCLP, this most recent part of their journey meant focusing on three key areas: 1) supporting healing; 2) being more inclusive of communities of

color and individuals with lived experience; and 3) changing organizational policies.

Impetus for Change: Looking Inward

Though racial equity has been a key part of CCLP’s juvenile justice work, the murder of George Floyd was described as a turning point. Tiana Davis, policy director for Equity and Justice, shared that CCLP took this moment to figure out how to “double down on our commitment to racial equity and challenge ourselves on what our impact should be in shifting this narrative about young people of color and the justice system.” Soler added that the murder of George Floyd made him reflect as an organizational leader and prompted him to feel that he had not done enough to push racial equity externally or to support his staff in this work. He reflected, “Some CCLP staff had not put ourselves in the shoes of people of color who are confronted and oppressed by police in their use of deadly force.” In order for CCLP to continue this work effectively, they knew they needed to embark on a journey of internal exploration.

During this time, Davis had also drafted a [statement](#) on behalf of the organization that articulated CCLP’s commitment, and issued a call to action against institutionalized racial violence and structural racism (excerpt to the right). The statement condemns acts of police violence against Black communities and perpetuation of white supremacy within the justice system. It also presents CCLP’s commitment to remaining steadfast in its efforts to “advance policies and practices





within the youth justice and other child-serving systems that will help make America’s promise of racial equity and justice a reality.” The statement concludes with CCLP committing to challenging themselves as an organization in recognizing their own biases and privileges and “keeping racial justice paramount” in this work.

At the same time, the COVID-19 context provided the organization with the space and time to take on this internal journey. CCLP, like many other organizations, began operating in “pandemic mode” and worked to transition to remote operations. As a small organization of eight, Davis shared that they committed to using this time to engage in this process and noted, “Okay, we decided that we need to do this, so we are just going to do it.” Thus, they dedicated this period to providing space for staff to recenter themselves as individuals within the work but also to reconfirm their organizational values on racial equity.

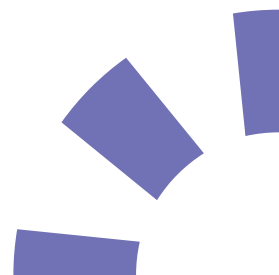
Transforming Healing into Action

For CCLP, it was important to begin with healing. Issuing the public statement with CCLP’s call to action felt like the first critical step. The murder of George Floyd was incredibly traumatic, and all staff felt its impact. Thus, right after it happened, CCLP staff came together during their regular two-hour staff meeting to begin talking through its impact on them as individuals and as staff, and to be in community with each other in an unstructured way. Recognizing the importance of connection, CCLP also used a scheduled board meeting to engage board

“ We challenge those with power and privilege, who have too often turned a willful blind eye, to acknowledge and work to dismantle racist structures that disenfranchise and dehumanize people of color. This means challenging ourselves at CCLP, too. We commit to recognizing our own privileges and biases and keeping racial justice paramount in our work. ”

► *CCLP Commitment and Call to Action Against Institutionalized Racial Violence and Structural Racism*

members—and invited CCLP staff members—to replicate the same process where each person could reflect and share stories as individuals. Soler described these meetings as being “very open-ended so that people could speak about what was going on in their minds and hearts.” Through these healing-centered





meetings, staff engaged in listening, were open to each other’s perspectives, stories and experiences, and connected with each other. Moreover, as Davis shared in the quote below, the COVID-19 context provided the space to

“ [The COVID-19 context] allowed us to do some thinking and do some work around what we need to do as an organization to do our work better, to have a greater impact in the field, and to be true to our own values. We recognized that if we say we value racial equity, we want to dismantle structures and institutions that oppress people of color, that we need to operate in those same values. We knew we had work to do. ”

▶ TIANA DAVIS, POLICY DIRECTOR FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE

engage in internal thinking about how they could hold themselves to their own values around racial equity. From here, CCLP shifted toward scrutinizing its internal organizational processes in a more structured and intentional way.

A crucial part of CCLP’s internal racial equity work focused on engaging in self-reflection and an examination of organizational structures and policies. To begin, CCLP established biweekly anti-racism meetings focused on this effort. As a first step, CCLP sought to find an organizational assessment that could measure and review racial equity within organizations, and one staff member was tasked with conducting research on anti-racism assessment instruments being used by organizations across the country. They landed on the [Racial Justice Organization Assessment](#), developed by Western States, which is designed to support organizations in identifying gaps and opportunities for deepening an organization’s commitment to racial equity and to deepen understanding of inclusion for staff, leadership and others. As Davis described it, “The tool breaks down a couple of different elements of an organization—power dynamics, personnel policies, etc.—and then charges you to assess how you’re doing in those key areas and how you’re leveraging those areas as an opportunity to improve racial equity and dismantle practices that are rooted in whiteness and maleness.”

Each staff member took the three-page assessment, which asked questions related to racial equity on these key dimensions: 1) program; 2) power; 3) policies; 4) people; and 5) culture. CCLP staff then used the biweekly





meetings to dig in on the results of the assessment. As an organizational leader, Soler shared that the tool “revealed a lot and it showed that there were some areas [he] had not considered” as it relates to organizational policies and structures. They then used a shared facilitation structure where all CCLP staff members were empowered to take on key areas of the tool and facilitate discussions during each meeting. These conversations were described as challenging but candid, and while everyone “had different levels of readiness and openness in the beginning, once the sessions began, you could tell that they were also developing a level of comfort and confidence.” From these conversations, CCLP staff engaged in transforming their organizational policies and articulating these in

“ Leaders must create time and space for staff to engage in this work as it makes them feel confident in their journey and adds a level of transparency. ”

▶ TIANA DAVIS, POLICY DIRECTOR FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE

a more comprehensive employee handbook—drawing from their review and conversations on key areas such as hiring, compensation and opportunities for leadership development.

When asked what was difficult about engaging in this process, Soler shared that it was important for him, as a White leader at CCLP, to take on a “listening” approach throughout and stressed that internal racial equity work requires intentional time to process the change. Davis added that the greatest value in this process is that CCLP is continuing its weekly anti-racism meetings and “didn’t drop the work.” She underscored, “Leaders must create time and space for staff to engage in this work as it makes them feel confident in their journey and adds a level of transparency.” Moreover, another critical value in this process is that CCLP staff feel better positioned in how they present themselves externally and how they partner with others.





Bringing Racial Equity to the Forefront

Over the last couple of years, CCLP had started efforts to shift the language they used with community partners and jurisdictions through their services and programming. Soler described seeing the major shift stemming from Davis' statement of commitment and call to action on behalf of CCLP. He shared that the statement "really gave expression to what we had been speaking about in our staff meetings and used stronger language that we had not used before." Through this statement, staff are clear that this is a priority and leadership are essentially authorizing the

“We realized that, knowing that systems will trend to the status quo, which is racism, we have to be more explicit about the language that we’re using. We’re here because we want to make things better for people in communities that are affected and impacted deeply by the system.”

> TIANA DAVIS, POLICY DIRECTOR FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE

culture and sending the clear message to the team to show up and intentionally engage in the work. In particular, CCLP began moving beyond focusing on racial disparities to fully advocating for a collective vision that as Davis noted, “ensures that communities and families have an opportunity to raise children rather than a system raising children.” As a result, CCLP is designing their curriculum and programs that include a focus on key topics such as race and supremacy within the justice system.

