

Building an equity foundation: A resource to define federal agency's mission and role in shaping equity

Guide and illustrative facilitation materials

July 2021

Table of Contents

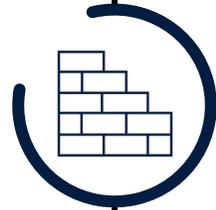


Overview and context of the resource

Context for this resource, including how to use it

Overview of PolicyLink blueprint for how federal government can approach racial equity

Key components of this resource



Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity

Guidance and illustrative discussion materials for how to build a collective understanding of racial equity and your agency's mission and role in shaping it



Reflecting on the equity impact for the major programs

Guidance and illustrative discussion materials on how to reflect on the impact of your agency's top three major programs on racial equity



Codifying and sharing main insights across agency

Template and illustrative steps to codify the outputs of this work, share throughout your agency, and inform Executive Order requirements and long-term racial equity strategy

Contents

Overview and context of the resource

Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity

Reflecting on equity impact of major programs

Codifying and sharing main insights

This resource can help federal agencies accelerate their multiyear journey on racial equity

- **Advancing racial equity is vital to improve the lives of all Americans – especially the 100 million who are economically insecure**
- **The Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity¹ accelerated this important work, calling upon federal agencies to...**
 - Conduct an Equity Assessment, to be submitted by August 2021
 - Develop an Equity Action Plan by early next year to address barriers that limit full and equal participation in agency services or federal contracting
- **Each federal agency has started to identify barriers that underserved communities and individuals face**
- **This resource further supports agencies in fulfilling EO requirements, while also laying the groundwork for a multiyear journey**
 - While the Executive Order lays out the next 200 days, this resource bridges the near term work to a long-term aspiration and plan to lift outcomes for all Americans



How to use this resource



What this resource is...

- **A starting guide to help federal agencies** understand how their mission, roles, and programs can be reimagined and transformed to **improve outcomes for all Americans** – including underserved communities and individuals
- **A set of illustrative discussion materials to facilitate conversations** on the agency's role in shaping an equitable society where all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential
- **A resource to support each federal agency in fulfilling Executive Order requirements** while linking its deliverables to a long-term strategic plan for action
- **The first resource of many** to enable agencies throughout the multiyear journey