In addition, the Racial Justice Organization Assessment catalyzed this work even more as it challenged the organization to be more intentional in pursuing opportunities aligned to its goals and values on racial equity. As Davis described, “I feel that now we have a better anchor in our values that not only guides the work that we pursue but also shifts how we engage in our work.” While this was challenging, CCLP knew it was important to remain clear and upfront with the language they use and their goals for advocating on behalf of young people of color impacted by the justice system. Davis emphasized, “We realized that, knowing that systems will trend to the status quo, which is racism, we have to be more explicit about the language that we’re using. We’re here because we want to make things better for people in communities that are affected and impacted deeply by the system.”

LOOKING FORWARD

CCLP knows that racial equity, healing and anti-racism work is ongoing. Staff are focused



on exploring ways in which they can deepen their impact in advancing racial equity across all their programs. One way is to engage local communities and young people who are directly impacted by the justice system. As a nationally based organization, CCLP recognizes that working with local communities is challenging. However, they are adamant about the importance of engaging communities as partners in systemic change. As Davis noted, “It’s our role to support inclusive systems that engage communities of color toward youth- and community-driven alternatives to the justice system.” To move forward in this work, CCLP plans to hire a dedicated community engagement specialist—someone who has been impacted by the justice system themselves—to support these efforts.

Moreover, as Soler looked toward retirement at the time of these interviews, he shared that CCLP intended to bring on executive talent search firms that would tap into alternative networks to bring in more candidates of color. In addition, CCLP staff hope that in the next phase of their journey, they will be able to fully build in racial equity across the organization and that they can remain committed to partnering with communities and young people of color in bringing change to the justice system. Davis concluded, “As CCLP works harder to ensure that our own organization functions more equitably, we can become even more effective in our advocacy to ensure racial equity and true justice for young people of color. It feels better to be practicing what we preach.”

Key Takeaways from CCLP’s Journey

- Create dedicated space for individual staff to reflect, heal and connect.
- Leverage organizational assessments as a vehicle for organizational collective self-reflection and discussion.
- Engage staff in identifying racial equity tools that are most relevant to the organization’s path and make space for emerging leaders to move the organization’s journey forward.
- Dedicate ongoing and regular meetings or communications to sustain a focus on equity.
- Take a courageous stand externally to live out a commitment toward racial equity.



Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

**BUILDING AN OUTSIDE-INSIDE APPROACH TO ADVANCING
RACIAL EQUITY. BUFFALO, NEW YORK**

In 2006, the board of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (Community Foundation) took a bold step and named advancing racial equity as a priority for the foundation. After looking at data naming the Buffalo-Niagara Falls area one of the worst for economic inequality and racial segregation,¹ and listening to the stories of individuals and families in the region, leaders at the foundation knew they needed to act. The Community Foundation has been a part of the >>>

¹ <https://racialequitybuffalo.org/resources/dividend-report/>



Greater Buffalo region for more than a century, and as a result, it is uniquely positioned to facilitate collaborative change by co-creating solutions to its community's challenges. The foundation's community goals center racial equity in all its work and name four areas of focus in its strategic plan: 1) increasing racial/ethnic equity; 2) improving educational achievement and workforce readiness for residents living in low-income households; 3) protecting and restoring significant environmental resources and promoting equitable access to them; and 4) strengthening the region as a center for architecture, arts and culture.

This spotlight shows how the Community Foundation's commitment to advancing racial equity within Greater Buffalo enhanced the foundation's internal racial equity journey. It illustrates how other organizations focused on supporting racial equity in communities can apply the same tools and learnings to strengthen their own racial equity capacity.

ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY

Resulting from the strategic plan was a commitment to building internal capacity to advance racial equity and the launch of Say Yes Buffalo, a collective-impact partnership led by the Community Foundation centered on racial equity and inclusion. Later, in 2014, the Community Foundation's board further deepened this learning journey as they sought to expand the work to advance racial equity through learning opportunities with Dr. Gail Christopher,



former senior advisor and vice president at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Angela Glover-Blackwell, founder in residence at PolicyLink.

With the backdrop of an economic revival in Buffalo, this work and learning agenda laid the foundation for the convening of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable in 2015. With the goal of achieving an expanded, inclusive economy, the Community Foundation saw the Roundtable as an opportunity to ensure an intentional focus on racial equity, truly aligning policy with practice in the midst of this economic growth and emphasizing the importance of “creating conditions for change” in all aspects of the work. The Roundtable comprises 35 community leaders and more than 300 partners from public, private, nonprofit and faith institutions committed to advancing racial equity in the Greater Buffalo



region through a 10-point strategic agenda based on data from its report titled [The Racial Equity Dividend: Buffalo's Great Opportunity](#).

Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, president and CEO of the Community Foundation, described the work of the Roundtable as rooted in data, focused on systems change while “shifting community culture and creating the conditions for change.” To do this, Roundtable members participate in individual and organizational racial equity capacity-building activities, including Racial Equity Impact Analysis Training (REIAT) and Racial Healing Circles (described below). Inspired by the transformative power of these activities, Perez-Bode Dedecker and Felicia Beard, the Community Foundation’s senior director of Racial Equity Initiatives, realized they needed to bring these tools within the Foundation and offer them to all staff and board members to further enhance the internal capacity-building efforts that have been ongoing since 2007.

Developing and Implementing a Racial Equity Workplan

While the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable’s strategies were gaining traction, Perez-Bode Dedecker emphasized that the foundation needed to double down on “walking the talk” as well. That is, if the Community Foundation was asking its community leaders to look inward and do the hard work of examining their policies, procedures and decision-making through a racial equity lens at their own organizations and institutions, then they also needed to do the same at the

“ We recognize and understand that this work is going to take time to fully achieve racial equity. But we’re not making it so impossible that we can’t see success and progress along the way. It is important that as you’re building out your workplan and strategies, that you’re putting some low-hanging fruit in there to keep people motivated and knowing that this is not impossible. ”

▶ FELICIA BEARD, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF RACIAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

Community Foundation. Beard recalled, “We had started the Racial Equity Impact Analysis Training—one of our strategies for creating conditions for change—in our community with leaders across the sectors, and we then started to include all staff and board in these trainings as well. We needed to make sure that we all



were equipped with this shared history, shared language and shared tools for decision-making through a race equity lens. That [started] in 2017, and we've been training both new staff members and board members ever since."

A critical aspect of the foundation's internal racial equity work included creating a structure for sustainability and accountability. This entailed developing a racial equity workplan and designating two champions within the foundation to drive the development and implementation of the plan. Beard, who serves as one of the Community Foundation's champions, remembered, "A challenge on the front end was not having a structure to hold ourselves accountable to the work. So, we created a workplan and held monthly meetings where we could talk about the plan and discuss

where we're at, what other resources we needed, who else do we need to invite into this scenario, who else needs to know what we discussed today and who else has influence."

The racial equity workplan for the Community Foundation identified three immediate priorities: 1) **talent management and recruitment**; 2) **procurement**; and 3) a **racial equity professional development plan** for staff. When asked about advice for others who are developing organizational racial equity plans, Beard encouraged creating goals that are both aspirational and achievable, reflecting, "We recognize and understand that this work is going to take time to fully achieve racial equity. But we're not making it so impossible that we can't see success and progress along the way. It is important that as you're building out your workplan and strategies, that you're putting some low-hanging fruit in there to keep people motivated and knowing that this is not impossible."

The champions of the racial equity workplan at the Community Foundation got to work embedding more equitable policies and practices into recruitment, such as being upfront with job candidates about the Community Foundation's commitment to advancing racial equity and how it is central in their vision for building an inclusive and thriving region. Perez-Bode Dedecker explained the importance of building buy-in for this vision at the recruitment stage, noting, "If you don't want to do this, you don't want to work with us. Coming to work at the





Community Foundation means doing this work, and serving on our board means doing this work. There is no opting out. It's who we are."

Moreover, during the new employee onboarding phase, the Community Foundation outlines all the activities and resources available to new hires to promote a strong foundation of shared language and understanding about the opportunities to deepen their individual racial equity practice. When updating procurement policies, they also developed some key metrics they hoped to meet and mechanisms to benchmark and track progress toward these goals.

Embedding Individual Practice into Organizational Culture

When naming the priorities in its workplan, the Community Foundation was intentional in both implementing institutional changes as well as creating opportunities for individual racial equity development. Beard explained, "If you change your policies, practices and procedures, and you don't work with the individuals that are within your organization at the same

“Training is never one and done. This is deep personal work and it's ongoing, and it's never over.”

> CLOTILDE PEREZ-BODE DEDECKER, PRESIDENT AND CEO

time, you just have a structure that people still function in as the way they were. We are doing the two things simultaneously so that people understand the importance, why we're doing this, what we're trying to achieve.”

The Community Foundation was also deliberate in offering trainings, resources and tools at multiple points in time, including hiring, onboarding and ongoing supports and resources to build upon the impact of the trainings. Perez-Bode Dedecker shared, “Training is never one and done. This is deep personal work, and it's ongoing and it's never over.” Additionally, the Community Foundation was purposeful in bringing in racial equity practitioners and experts in the field to support both the work of the Roundtable as well as its own internal racial equity capacity. The Community Foundation developed RFPs (requests for proposals) for the work and reached out to its foundation partners for advice. Perez-Bode Dedecker explained, “We called our national foundation partners to say, ‘Who do we send these RFPs to? Who are the best in class?’ Because we only get one bite at the apple with sector leaders here, and we want people to have a powerful experience so that we can build this movement locally.”

The Community Foundation's strategic efforts to leverage connections and seek out advice and resources to support its racial equity work, as well as its intentional use of tools and support afforded to them as part of Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT), a comprehensive community-driven approach to sustainable change launched by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation



in 2017, resulted in access to a wealth of capacity-building resources. This ultimately enabled the Community Foundation to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for internal racial equity capacity-building, one in which staff and leaders at all levels at the foundation participate, including the board. These capacity-building

activities, offered to board and staff in parallel, focus on increasing awareness and education about racial inequities and providing tools and assessment opportunities to support individual staff and leaders to understand where they are and make a plan for growth. More detail about these activities is offered in the text box below.

Sample of Racial Equity Opportunities for Both Staff and Board at the Community Foundation

- **Racial Equity Impact Analysis Training (REIAT).** This half-day training designed by [The Race Matters Institute](#), taken by all staff and board when they start at the foundation, offers grounding in a shared language, and introduces participants to the Racial Equity Impact Analysis tool that applies a racial equity lens to decision-making. The training is highly interactive, using small-group discussion, videos and application exercises to engage participants' knowledge and insights.
- **Other Racial Equity Trainings.** The Community Foundation is very intentional to offer racial equity development opportunities at its staff and board advances² twice a year. Opportunities include an implicit bias training and, most recently, the **Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)** training by [The Winters Group](#). The IDI is a tool that assesses an individual's level of intercultural competence on an intercultural development continuum. For each participant, an Intercultural Development Plan is created that provides a blueprint for the individual to further develop their intercultural competence.
- **Racial Healing Circles**³. Racial healing circles, offered to all staff every two years, are both an experience and a tool that can facilitate trust and build authentic relationships to bridge divides created by real and perceived differences. They consist of both group interactions and smaller more intimate conversations between two participants. Trained Racial healing circle practitioners are responsible for helping to ensure that these circles are confidential, safe spaces for participants that elicit stories of empowerment and agency.
- **Board Stories.** With a similar goal to racial healing circles, board stories are intended to foster trust and relationship-building among board members. Every board member at one point in their tenure tells a personal story about themselves. The Community Foundation brought in trained storyteller facilitators to support board members in developing their stories.
- **Book Discussions.** The board and staff regularly read books related to the advancement of racial equity and have professionally facilitated discussions focused on implications for the work. Recent books have included *The Color of Law* and *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America and Caste*.

² Staff and board "advances" are akin to what most organizations refer to as "retreats," though the Community Foundation prefers to use the term "advance," as it better illustrates their goals around forward progress

³ <https://wkkf.issuelab.org/resource/restoring-to-wholeness-racial-healing-for-ourselves-our-relationships-and-our-communities-trht.html>

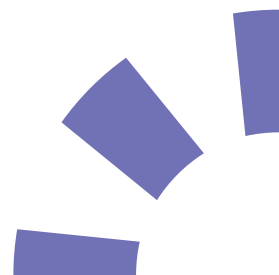


LOOKING FORWARD

The Community Foundation recognizes that its racial equity work is an ongoing journey and there is always more to learn and unlearn and more to reflect and build upon. To support continuous learning, in its work with the Racial Equity Roundtable, the Community Foundation created a community on Slack for Racial Equity Impact Analysis Training participants. Here, participants are able to access racial equity capacity-building resources. Moreover, according to Perez-Bode Dedecker, the creation of this community enables participants to “connect with each other and see, within our community—the Western New York community—that they are not doing this by themselves, there’s actually a number of other organizations that are on this journey with them.” To support continuous learning within, in 2020, the foundation created a cultural competency cross-functional team made up of organizational leaders with the authority to create and strengthen paths for forward movement, including its President and CEO, Senior Director of Racial Equity Initiatives, the Chief Community Impact Officer, Vice President of Finance and Director of Gift Planning. To this end, as shared in the quote to the right, Perez-Bode Dedecker expressed a sense of enthusiasm as they continue to work and learn with and from community in their shared racial equity journey.

“We are constantly supporting the organization’s capacity to lead this work externally by investing in the organization’s capacity to do the work internally, to build our capacity to support this work in the community and to learn along with the community...We are on a journey that is about redressing and reshaping the culture in the region with those members of the community that are part of the organization and with the over 300 partners that are part of the Community Foundation’s work.”

> CLOTILDE PEREZ-BODE DEDECKER, PRESIDENT AND CEO





Key Takeaways from the Community Foundation's Journey

- Create racial equity goals that are both aspirational and achievable.
- Create a clear workplan to help the organization articulate its goals, monitor progress and keep the organization and its leaders accountable.
- Assign internal champions that can steward the work, keep it moving forward and provide ongoing support.
- Attend to both institutional changes and individual development at the same time.
- Utilize tools and experts at multiple points in the journey: assessment, planning and creating a space for healing.
- Embed racial equity capacity-building activities into organizational culture that build upon one another and are ongoing.





The Corps Network

ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY WITHIN A NATIONAL NETWORK WASHINGTON, D.C.