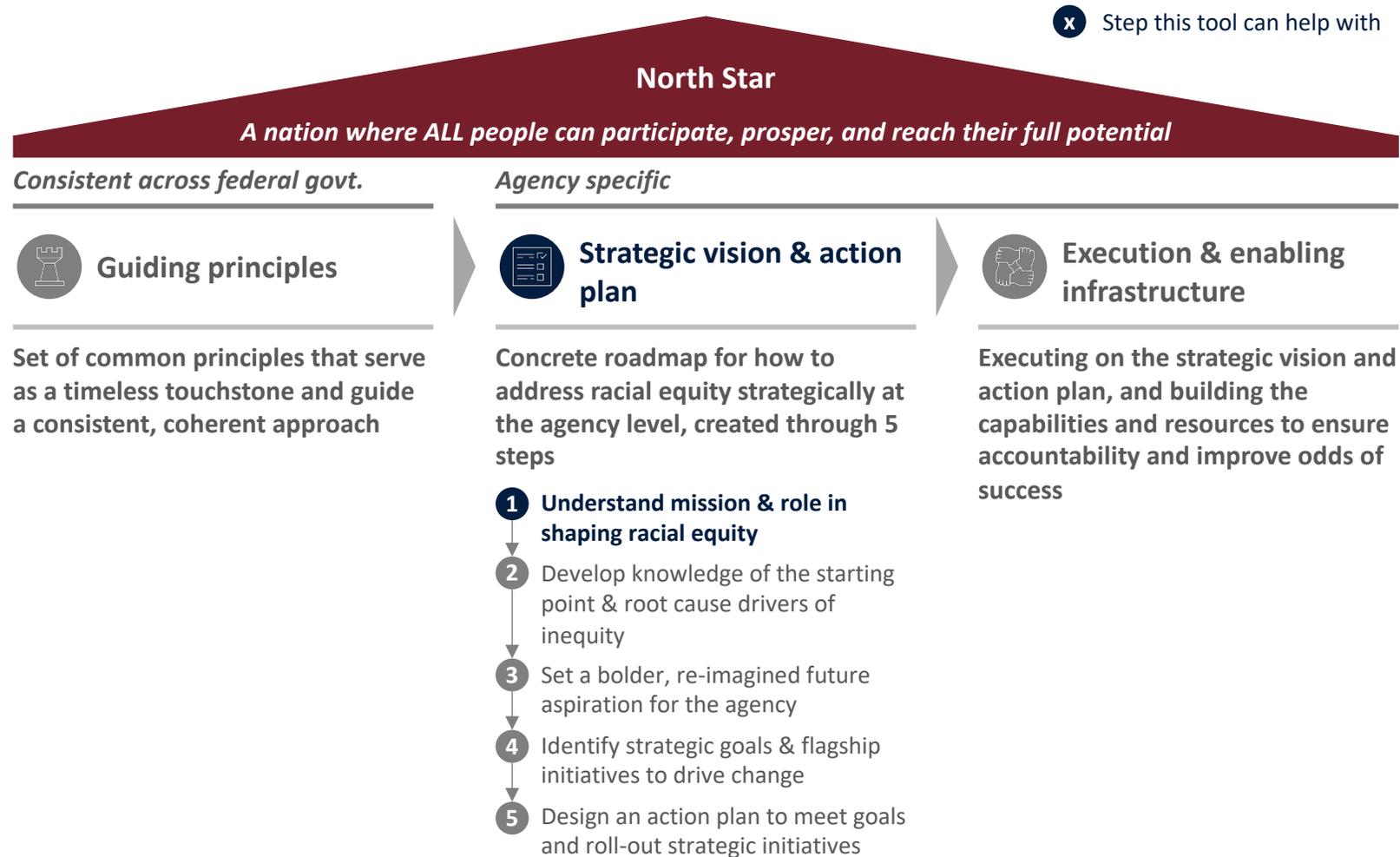


What this resource is not...

- A comprehensive guide to achieve racial equity – this tool is meant to facilitate first steps to get started on a multi-year journey
- A requirement of the Executive Order
- A checklist that fulfills the federal responsibilities to address racial equity
- A replacement for other resources agencies may already use – this resource is meant to complement and deepen existing racial equity tools

PolicyLink has developed a blueprint for how agencies can approach racial equity in the long-term

See our full report laying out the foundation and context for the blueprint

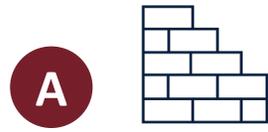


The three-pillar blueprint lays out a path for federal government to advance racial equity

It can help connect near-term Executive Order requirements to an agency's long-term racial equity journey

This resource focuses on the first component of a strategic vision & action plan: understanding the mission and role of an agency in shaping racial equity

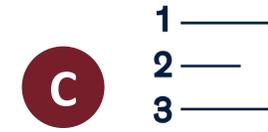
The resource has three components to build momentum and accelerate equity work through series of workshops and written communications



Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity



Reflecting on the equity impact of major programs



Codifying and sharing main insights across agency

Objectives

- Create a safe space to talk about racial equity
- Share context and common guiding principles
- Reflect on agency mission and role

- Examine available data to assess who is impacted by agency's top 3 programs
- Discuss how groups may be benefitted or harmed

- Share key findings with agency staff and incorporate them in equity assessment
- Prioritize actions to take to improve equity impacts

What this could look like

2-hour workshop

2-hour workshop

One page written communications, staff townhall

Potential participants

Current leaders of agency's Executive Order equity work can lead this work, pulling in agency top team, leaders of major programs, and additional cross-functional representatives as needed

Facilitation guidance and illustrative materials for each component to follow

Contents

Overview and context of the resource

Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity

Reflecting on equity impact of major programs

Codifying and sharing main insights

A. Setting a foundation for racial equity work at our agency

How to align on a collective understanding
of the importance of racial equity and reflect
on how our agency's mission and overall roles impact it

*Illustrative materials for how leaders can navigate these
discussions to follow*

Facilitation guide

Checklist for facilitators

Before the workshop

- Send out calendar invite for upcoming workshop
- Share pre-read materials ~2 days before workshop
- Review discussion materials

During & after the workshop

- Screenshare the discussion materials and take discussion notes
- Share discussion notes with participants after the workshop

FAQ on facilitating a workshop

Question



Who should I invite?

Potential approach

- Agency's executive team (e.g., Cabinet-level)
- Leaders of major programs
- Cross-functional front-line representatives (e.g., call center employees, developers, evaluation officers)



How could I facilitate the workshop?

- Share upfront context with all participants
- Break out into smaller groups so everyone has opportunity to contribute ideas – option to prepare a facilitator and note taker for each group
- Reconvene all participants to share key insights from each group



What can I do to make the workshop a 'safe space' to talk about racial equity?

- Take notes on perspectives and ideas, without recording who shared them
- Ask agency leaders to share reflections that take a critical eye to the agency's role in shaping (in)equity

Guidance for facilitators: Addressing a wide-range of potential questions about racial equity

Potential questions

Racial equity

Isn't it anti-American to emphasize race and take a critical eye to our nation's structures?



Why are we saying "equity" is the North Star of our democracy, and not "freedom" or "liberty"?

Does the work of racial equity exclude White people?