Since 1985, the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, known as The Corps Network (TCN), has supported a network of Corps organizations collectively engaging upwards of 25,000 young adults and veterans annually through service projects on public lands and in rural and urban communities across the country. Today's Corps date back to the federally funded Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s when the voluntary public relief program was a key pillar of the New Deal that got millions of unemployed young men manual labor jobs related to the conservation and development of natural resources in rural lands. Almost a century later—through a network of >>>

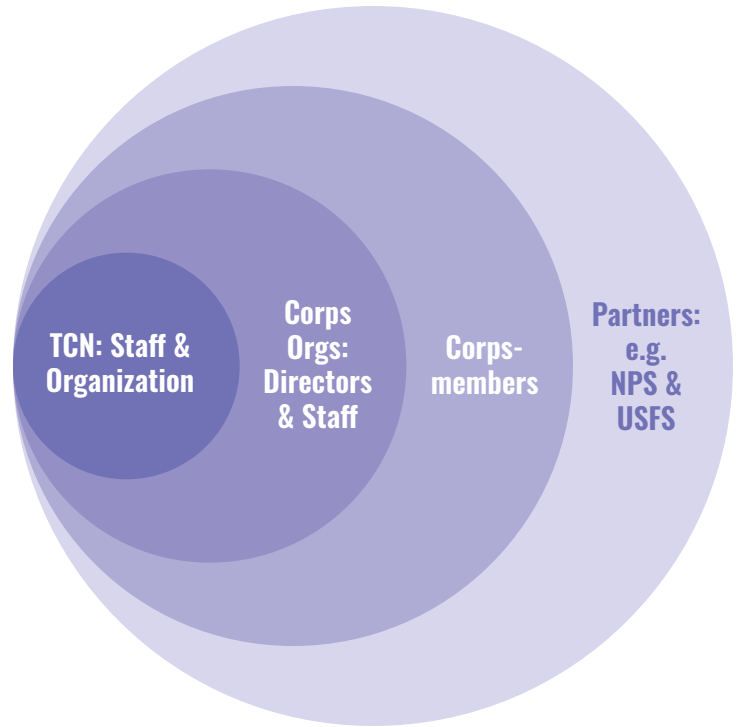


more than 150 locally based organizations—the Corps continue to be a vehicle for economic mobility and environmental justice for young people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories. Through Corps projects centered on conservation, recreation, disaster response and community needs, Corps participants not only provide valuable public service, but also gain critical work experience and in-demand skills.

This spotlight tells the story of TCN’s efforts to advance racial equity through fostering shared understanding for its staff and the wider Corps community as a means to strengthen their collective work. The key takeaways offered at the end of this profile may be especially useful for multilayered networks of organizations that are at various stages in their racial equity journeys.

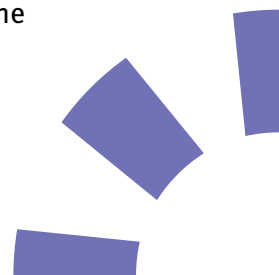
ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY

Given TCN’s laser focus on creating pathways for young people, the question of increasing diversity and centering equity within the conservation and environmental space has naturally become a central one. As framed by TCN’s Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Capri St. Vil, “it is ultimately about increasing diversity within the conservation and environmental space ... (but) we must address why there's not diversity within that space. When you're looking at why there is a lack of diversity, then you must look at the issue of race and racism, which would bring us to the issue of equity. And



when we look through that lens at The Corps Network, then we had to start to do backwards planning. We had to look at what we're doing and not doing at The Corps Network that perhaps is also contributing to the problem.”

Looking inward is not easy within a networked organization. While TCN’s national D.C. office comprises only 24 staff members, The Corps Network extends to 139 organizations—some very diverse, some entirely homogenous and White—located in very politically diverse regions of the country, each with separate staff and boards, each working with different Corpsmembers, and each at different points in their own equity journeys. The graphic above captures the concentric circles that TCN sees as the four spheres of focus, including TCN’s own staff and organization, each of the Corps organizations that comprise the





network, Corpsmembers served through the network and TCN's federal partners, which include the U.S. National Parks Service (NPS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

The Organic Origins of TCN's Racial Equity Work

TCN's work to center equity in each of these spheres organically emerged from the Corps organizations themselves. Themes of equity and justice had been bubbling up through workshops at TCN's annual national conference of Corps organizations and among Corpsmembers and national, state and local leaders in the fields of workforce development, community service and conservation. In 2016, however, two Corps organizations from Oakland and Fresno took the lead in facilitating a racial equity workshop rooted in what they were piloting and learning within their local context. That workshop generated so much interest among conference participants, the following year TCN took the bold step to make the theme for its 2017 annual conference "Moving Forward Together: Promoting Racial, Environmental and Community Equity." According to Mary Ellen Sprenkel, TCN's president and CEO, "We framed this conference as an invitation to our Corps and partners to join us on a journey to examine our work, our organizations, and ourselves as individuals. We stated our intention as an organization to question our assumptions and work purposefully to confront racism and advance equity."⁴

After the success of the 2017 conference and amid a backdrop of examples of open hate



and racism bubbling up in various Corps local communities, TCN reached out to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) for support. A WKKF grant in the spring of 2017 helped TCN launch the [Moving Forward Initiative](#) (MFI), focused on identifying, examining and addressing unconscious bias and structural racism impacting the Corps movement and community with the hopes of expanding career exposure and increasing employment in conservation and resource management for Corpsmembers of color.

Steps Toward a Shared Language and a Shared Framework

The first step in TCN's racial equity journey through the MFI was a racial equity training for TCN staff. A search for the right consultant ultimately landed with the [People's Institute](#)

⁴ <https://corpsnetwork.org/blogs/a-message-from-our-president-and-ceo-we-need-more-anti-racism-training-not-less/>





for Survival and Beyond (PISAB). St. Vil remembered that a deciding factor was PISAB’s explicitness in naming race and racism. She shared, “They said the word racism. When the words are not said, we cannot really address it.”

This first offering generated excitement among TCN staff; St. Vil described it as an “appetizer” that set the stage for everyone at The Corps Network, with staff leaving the training saying, “Wow. I want more. I really am connected, I want to go the next step.” Broadening the training to three more of TCN’s spheres proved to be more of a challenge given the different levels of interest and readiness from stakeholders across the system.

Ultimately, TCN decided to start where there was interest, offering a longer 2 ½-day training with PISAB to a cohort of those who wanted to participate. Therefore, the first MFI cohort was made up of 16 TCN staff, two TCN board members, three federal land management agency partners and 10 select Corps organizations, which TCN thought represented a geographic and urban/rural mix. At the suggestion of PISAB, “each Corps brought a team, including the Executive Director, a midlevel manager and a Crew Leader/Corpsmember to ensure that learning and skill-building occurred at all levels of the organization.”⁵ To keep the discussions going after the training, TCN set up a virtual community learning space, and worked with facilitator Juanita C. Brown to lead discussions. Through the virtual learning space, Brown

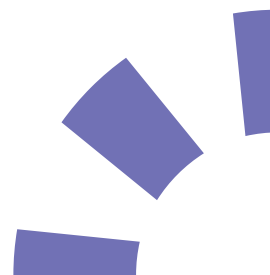
and St. Vil designed a racial equity “course,” where participants could read about historical perspectives of structural racism and respond to prompts at their own pace.

An independent evaluation of MFI found that the experience was a powerful one. Cohort participants not only reported gaining a deeper understanding of concepts like structural racism or unconscious bias, but also reflected on how their own actions and organizational structures might serve to reinforce inequity. Several participants gave examples of how an examination of their biases helped them to pivot and rethink how opportunities for Corpsmembers were being structured at the Corps level. As a result of the training, Corps organization participants shared examples of reexamining coded language or diversity of staff, but also reported engaging in a broader discussion of power and power sharing within Corps organizations and what it would take to move Corpsmember voices from the programming margins to its center.