Role of government



Why is racial equity a responsibility of federal government? Shouldn't it start at local level?

Why can't government have a smaller footprint in general, including in racial equity?

Aren't there other pressing priorities that government needs to focus on?

The federal approach to racial equity

Why will this work take multiple years?

Should we engage in work that is so partisan and political?

Haven't we already achieved equal opportunity and racial equity?

How will we ever achieve racial equity when the work is so complicated?



How can I, as an individual, have the power to change systemic and institutional inequity?

Key messages

Creating a nation that works for *all* is fundamentally an American value and represents a true love for the nation

Equity and liberty are dual principles from our founding documents and inextricably linked; to have freedom requires achieving equity as a start

Racial equity ensures equal opportunities for all regardless of race, and persistent inequities harm our collective well-being, including for White individuals

Leadership from the federal government can ensure consistency and coordination in this work, particularly given its wide reach and influence

There is precedent for government playing a major role in shaping society (e.g., building the White middle class), and government has the responsibility to fix market failures

Addressing racial equity will, in parallel, address some of the most critical problems of our society given the intertwined nature of these outcomes (e.g., housing, health, safety, education)

Racial equity will require a fundamental re-imagining of how the federal government does work, which is not an overnight effort, and a multi-year effort can ensure longevity and sustainability

Designing a nation that ensures high quality of life and works for *all people* is fundamental to a functioning society regardless of political affiliation

The data shows that race is still a major determinant of access to opportunity and quality of life across majority of socioeconomic outcomes and has ripple effects for all of society

While this is a multi-year journey, it can be done in phases, and every step forward has a major impact. We can work together, each contribute, and lean on resources to begin and continue this work

Though systems and institutions are important to moving the needle on racial equity, individuals in their roles have a meaningful impact as the fundamental decisionmakers and actors on the ground

Pre-read materials

PRE-READ (materials to follow)

- 1 What is racial equity?**
Leading explanations of racial equity to ground our work
 - 2 PolicyLink Blueprint for Federal Government's Approach to Racial Equity**
Our long-term blueprint on how federal agencies can address racial equity
 - 3 Guiding principles for racial equity work**
Government-wide principles for equity
 - 4 The roles of the federal government**
Framework to outline the key levers and roles agencies play to drive impact for society
-

ADDITIONAL FOUNDATIONAL RESOURCES

Advancing Racial Equity: A Path Forward for the Federal Government
Our report on the long-term blueprint for federal agencies to address racial equity

The Equity Manifesto

A short declaration of the vision and purpose of equity

The Curb-Cut Effect

An article explaining why equity is not a zero-sum game

100 Million and Counting: A Portrait of Economic Insecurity in the United States

An overview of the 100 million Americans living below the federal poverty line

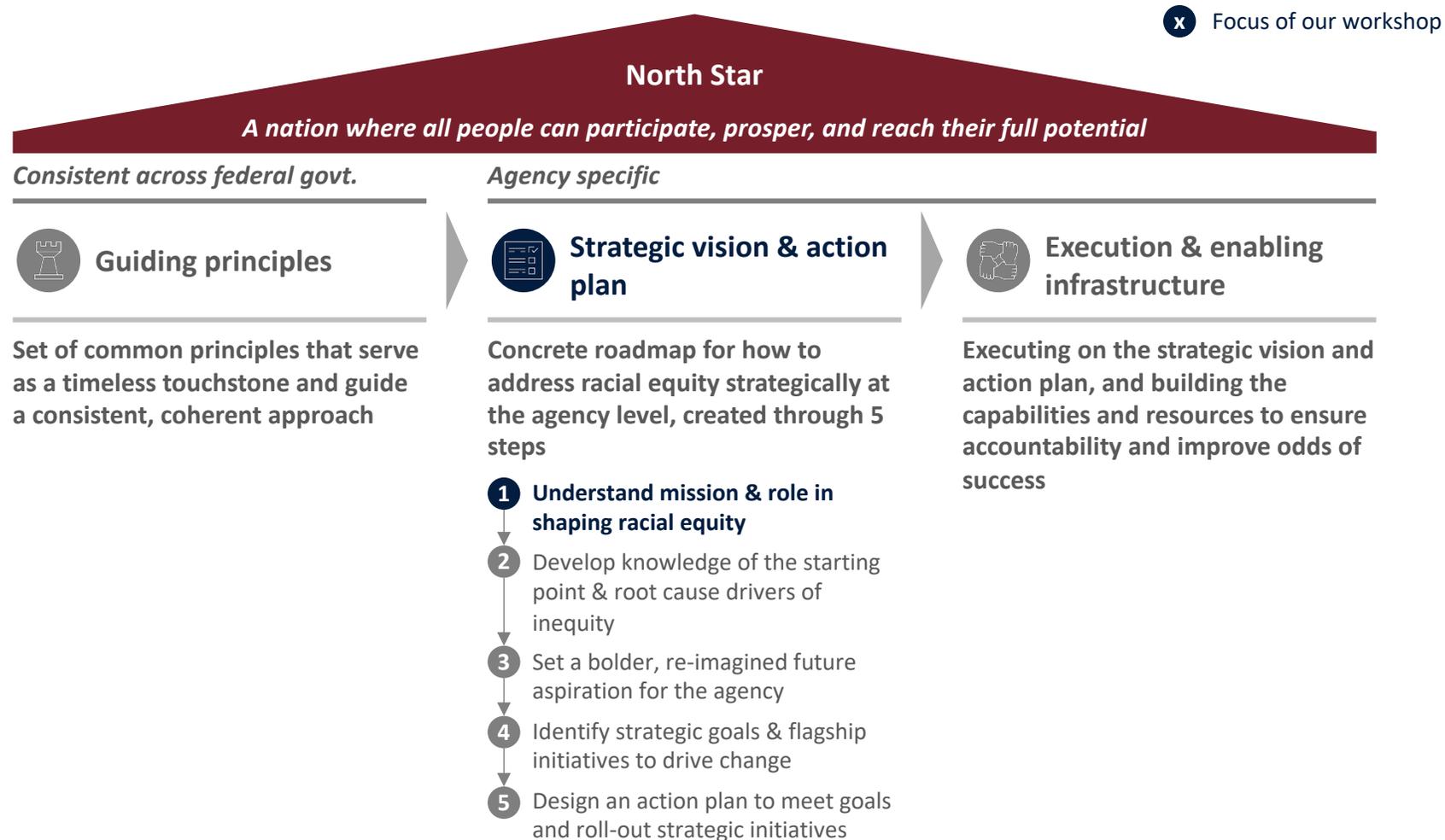
1. What is racial equity?

The North Star of equity is a society in which **all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential**

This requires **the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals**, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment¹

2. PolicyLink has developed a blueprint for how agencies can approach racial equity in the long-term

See our full report laying out the foundation and context for the blueprint



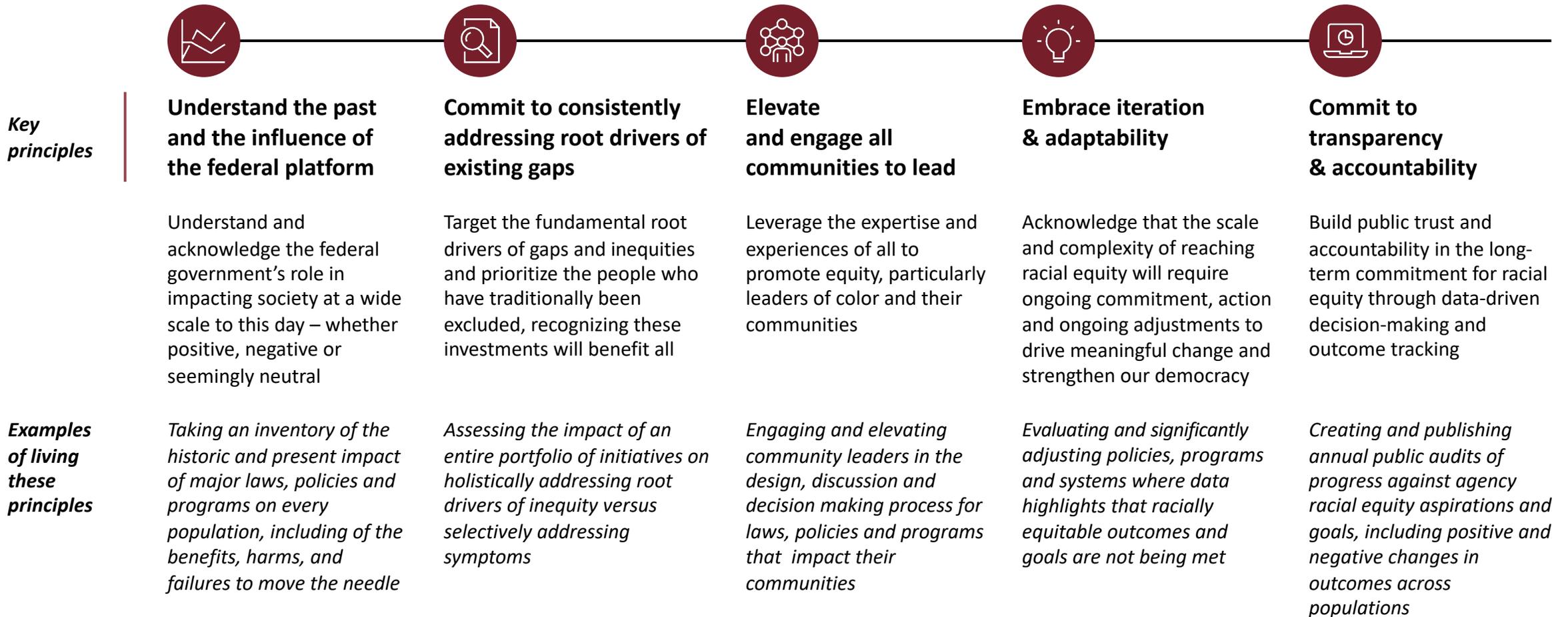
The three-pillar blueprint lays out a path for federal government to advance racial equity