Extending the Learning Community: Engaging the Concentric Circles

The journey continues in each of TCN’s concentric circles. TCN’s visible equity focus has created an authorizing imperative for this continuing work. According to a TCN staff member, “Corps have the opportunity to see TCN leading a mission and to have this be across all Corps. The narrative of the priority and how we publicly and collectively talk about

⁵ *The Corps Network Year 1 Annual Narrative Report submitted to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.*





what is needed has been literally a driver to help our argument around why we need to do this work. Nonprofit work is hard and really busy, there's never enough money, and there's always somebody ready to tell us, 'You don't have time to do that. That's not what you need to prioritize.' We're like, 'no we can't be legitimate if we're not doing this work.'"

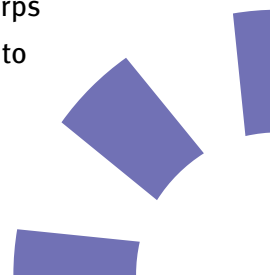
Participating Corps organizations left the training and have not only informally continued conversations within their respective organizations, but have also

“Corps have the opportunity to see TCN leading a mission and to have this be across all Corps. The narrative of the priority and how we publicly and collectively talk about what is needed has been literally a driver to help our argument around why we need to do this work.”

▶ *TCN Year 1 Annual Narrative Report*

made formal investments in racial equity programming and initiatives. Some have engaged separate consultants to further their organization's equity journey, created advisory councils to center Corpsmembers' perspectives or fostered local partnerships with businesses who share a racial equity lens when engaging Corps graduates. As they engage, each Corps organization describes the experience of learning in real time as they chart their own organization's paths of developing organization-wide shared vision and buy-in, engaging leadership in fostering an authorizing culture for deep reflection and action and aligning policies and structures with organizational equity values.

The learning community continued among Corpsmembers and TCN partners as well. According to St. Vil, for a Corpsmember who was able to attend the multi-day PSIAB training, it was impactful but they wanted more and something specifically for their peers. Thus, to focus on the Corpsmembers themselves, St. Vil and two consultants, Junita C. Brown and Mahdi Davenport, developed the Corpsmember Liberation and Leadership workshop, which helps Corpsmembers identify patterns of systemic and institutional oppression, interrupt them and replace them with new patterns. St. Vil stated that while the initial design was for a Corpsmember-only space, they found that having Corps staff present actually allowed for connection and shared understanding across Corps staff and Corpsmembers. So far, the workshop has been offered to six Corps organizations, and TCN hopes to offer it to





more in the future. Among federal partners, an avenue through which TCN staff have continued a learning community is through participation in the Diversity Joint Venture (DJV), a working group comprising resource management agencies, nonprofits and institutions of higher education that is focused on increasing diversity in the conservation workforce.

Importantly, TCN has simultaneously expanded the conversation beyond the MFI cohort, offering a wide variety of opt-in opportunities for staff, Corps organizations, Corpsmembers, partners and anyone else in the community to engage in DEI work. In 2018, TCN added an official MFI track to the conference, where all 250-some conference-goers could attend workshops, lectures and film screenings focused on equity, diversity and inclusion. TCN also continues many of the conversations online with its impressive resource library, blogs and virtual learning space, which is now open to a larger audience than the original MFI cohort.

Silence is not an Option

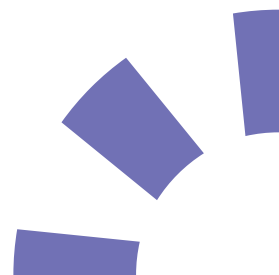
The murder of George Floyd and the racial reckoning that ensued also created a moment of opportunity to engage the broader conservation movement. Based on a strong outcry from Corps organizations for connection and community, TCN immediately responded. St. Vil quickly organized a town hall, which was attended by over 150 participants. St. Vil reflected, “We needed a moment of pause. We needed a moment of just really deep reflection.” Following the town hall,

“Because we have been engaged in this work for three years with the Kellogg Foundation, I personally felt much more equipped to respond, and to help to put out a statement, to move forward. So, I was extremely grateful that we had started this work three or four years ago.”

► MARY ELLEN SPRENKEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO

TCN started a five-part virtual seminar series facilitated by TCN staff called Silence is Not an Option. These groups were designed to provide space for TCN staff and Corps staff across the country to have honest discussions about race in America. Before each discussion, seminar participants received a collection of readings, videos and other materials to review that helped guide the conversations.

Both Sprenkel and St. Vil pointed to their racial equity journey providing a foundation to quickly act during the summer of 2020. Sprenkel noted, “because we have been engaged in this work for three years with the Kellogg Foundation, I personally felt much more equipped to





respond, and to help to put out a statement, to move forward...Had [our statement and town hall] been our first real foray into the racial equity space, I don't know if we would have been able to respond." St. Vil added that the foundation was laid for knowing how to frame a response, but to do so knowing that it reflected the core values and perspectives of the broader network they represent: "These three years gave an opportunity to really develop a thick skin and strengthen our words."

LOOKING FORWARD

TCN sees this work as a journey that requires years of investment and looks forward to continuing this work moving forward. The work of the MFI and the Liberation and Leadership racial equity learning community continues, with more workshops and trainings planned for Corps organizations and Corpsmembers who have not been able to participate to date.

TCN leaders are also eager to tackle deeper transformation work within the organization itself. TCN is actively engaging their own board in conversation about the imperative of diversification, and reports that almost every board meeting has a section dedicated to racial equity sharing and learning. TCN also recently convened a Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) working group made up of board members, Corps council members and The Corps Network staff to move their organizational journey forward. This group is working on an equity statement and exploring an organizational equity assessment to

more deeply examine structures and policies within the organization. Sprenkel feels the organization is at a point of readiness for this level of organizational self-reflection, and feels the work of the past few years has ensured that instead of "defensiveness," TCN and the broader spheres in which they work are oriented and ready to "dive in."

Key Takeaways from The Corps Network's Journey

- Be responsive to members' interests and desires, and leverage momentum to create windows of opportunity for broader conversations.
- Make the case for resourcing of racial equity work.
- Invest in building shared understanding; start with a core group and grow a broader learning community from there.
- Be bold even when you're unsure what the response will be.
- Go where the energy is; create space for subsets of organizational stakeholders to have deeper conversations that push the organization forward.
- Build upon racial equity frameworks and—especially in fields where a racial equity focus is still emerging—invest in tailoring curriculum and thought pieces.



Union for Reform Judaism

HARNESSING THE POWER OF ALLIES WORKING IN SOLIDARITY TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY. NEW YORK, NY

Established 150 years ago, the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) is the largest organization supporting North American Jewish life. The URJ encompasses more than 1.8 million Jews that support lay leaders, clergy and Jewish professionals. Their reach includes nearly 850 congregations in the U.S. and Canada as well as 15 overnight camps. The URJ's overarching goal is to create a more whole, just and compassionate world. To that end, the URJ works to motivate people from diverse backgrounds to participate and deepen their >>>



engagement in Jewish life, create a more inclusive Jewish community, help congregations stay adept and agile, develop teen and adult leaders to lead transformation for the future, foster meaningful connections to Israel and agitate for a more progressive society.

Considered by many as the social justice arm of the URJ, the Religious Action Center (RAC) was born during the civil rights movement to inform, inspire and mobilize the Reform Jewish Movement to advocate for social justice.⁶ The RAC provides social justice education, programming, advocacy and leadership development within the congregations and affiliates of the Reform movement. Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner (he/him), URJ’s senior vice president and director of the RAC, quipped that the URJ may seem like a “bit of an odd duck” among the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Racial Equity portfolio of grantees, unless one understands URJ’s long history of social justice advocacy as well as the ways in which racism and anti-Semitism are deeply intertwined.