It can help connect near-term Executive Order requirements to an agency's long-term racial equity journey

This resource focuses on the first component of a strategic vision & action plan: understanding the mission and role of an agency in shaping racial equity

3. Guiding principles for racial equity work at the federal government

Together, these principles support the design of a world where everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential – this world is unprecedented, because it works for the 100 million



4. A framework for the number of roles the federal government plays as the architect of an equitable nation

These roles collectively help government agencies and actors drive equity internally and externally



Policymaker

Sets agency strategy and policies, helping to shape economy and the market, and providing two-way feedback with Legislature



Direct provider

Delivers and implements programs & facilitates operations directly



Funder

Provides capital through grants, budget allocations, and incentives



Influencer

Builds national community, represents cultural values, and provides best practices to influence actions



Buyer

Purchases goods and services & contracts with non-government entities



Researcher & data provider

Aggregates & provides publicly available data



Watchdog & enforcer

Ensures enactment & accountability for laws & regulations



Convener & coordinator

Convenes stakeholders across sectors in service of action



Employer

Hires staff to execute agency strategy and administer programs



Setting an Equity Foundation

Illustrative discussion materials



Sample agenda

1

Objectives and discussion norms

2

Defining racial equity

3

Guiding principles for equity

4

Reflection on our agency's mission and role in shaping equity

5

Forward-looking actions to address equity

Objectives for today's discussion



Create a safe space to talk about racial equity



Set the context and common guiding principles for our racial equity work



Reflect on agency mission and role in shaping racial equity

Norms for discussion



Take space and make space

Be mindful of how you take up space and time; aspire to be present and listen deeply.



Be unconstrained in your thinking

Approach this session by envisioning a world where anything is possible



Lean into learning openly

These are difficult issues; work on expanding your capacity to sit with tension and discomfort



Be open and reflective

Humility, honesty, and transparency will be essential to success

In what ways is our agency important for driving racial equity in our society?



Discussion notes

Example: The Department of Education plays a critical role in enforcing national standards of education in this country (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act) and providing funds, mainly for students in need (e.g., Pell Grants).¹ Education is critical to the well-being of all individuals and impacts other socioeconomic outcomes such as economic mobility, employment prospects, long-term wealth.



Facilitator tip: Consider use of breakout rooms, round robin format, etc. to capture as many ideas from the group as possible

1. Department of Education, "[The Federal Role in Education](#)", n.d.

From your perspective, what is a program (in our agency or outside) that has been successful for addressing racial equity in a sustainable – rather than short term – way?



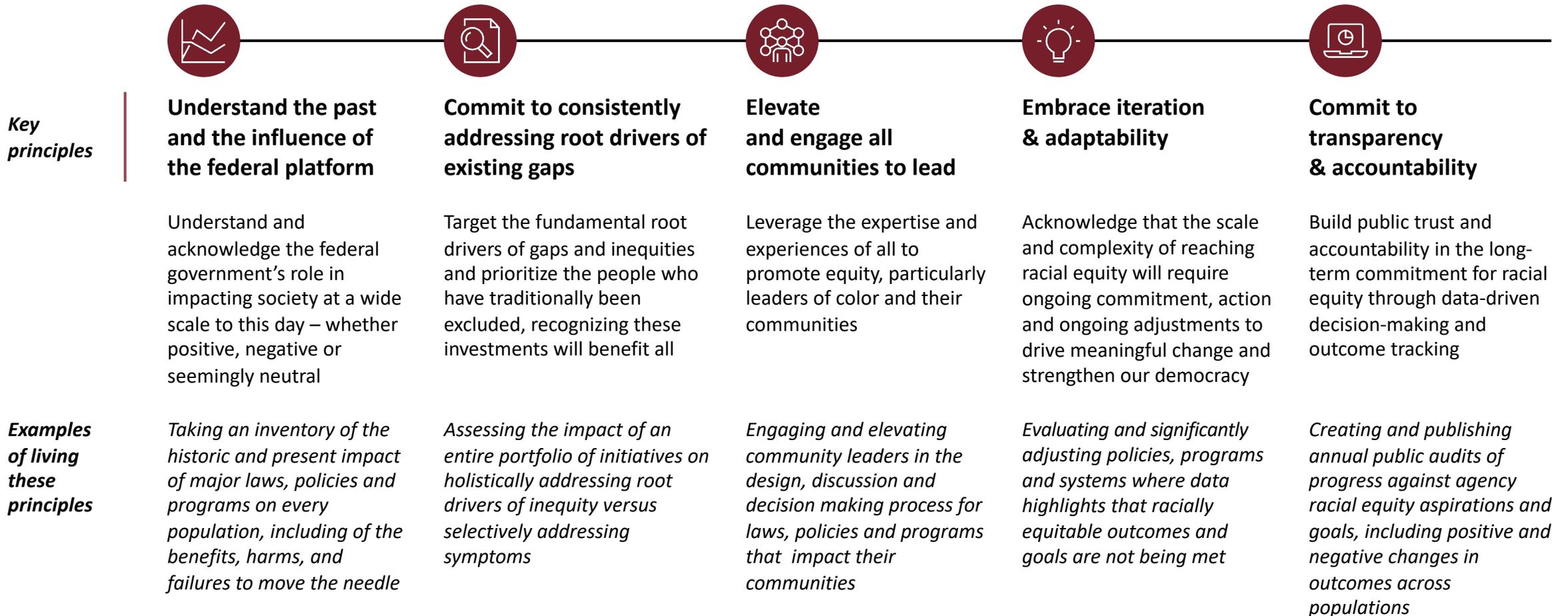
Discussion notes

Example: The Small Business Administration sets procurement goals for federal spend with small and diverse businesses (e.g., at least 5% of federal contracting dollars must go to women-owned small businesses every year), and coordinates with each agency to meet the goals.¹

1. U.S. Small Business Administration, "[Contracting assistance programs](#)", n.d.

Recap: Our guiding principles for racial equity

Together, these principles support the design of a world where everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential – this world is unprecedented, because it works for the 100 million



What are some examples of times our work has already reflected one or more of these guiding principles?

Going forward, what can we change or do to better live up to the guiding principles?



Discussion notes

Example: Our agency embraces iteration and adaptability through frequent pilot programs, where we test progress and make adjustments

Example: To embrace iteration and adaptability, we can pilot our new initiative to increase vaccine distribution and measure impacts (including racially disaggregated results), so that we can make adjustments as needed



Facilitator tip: Encourage participants to reference guiding principles in pre-read and explicitly tie examples to the principles

What is our mission?

How does that mission serve to advance or hinder a society in which all people can prosper, participate, and reach their full potential?

1. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "[Mission](#)", n.d.



Discussion notes

Insert notes

Example: HUD's mission to create inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all¹ strives toward racial equity. However, we need to be mindful that public housing can (and has historically) perpetuate segregation, unless we explicitly make an effort to provide affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods.



Facilitator tip: Ask the group to take a critical eye, considering ways the mission falls short of serving all Americans, in addition to its benefits

Recap: The federal government plays a number of roles as the architect of an equitable nation

These roles collectively help government agencies and actors drive equity with both an internal and public-facing focus



Policymaker

Sets agency strategy and policies, helping to shape economy and the market, and providing two-way feedback with Legislature



Direct provider

Delivers and implements programs & facilitates operations directly



Funder

Provides capital through grants, budget allocations, and incentives



Influencer

Builds national community, represents cultural values, and provides best practices to influence actions



Buyer

Purchases goods and services & contracts with non-government entities



Researcher & data provider

Aggregates & provides publicly available data



Watchdog & enforcer

Ensures enactment & accountability for laws & regulations



Convener & coordinator

Convenes stakeholders across sectors in service of action



Employer

Hires staff to execute agency strategy and administer programs

What is the historic impact of our mission and work on underserved populations (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities)?

What is our current impact on underserved populations (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities)?



Discussion notes

Example: Historically, the Department of Transportation has contributed to racial inequity. For instance, the construction of interstate highways in Black communities led to destruction of their property and created barriers between Black and White communities.

Example: The Department of Transportation builds infrastructure that serves all Americans. However, the majority of our grants to states goes to build roads, highways & bridges – which may not serve the transit needs of low-income, people of color, and urbanites who rely on public transit



Facilitator tip: The group is also encouraged to consider other underserved populations where relevant, e.g., rural, low-income, etc.

What are the roles our agency plays in delivering its mission?

Please check boxes and add brief description

- Influencer:** ...

- Funder:** *Small Business Administration has grant programs e.g., SBIR and STTR*

- Watchdog & enforcer:** *SBA manages federal government's diverse procurement policies*

- Researcher & data provider:** ...

- Direct provider :** ...

- Convener & coordinator:** *SBA helps to organize regional small business councils*

- Policymaker:** ...

- Buyer:** ...

- Employer:** ...