This case study highlights the connection between URJ’s history of social activism and its decision to engage with more intention around its Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) efforts. It describes the RAC’s efforts to build a strong REDI foundation within the organization, with the intention of strategically expanding its work to effectively support REDI efforts across all of its programs, partner affiliates, camps and congregations. It concludes



with key takeaways from the URJ’s internal journey, which may be especially useful for White-led organizations seeking to build REDI capacity to support internal efforts, as well as to build their capacity for allyship across racial equity-focused social movements.

ORGANIZATIONAL JOURNEY

URJ has had a long history of social activism and involvement in progressive movements including immigrant rights, women’s suffrage, LGBTQ+ rights and workers’ rights. URJ’s involvement in racial justice movements was amplified during the civil rights era, when the RAC served as a significant resource to the movement. The RAC’s founding benefactor, Kivie Kaplan, who viewed anti-Semitism and racism as “insidiously

⁶ <https://rac.org/about-religious-action-center-reform-judaism>



linked,” served as president of the NAACP for eight years and supported the founding of the RAC in Washington, D.C. He offered the RAC as a working space for Black civil rights leaders who did not have access to working spaces around the Capitol—the fact that parts of the Civil Rights Act were drafted in the RAC conference room is a major source of pride for URJ.

While progressive activism and advocacy have always been part of Reform Judaism’s external work, URJ’s intentional decision to look inward to address oppression in their own communities is more recent. The start of this internal journey can be said to have started in the 1970s, when URJ leadership focused on affirming and welcoming interfaith families as well as unaffiliated Jews and non-Jews interested in converting. In 2014, URJ President Rabbi Rick Jacobs (he/him) called for a deepened and renewed commitment to this idea and announced the launch of the [Audacious Hospitality](#) program, appointing April Baskin (she/her) to be the vice president. Recollecting the impetus of the program, Rabbi Pesner said of Rabbi Jacobs, “he extended those themes, not only of social justice and a commitment to racial equity and racial justice externally and interfaith inclusion internally. He said, ‘We have to reimagine all of it,’ LGBTQIA inclusion, people with disabilities, people of color...the reformed Jewish movement had to be audaciously hospitable to all who would find a home among us.”

Within six months of the launch of the Audacious Hospitality program, Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson,

Missouri. Eight months later, Freddie Gray died while in custody of the Baltimore Police Department. According to Rabbi Pesner, “There was a kind of a plea that was heard from lots of Black and Brown Jews who were asking some of the White Jews and leadership, including me, why it was that we were not more present and taking a more vocal and visible leadership role around Black Lives Matter, and frankly, if we were really confronting the racism within our own community.” He described these two high-profile cases, as well as the deaths of Tamir Rice and Sandra Bland, as a “wake-up call” and a “moment of reckoning” for the Reform Jewish movement.

Building a REDI Infrastructure and Plan

URJ leaders recognized that thoughtful, intentional efforts to support congregations to be more engaged in racial justice externally as well as to confront racism within their own community would require dedicated resources, infrastructure and a plan for implementation. In terms of infrastructure, URJ dedicated four full-time staff to REDI efforts, and funding from WKKF enabled URJ to hire Yolanda Savage-Narva (she/her) to serve as the organization’s first Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion assistant vice president to lead, develop and expand organizational and movement-wide inclusion efforts for URJ. Together, the REDI team worked with consultants to develop a plan that would set them up to be impactful across all areas of this organization, whose staff exceeds 250 persons.

URJ’s plan for building internal REDI capacity focuses on building the capacity of its leaders,





while simultaneously scaling outward to more systematically support programs and congregations. Savage-Narva underscored the importance of laying the foundation with leadership, noting, “I want to really emphasize how important that piece is around getting leadership involved in getting buy-in from all levels of staff, and to make sure people are willing to put in the work to continue on this journey.” The REDI team developed “REDI Agile Working Groups” to support two levels of leadership: a group of approximately 30 supervisor-appointed managers and directors of URJ teams (e.g., Mar/Comm, Programs, IT, Youth, Development, etc.) and the Executive Team. Jaimie Green (she/her), REDI director of operations, described the managers and directors as “the people who have real power at

“How do we ensure that REDI is actually throughout everything? There’s four people working full time on this, but we really need us to be in every single area of our organization for this to actually be impactful.”

> JAIMIE GREEN, REDI DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

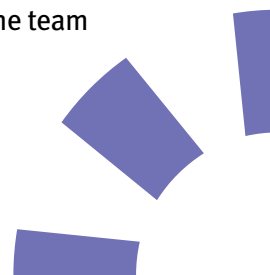
our organization...people who have pretty big portfolios of URJ,” and as such, they engaged this level of leadership first. After working with these leaders for two months, URJ launched the REDI Agile Working Group for the Executive Team.

Confronting Whiteness

The REDI team was frank in its recognition of the fact that URJ’s leadership team is predominantly White. Thus, the REDI curricula they use in their trainings with the Executive Team and the Managers/Directors in the REDI Agile Working Groups has a strong focus on addressing whiteness and white supremacy culture. Green explained that their efforts with leadership are focused on developing a White, anti-racist affinity space, utilizing the body of work developed by people of color and Jews of color.

Rachel Hall (she/her), assistant director of REDI Content, shared that there is an extra layer of complexity in unpacking whiteness and addressing white supremacy in the Reform Jewish community because of its largely immigrant identity as well as its own history as oppressed people. She notes, “We’re trying to get White Jews to understand that while we may experience oppression due to anti-Semitism, we can simultaneously benefit from privilege and oppress others. It’s holding ourselves accountable to looking at intersecting identities.”

Green shared that purposefully engaging in this work with URJ leaders has been a “big learning experience” and notes that issues of equity and inclusion are now increasingly being incorporated into decision-making. At the same time, the team





openly acknowledged that this creates discomfort for some, with Hall noting that participants often ask why they are in an all-White group. Their response to this question is, “Because this is actually what the URJ looks like.” Green added that it is important to “be really aware and frank with where we actually are at” so they can also focus clearly on where they want to be in the future. The team also acknowledged the challenges they face as they press on with this work, which they believe reinforce the importance of laying a solid foundation and clearly communicating the path forward. Hall explained, “We are wary of the lack of racial stamina that most people have to engage in this long term. Most White people want a training or two and to check it off and say this work is done... but [in the words of Robin DiAngelo] systems of oppression are highly adaptable. We know that if we think we are doing something well in one area, the systems that are in place can really adapt quickly to become inequitable in another area. So, we are at this point where we’re standardizing a lot of these conversations and sharing language around where we are going. But then we really need to hold ourselves accountable.”

Fostering Intersectional Understanding

Though building REDI capacity in its leadership has been the team’s primary focus, it is not its only focus. As the team engaged in more intensive trainings with the leadership teams, it also offered optional “micro-learning groups” to all URJ staff. These include a foundational training comprising intersectional presentations that give participants a sense of experiences

URJ Resources for White People Engaging in Antiracist Work

- [A Tool for White People Navigating Conversations About Race - Union for Reform Judaism \(URJ\)](#)
- [Reconsidering Being “Colorblind” - Union for Reform Judaism \(URJ\)](#)
- [The Black Jews Are Tired - Union for Reform Judaism \(URJ\)](#)
- [Utilizing Race-Based Affinity Spaces - Union for Reform Judaism \(URJ\)](#)

Additional Helpful Resources

- [\(divorcing\) White Supremacy Culture - Showing Up for Racial Justice \(SURJ\)](#)
- [Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People - The Arrow](#)
- [4 Ways White People Can Process Their Emotions Without Bringing the White Tears - Everyday Feminism](#)
- [General Audacious Hospitality Resources - Union for Reform Judaism \(urj.org\)](#)

that Jews from a wide range of backgrounds face in the Jewish community. The content includes microaggressions common to transgender or non-binary Jews, homophobic language, experiences of people with disabilities, in addition to racism and, as Hall described, a host of “other isms.”