What are potential ways we as an agency can accelerate progress to improve racial equity outcomes?

- Create new processes:** *We can incorporate a racial equity assessment into our annual planning & budgeting process*

- Build incentives:** ...

- Embed changes to agency culture:** *Host townhalls and program team discussions on a regular cadence where we discuss how we are living up to the five guiding principles*

- Hire and promote diverse talent** ...

- Collaborate within agency** ...

- Collaborate with other branches (e.g., Congress)** *If we had Congressional approval, we could tie our block grants to states to equity requirements to ensure that dispersal of funds benefits people of color who have been historically excluded*

- Other** ...

Group discussion/output: Our key takeaways from today's session



How our agency drives racial equity

Empty rectangular box for notes.



Our mission and its ties to equity

Empty rectangular box for notes.



The roles we play to shape equity

Empty rectangular box for notes.



Our priorities to accelerate equity

Empty rectangular box for notes.

Contents

Overview and context of the resource

Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity

Reflecting on equity impact of major programs

Codifying and sharing main insights

B. Reflection on racial equity impact across our major programs/services

How to reflect on the impact of our agency's top 3 major programs/services on racial equity

Illustrative discussion materials to follow for one program

Facilitation guide (for program-level discussions)

The top 3 programs/services/policies to discuss can be those where the agency...



Serves highest number of people



Spends the most



Has an outsize impact on people's lives



Has specifically designed programs for historically underserved populations (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, women)¹

Options for how to structure the workshop...

- **Host one workshop with separate breakout rooms** for each program team, then share back key learnings as a full group
- **Host three separate workshops with each program team**, and engage agency leadership and cross-functional staff in each

The materials to follow are intended to be used to discuss one program or service at a time. Please duplicate the materials for each program/service the group intends to discuss.



Facilitator tip: Agencies can opt to focus on top policies or services if appropriate in lieu of programs)



Reflecting on equity in our major programs

Illustrative discussion materials



Sample agenda

1

Objectives and discussion norms

2

Reflection on overall impact of program on racial equity

3

Discussion on data collection and outcome tracking

4

Agency roles and impact on racial groups

5

Long-term program vision and opportunities for equity

Objectives for today's discussion



Reflect on the impact of our major programs/services on shaping racial equity



Identify key actions going forward to contribute to a more equitable society

Norms for discussion



Take space and make space

Be mindful of how you take up space and time; aspire to be present and listen deeply.



Be unconstrained in your thinking

Approach this session by envisioning a world where anything is possible



Lean into learning openly

These are difficult issues; work on expanding your capacity to sit with tension and discomfort



Be open and reflective

Humility, honesty, and transparency will be essential to success

Recap: At our previous workshop, “Setting Our Equity Foundation,” we aligned on our mission and core priorities for racial equity



How our agency drives racial equity

Placeholder for output from workshop 1



Our mission and its ties to equity

Placeholder for output from workshop 1



The roles we play to shape equity

Placeholder for output from workshop 1



Our priorities to accelerate equity

Placeholder for output from workshop 1

How does the program serve to advance (or hinder) a society in which all people can prosper, participate, and reach their full potential?

How does it help individuals and communities?



Discussion notes

Insert text

Insert text

Recap: The federal government plays a number of roles as the architect of an equitable nation

These roles collectively help government agencies and actors drive equity both internally and externally



Policymaker

Sets agency strategy and policies, helping to shape economy and the market, and providing two-way feedback with Legislature



Direct provider

Delivers and implements programs & facilitates operations directly



Funder

Provides capital through grants, budget allocations, and incentives



Influencer

Builds national community, represents cultural values, and provides best practices to influence actions



Buyer

Purchases goods and services & contracts with non-government entities



Researcher & data provider

Aggregates & provides publicly available data



Watchdog & enforcer

Ensures enactment & accountability for laws & regulations



Convener & coordinator

Convenes stakeholders across sectors in service of action



Employer

Hires staff to execute agency strategy and administer programs

What are the roles our agency plays as it delivers this program?

Please check boxes and add brief description

- Influencer:** ...

- Funder:** *Some low-income families gain income from filing their taxes (e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit)*

- Watchdog & enforcer:** *The IRS administers tax laws enacted by Congress and performs audits*

- Researcher & data provider:** ...

- Direct provider :** ...

- Convener & coordinator:** ...

- Policymaker:** ...

- Buyer:** *The IRS contracts with tax filing services as part of our Free File program*

- Employer:** *The IRS employs staff to respond to constituents questions and audit tax filings*

Which of the 15 outcomes is our program designed to address?

Please check boxes and list an example indicator that measures the outcome

<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation & broadband infrastructure: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Public safety: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Health & well-being: ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental health & resilience: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Civic engagement: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher education: ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing security: <i>Section 8 – percent of rent burdened households</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Business & sector development: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment & wages: ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Food security: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneurship ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial inclusion: ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-K-12 education: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Research & innovation: ...	<input type="checkbox"/> Social safety net & supports: <i>SSI – percent of eligible beneficiaries served</i>

For the outcome(s) our program addresses, who is the most burdened? What are the racial demographics of the most burdened?



Discussion notes

For the outcome of food insecurity, our agency has conducted research to identify demographics and geography of food insecure households. In 2019, 1 in 10 American households lacked access to affordable, nutritious food. White individuals make up about half of the total number of food insecure households, but rates of food insecurity within the Black (19%) and Hispanic (16%) communities are higher than among White Americans (8%).

What data is collected to measure program impact and success?

Does that data inform the program's impact on the lives of the most burdened? Is the data racially disaggregated?



Discussion notes

Examples: Annual surveys, assessment of program outputs, user outcomes, etc.

...



Notetaker tip: If racially disaggregated data is not collected, you can note it down as an action item for the agency to understand its impacts

Which groups are positively impacted by the program? Is there data to support our conclusions?

Please consider racial groups and others as applicable, and add a brief explanation

Rural Americans *RDOF subsidizes broadband expansion in rural areas*

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...



Facilitator tip: Take inventory of agency's current understanding of who benefits. After the workshop, assign task owners to gather more data to inform or verify initial hypotheses.

Which groups are negatively impacted by the program? Is there data to support our conclusions?

Please consider racial groups and others as applicable, and add a brief explanation

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...

Insert demographic group ...



Facilitator tip: Take inventory of agency's current understanding of who is harmed or excluded. After the workshop, assign task owners to gather more data to inform or verify initial hypotheses.

What could be driving different outcomes for different groups?



Discussion notes

Example: Eligible SNAP recipients may not be able to access their benefits due to barriers created by in-person interview requirements.¹

1. Unrath, "Targeting, Screening and Retention: Evidence from California's Food Stamp Program", 2021

How could the program be adjusted to ensure all people can benefit to the same extent, taking into account different starting points of different racial groups?

Please check boxes and add brief description

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change regulation(s) ... | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve monitoring and evaluation <i>Set up a performance dashboard to monitor program KPIs on a monthly basis</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fix implementation <i>Proactively reach out (e.g., mailing a flyer of how to access) to those eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit – a survey found >40% of those eligible were unaware of the program¹</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase buy-in ... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase collaboration across stakeholders ... | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ... |

1. Bhargava and Manoli, "Psychological Frictions and the Incomplete Take-up of Social Benefits", 2015

What are the significant opportunities for our agency to improve racial equity?

What can we start doing now within our existing authority, and what requires expanded authority or mandate?



Discussion notes

Insert text

Insert text



Notetaker tip: Expanded authority refers to changes in rule-making, while expanded mandate requires Congressional authorization

Contents

Overview and context of the resource

Setting the foundation for the agency's work on equity

Reflecting on equity impact of major programs

Codifying and sharing main insights

B. Codifying insights and sharing with agency

How to synthesize the outputs of this work to share with agency employees and inform both the Equity Assessment and long-term racial equity strategic work

Objectives for the output template



Share key findings with agency staff



Incorporate key findings in equity assessment for the Executive Order



Prioritize actions to take to improve equity impacts

Template: The key learnings from this resource

This output can serve as a communications tool to share with agency staff and inform broader EO and long-term racial equity strategic planning

Illustrative responses (will vary based on agency)

Our mission

Including its core ties to racial equity

Example: Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all American people and communities, from rural to urban to all races, with emphasis on those who have historically been underserved

Top 3 most impactful roles we play as an agency to shape racial equity

Our work as a funder (e.g., funding grant programs), direct provider (e.g., providing in-kind benefits), and convener (e.g., bringing together cross-sector stakeholders) are highest impact in shaping racial equity because....

Top 3 priorities on what we can do differently to drive racial equity going forward

- 1** *Reassess funding formulas to incorporate racial equity-based outcomes*
- 2**
- 3**

What we will stop doing today in service of racial equity

Mandating employment eligibility requirements in our service provisions

Next steps

1

Share key learnings with agency staff in the near-term

Hold town hall to share process, main insights, and implications for both the Executive Order and long-term racial equity work

Share written communications codifying the key learnings

2

Incorporate learnings into Equity Assessment and Action Plan

Embed key components into EO requirements and ensure consistency throughout all racial equity work

3

Begin to develop knowledge of your starting point and root drivers of inequities

Continue the long-term racial equity journey by anchoring on the blueprint and continue the process for a strategic vision & action plan

4

Bring together teams and reflect on and refine insights periodically

Convene the same groups that participated in these discussions to reflect on how the agency is adhering to its mission and key priorities going forward