URJ is also continuing its efforts to strengthen the voices of Jews of color more intentionally, though URJ's REDI team acknowledges that they are in the early stages of this part of their journey. One avenue of support is through URJ's JewV'Nation Fellowship. Developed and launched by Baskin in 2017, these six to nine-month fellowships aim to expand and diversify the field of Jewish leaders in the Reform movement. Each cohort of the JewV'Nation Fellowship has focused on a different interest or affinity group, including Jews of Color and LGBTQIA+ Jews. In 2020, URJ also began offering Jews of Color & Jewish Adjacent⁷ People of Color Affinity Space Gatherings, which enable Jews of Color to have open and honest discussions about their lived experiences, without having to comfort or teach White people about race and racism.⁸ The REDI team has also been engaging Jews from historically marginalized communities to serve as consultants and trainers to support efforts internally as well as externally with congregations.

LOOKING FORWARD

Hall described their recent efforts as a way of “readying the soil,” which resulted in getting the buy-in they needed for long-term commitment to this work. As the REDI team members look ahead to the next phase, they hope to expand their internal trainings to engage URJ staff

at all levels, as well as to do “deeper dives” with those who have already participated in some trainings. The URJ is also now in the early stages of reviewing all URJ policies through a REDI lens and they plan to scale the learnings so that they can work more closely with camps, camp families and external affiliates. Savage-Narva described this part of the organization’s journey as moving into a phase of “action and implement[ation],” and URJ hopes to get support from an outside evaluator to assess the impact of the work.

In the meantime, URJ has been actively sharing resources and continues to provide external trainings to support programs and congregations in REDI efforts. In 2020, the Audacious Hospitality program launched a [Community Self-Assessment Tool](#) to act as a starting point for congregations interested in engaging in REDI conversations. Over 450 people have downloaded the Community Self-Assessment Tool, which is available to the public on the URJ website. Over 2,000 people from over 400 different congregations/communities have engaged in REDI trainings offered by URJ from May 2020 to April 2021. Training participants included clergy, educators, congregational presidents, lay leaders, congregational members, other congregational leaders and teen leaders.

While they are excited about the eagerness shared by many in the Reform Jewish

⁷ Jewish Adjacent people are non-Jewish spouses/partners and immediate relatives of Jewish people. In the Reform movement’s teachings, these family members are referred to as Jewish Adjacent to recognize that they travel their own journey of community engagement and spirituality adjacent to and with their Jewish family members.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/congregationrodephshalom/posts/a-jews-of-color-people-of-color-in-the-reform-movement-affinity-space-december-g/3964449990249496/>



community to grow their REDI skills and capacity, URJ's REDI team also recognizes that there will be challenges ahead. Rabbi Pesner indicated that one of the most interesting obstacles is actually tied to their progressive identity and their strong history in social movements, which can result in "people think[ing] that they are good at this already" and thus not realizing that they have so much to learn. Reflecting on his own experience, he shared, "I've done social justice work my whole career and I'm having to unlearn a lot. And I'm having to relearn a lot, knowing that people's lives are at stake."

Key Takeaways from URJ's Journey

- Connect racial equity/racial justice to organizational values and history.
- Intentionally set aside resources and create an infrastructure and plan to guide the work.
- Focus first on building racial equity capacity in leadership in order to get the buy-in for long-term commitments.
- Utilize existing resources, informed by communities of color.
- Attend to the intersectionality of identities.
- Examine and confront one's own oppressive practices.
- Diversify leadership pipeline.





Conclusion

The stories of the five organizations highlighted in these spotlights reinforce our understanding that the journey toward racial equity is complex and influenced by many different factors. These stories reveal a range of starting points and approaches to organizational change, rooted in the unique context of each organization. At the same time, we also see common themes across the stories: the importance of dedicating time and resources to foster shared understanding across organizational stakeholders, the role of visible and engaged leadership and of dedicated resources focused on racial equity goals, the reinforcing role of aligned organizational policies and systems to ensure that day-to-day operations center equity goals and the powerful recognition of the interrelated role of personal racial equity journeys within the organizational journey. What these stories also demonstrate is a desire on the part of its actors to embark, to take action, to reflect and to learn.



In the coming months, SPR, in partnership with Eternal Knot Evaluation, will develop additional spotlights highlighting the work of other organizations across the country that have been actively reflecting on their own organizational journey toward racial equity and embarking on a path to change. SPR and Eternal Knot Evaluation will also be developing a series of learning papers focused on important themes that emerged over the course of their interviews. While we recognize that every organization's journey will be different, it is our hope that by reading these spotlights and learning papers, organizations may find some points of resonance and that they will not only feel supported in their efforts, but they will also be able to glean ideas and insights that can help them continue moving forward in the larger movement for racial justice.



The Underlying Framework for this Series

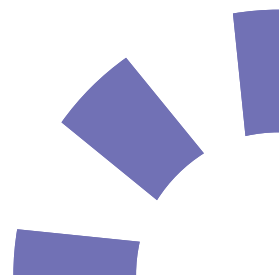
A wealth of published organizational development and change literature exists that summarizes common elements necessary for the sustainable implementation of change. The WKKF Institutional Framework provides additional nuance that must be taken into consideration when fostering institutional contexts for equity-focused, values-based change. While there is comparatively less guidance published in this area, there is a growing base of collective learning being generated from equity-focused foundations and their partners who are actively reflecting on lessons learned from their own journeys. The stories of organizations highlighted in these spotlights add to our collective learning, as each has embarked on racial equity journeys that have facets that embody different aspects of this framework over the course of their own pursuits toward centering racial equity, diversity and inclusion within their respective organizations.

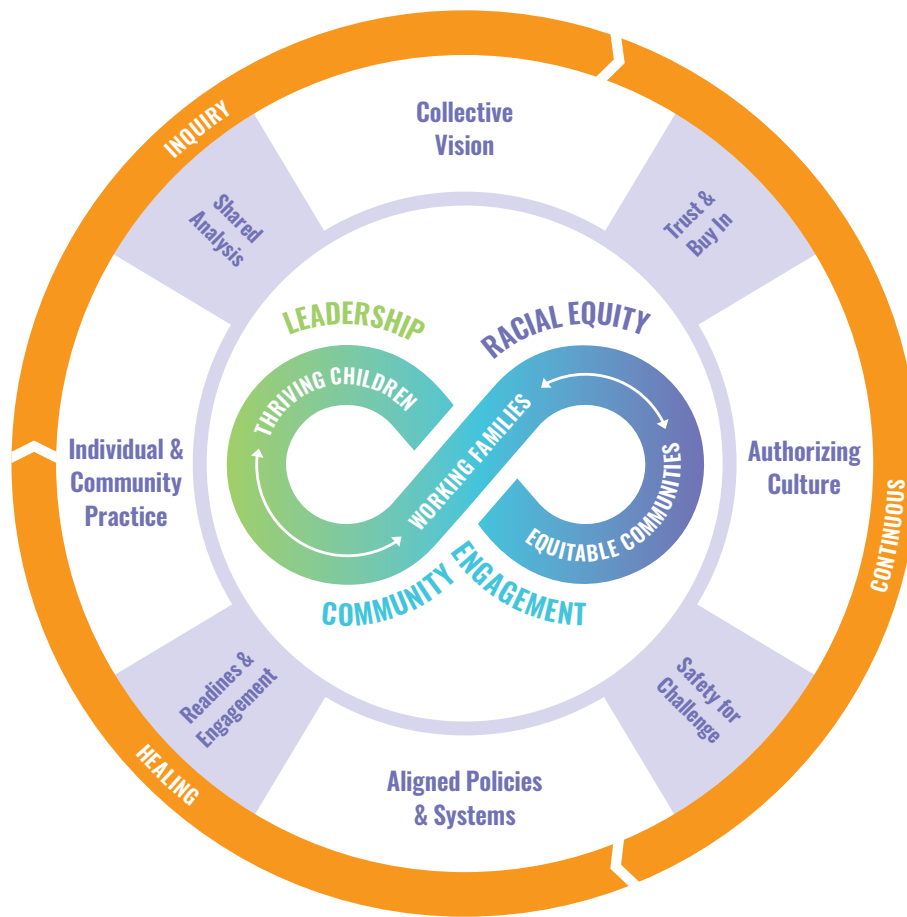
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Institutional Support Framework

The heart of WKKF’s Institutional Framework (framework) shown on the next page is the foundation’s priorities—of thriving children, working families and equitable communities—surrounded by its three intersecting DNA strands that are embedded across all of the foundation’s work: racial equity, community engagement and leadership. However, the core elements of the framework are reinforced in the literature as key supports to centering equity-focused missions more broadly.

As described in a full paper ([linked here](#)) there are four core elements connected by separate “facilitators” that are important enablers for implementation of each of the elements. The four elements are:

- **Collective vision**, or the degree to which shared understanding exists such that staff can understand, personally and professionally align with and embrace the organization’s core equity values.
- An **authorizing culture** comprising visible and engaged leadership,





dedicated resources and a clear sense of expectations and accountability such that staff can step forward as equity-focused leaders, with confidence they are doing the core work of the organization.

- **Aligned policies and systems** that integrate an organization’s core values around equity, eliminate unintentional bias and ensure that day-to-day operations truly “walk the talk.”
- Attending to **individual and community practice** that recognizes the personal journey within the organizational journey, and allows for exploration of beliefs about, histories of and experiences with race, racism and racial equity—both individually and in community with other staff or with the communities they serve or represent.

Recognizing that these elements are not static or stand-alone, each is connected by four facilitators that must be activated and attended to when centering core values. Depicted in the graphic as “spokes” that help to facilitate movement in a wheel of change, these are highlighted separately not only because of the complexity involved in meaningfully implementing these facilitators, but also the potentially detrimental implications of not addressing them. An organization cannot arrive at a collective vision without a shared equity analysis, which must be predicated by investments in supporting readiness and engagement on individual journeys. An authorizing culture requires organization-wide trust



and buy-in, and effective equity-centered policies and systems require a culture where there is comfort to ask hard questions and challenge the status quo, and that ultimately holds the organization accountable to meaningfully align with its core values.

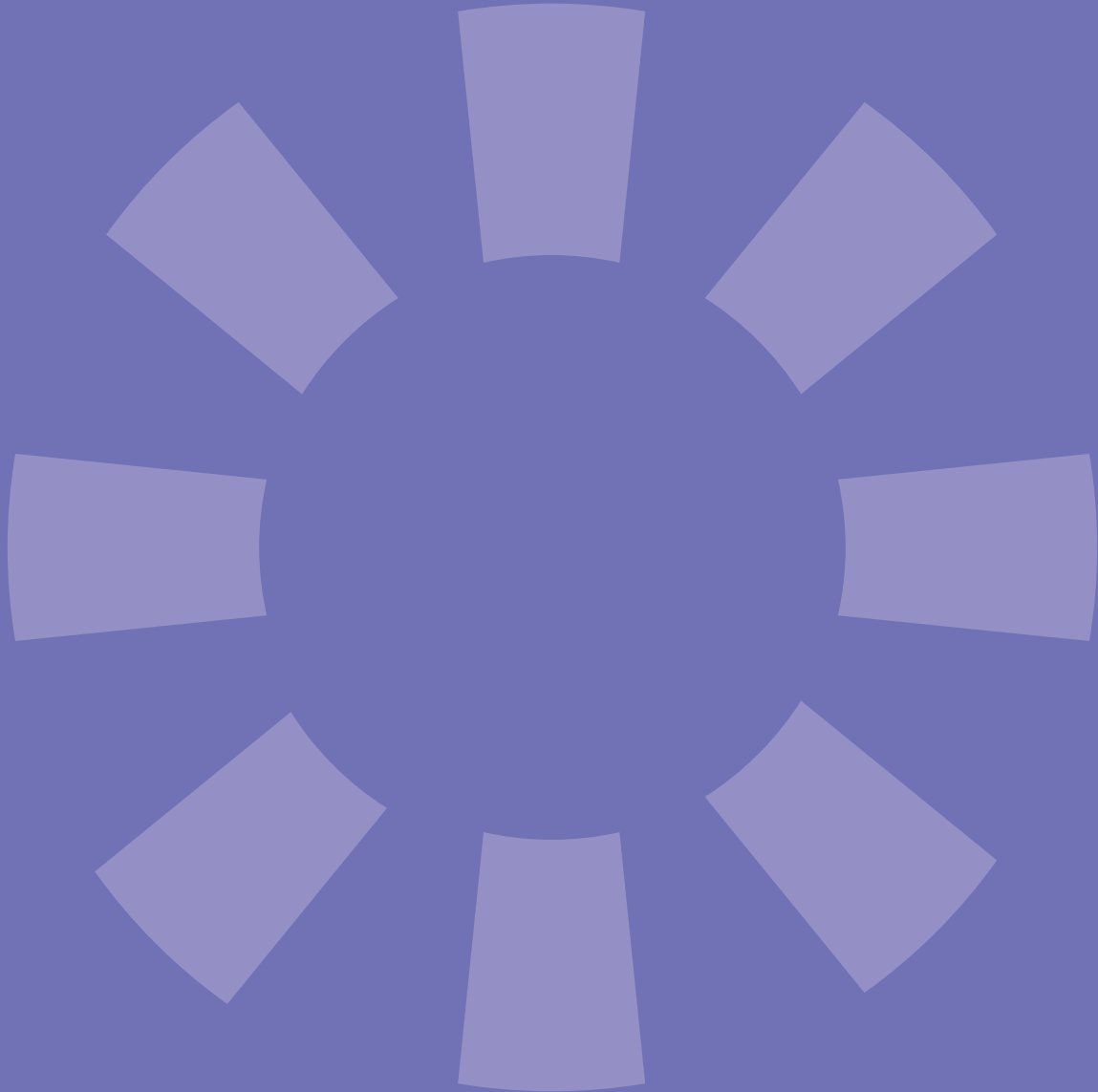
Importantly, this framework is also encircled by a continual process of *inquiry, continuous learning* and *healing*. The outer band is intended to reinforce the dynamic nature of institutional support, recognizing that all organizations, but especially social change

foundations, are continuously learning from community wisdom and changing in response to an always-evolving context. The specific concepts captured in the outer band are not only an embodiment of WKKF's long-term commitment to reflection and learning, but also reinforce the foundation's core belief that any meaningful change must simultaneously attend to healing and restoring to wholeness, to productively move forward anew.





Spotlight Series >>>



Organizational Journeys in Centering Racial Equity *PART ONE*



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION