106 D IT'S TIME TO TALK how to start conversations about racial inequities



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IT'S TIME TO TALK

How to Start Conversations about Racial Inequities

Introduction

When the Annie E. Casey Foundation released its *Race for Results* policy report in April 2014, it aimed to bring greater understanding among policymakers and influential organizations of how race matters – and how it always has mattered – in the policies, institutions and systems that shape the future of children and families in America.

But racial inequities seem to get national media attention only when riots break out in places such as Ferguson, Mo., and Baltimore in response to the deaths of unarmed black teenagers and young men during encounters with police. So many instances of these deadly confrontations happen without public attention or response. Young black males are 21 times more likely than their white counterparts to be shot dead by police, according to a ProPublica analysis. Although police shootings are the most distressing indicators of inequity, there are many others, as the Race for Results index pointed out.

African-American, Latino and American Indian children face the toughest obstacles to opportunity in America at every stage of their growth, as has been the case for generations and centuries. Our country must address the structural roots of this racial inequity if we want America to truly become a land of opportunity for all. By definition, structural racism is racial bias across institutions and society and describes the cumulative and compounding effects of factors that systematically confer privilege to white people and assign disadvantage to people of color. As *Race for Results* indicates, policies and systems must focus on approaches that remove racial barriers to opportunity for children of color if we are going to be successful in improving outcomes for all children.

In the Race for Results report, the Foundation outlined four recommendations to help legislators, public systems, nonprofit organizations, businesses and community leaders address the many barriers facing children of color: 1) gather and analyze racial and ethnic data to inform all phases of programs, policies and decision making; 2) use data and impact assessment tools to target investments that will yield the greatest benefit for children of color; 3) develop and carry out promising and evidence-based programs and practices focused on improving outcomes for children and youth of color; and 4) integrate economic inclusion strategies with economic and workforce development efforts. The Foundation is launching a series of case studies designed to examine the four recommendations and provide concrete and more nuanced examples of how to apply them.

What the Foundation has learned, however, is that taking action must begin with honest and sincere conversations about the ways systems, policies and processes perpetuate structural racism,



and how they harm the children of color they are supposed to help. The Casey Foundation is committed to helping inspire dialogue across communities and sectors that explores the data, context and solutions to address barriers to opportunity. Several organizations in the 53-member KIDS COUNT network and many other Casey grantees and partners have taken on the challenge of making race equity a priority of their work, providing lessons for other organizations as they begin this process.

As a result, this first case study focuses on the importance of organizing community conversations about race as a first step toward action and draws primarily from the experiences of our KIDS COUNT grantees in Nebraska, Wisconsin and Washington as they work to move their communities forward. The Foundation hopes that this document can help leaders across the country convene conversations that enable stakeholders to adopt a race-equity approach to their work that will ultimately focus attention on solutions that create brighter futures for all kids. By proactively improving the life prospects of children of color today,

the Foundation believes that the country can replace the Baltimore and Ferguson stories with ones of healthy and thriving communities powered by the energy of the next generation.

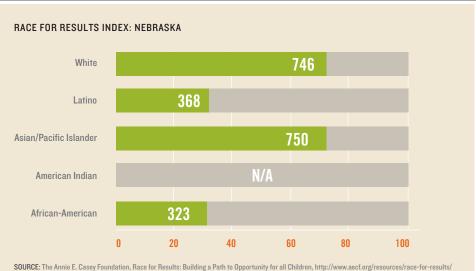
Case Study: Nebraska

In Nebraska, the impetus to create a statewide conversation about race began after scathing criticism by legislators, advocates and the media of a failed effort in 2009 by state child welfare officials to privatize child welfare services. After the fallout, in 2012, the state legislature created a children's commission and gave it power to investigate problems and find solutions.

Racism in child welfare was not the first concern of critics. The commission examined many deficiencies of the system, and racial disparities in child welfare were not being discussed at length. But race was a major fault line rupturing just beneath the surface. When a member of the children's commission said during a public meeting in December 2012 that there was a need to address racial disparities, it went nowhere.

Ignoring race disparities, especially in child welfare systems, is a major oversight, even in a state such as Nebraska, which is 81 percent white, 10 percent Latino, less than 5 percent African American and 2 percent Asian American. Children of color were disproportionately represented in child welfare. For example, although about 6 percent of children in Nebraska were African American, they comprised nearly 19 percent of the state's child welfare population, according to the 2013 Nebraska KIDS COUNT report. And like most states, the demographics are changing: Researchers project that the number of people of color will double in Nebraska to 38 percent by 2050.

Carolyn Rooker, executive director of Voices for Children in Nebraska, seized the opportunity to take action. Rooker said she felt a sense of urgency to address racism. Her organization had become increasingly alarmed by the disparities shown annually in its KIDS COUNT report, but she knew it would take a collaborative effort involving experts in race equity to inform – and ultimately move – policies and practices. She engaged her board to support the effort, and committed to raising money to fund it.



SUDRCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Race for Results: Building a Path to Upportunity for all Children, http://www.aect.org/resources/race-for-results/ NOTE: N/A data not available due to small population size.

First, Rooker wrote a letter to the commission's chair and offered to form a subcommittee to look at disparities and issue a report. She did not get permission to form a subcommittee, but that didn't stop her from taking action. Carolyn knew that systems often lacked the cultural competency to meet the needs of the increasing population of children of color.

"We began to pull together a group of partners," she said, adding that she first reached out to her organization's historic stakeholders. "We really needed to look at disparities and determine how to make progress in these areas. I suggested to my partners that one of the first things we could do, which is very low-hanging fruit, is to have a statewide conference where we can highlight the racial history of Nebraska, look at the data, let the data drive the conversation and have a meeting." Voices for Children in Nebraska was determined to hold a statewide conference because it would be an unprecedented gathering for Nebraska to hold a meaningful dialogue on race equity and the factors that have created disparities.

Although she was able to get stakeholders in a room, the challenge was to elevate the conversation from pointing out individual acts of bigotry — what she calls "micro diversity" —to confronting institutional racism. It was important, she believed, to focus those conversations on what she calls the "macro perspective" on government policies and structures that have exacerbated disparities for generations.

Voices for Children in Nebraska led its conversations with data — disaggregated data in context. Their experience was that detailed information by race was important in any conversation to improve child welfare and juvenile justice systems as well as policies and practices involving children living in poverty. "Even when kids do better in certain areas, if you look at trend lines, the disparities never get better. Kids of color never catch up," Rooker said.

To help align the stakeholders around a common vision, Rooker brought in the Race Matters Institute (RMI), which helps organizations develop policies, programs, practices, and protocols that achieve more equitable outcomes for all children, families, and communities. The plan was to have RMI conduct a two-day training session for the core group planning the conference. This group, Partners for Race and Equity in Nebraska, included the Latino Center of the Midlands, the Santee Tribe, the Urban League of Nebraska and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Voices for Children in Nebraska served as the coordinator because it had the capacity to lead the initiative, had credibility as a KIDS COUNT grantee that advocates for children and has reliable data on race.

Initially, Partners for Race and Equity in Nebraska had hoped to hold a conference in 2013, but by the end of the year, key members were not sufficiently aligned around a structural lens for the work. Instead, they began planning an event to coincide with the April 2014 release of the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT *Race for Results* report. The event drew more than 100 people for a panel discussion that discussed the *Race for Results* index and Nebraska data.

It was a successful event, but the discussion was difficult. "We had a couple of meetings and still, people could not get on board with the macro perspective on race equity," Rooker said. She said it took months of having the same conversations, along with RMI as a credible partner, to finally get everyone in agreement.

After a series of phone calls, Rooker brought in RMI again in May 2014 for a daylong strategic planning meeting with 50 people to make sure leaders understood they needed to be intentional about advancing race equity by examining structural bias and to begin the process by engaging stakeholders in conversations. "The whole goal was to get people in the room to support the strategic plan and agree to focus on addressing structural issues. We needed for everyone to come to an understanding that there are not necessarily right or wrong people or players, or bad people, but rather there are systems at play," she said. By the end of the day, she said, everyone was aligned and they began to focus on planning for a conference in early December 2014.

Rooker wrote grant applications to funders and hired a coordinator to plan a two-day, statewide conference that included key audiences across all sectors. At the conference, the partners featured nationally recognized speakers focused on the structural barriers of racial equity and to introduce a racial-equity impact analysis tool. The tool provides a set of guiding questions to determine whether existing and proposed policies, programs, and practices are likely to close the gap for specific racial disparities.

The conference was held in Omaha, Neb., and drew 275 attendees. Coincidentally, it took place in the wake of protests and violence in Ferguson, Mo., and while issues of race simmered because of encounters between residents and police in predominantly black North Many participants reported in evaluations that they attended the conference to learn more about the issue and left feeling better equipped to incorporate the approach in their work. Despite the event's success, some participants still noted lingering concerns. As one attendee responded, "I feel these 'hard conversations' are good, but a lot of the time it doesn't go any further than the training. I hope this conversation keeps going until the whole apple is eaten." Omaha. The conference attracted large funders, city council members, state legislators, board members of nonprofit organizations and a few members of the business community.

There were plenary and breakout sessions that included lessons on a racial-equity impact analysis tool; a theory of change in racial equity; the American Civil Liberties Union's work to end racial profiling in Nebraska; structural racism in the Omaha region; improving equity in early childhood education, health and child welfare; and using data to ensure equity in juvenile justice. Sessions also addressed issues unique to Indian child welfare and refugees from other countries. One session, called "Gaining on the Gap: Changing Hearts, Minds and Practice," described a school system in Arlington, Va., that acknowledged institutional racism as a substantial cause of achievement gaps and developed a systemic response to address the problem.

"The conference provided clarity about how these disparities affect children of color and a sense of urgency to help them," Rooker said. "For the first time ever, people walked away feeling there are larger systems at play. The racial equity impact analysis tool gave people a vision of what could be done and now it's a matter of figuring out how to make that happen." On the second day of the conference, the group created action steps, with guidance on moving forward.

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That remains to be seen. In the short term, Voices for Children in Nebraska and its partners gained more credibility around addressing structural racism. The clearest example came earlier this year, when Rooker was invited to address the Nebraska State School Board. She presented data on race equity and discussed its effects on children of color, using disaggregated data and telling stories to show how children were suffering.

One board member was widely viewed as being hostile to issues of race equity. After Rooker concluded her presentation, however, that board member was visibly moved, saying he had no idea that systemic racism was producing such horrible outcomes for children of color. When the board member publicly acknowledged he had a lot to learn, Rooker was profoundly moved. "My arms were raised, and I was almost in tears," she said. "I offered to come back to the board and do a training on the seven steps to racial equity [based on an action guide created by Casey]. This is yet to be scheduled, but the board was unanimous in wanting to receive this training."

The next step is to take the action steps created by each breakout. Voices for Children in Nebraska brought in RMI to build a conversation and help focus on the issue with credible data. Now it is viewed as an independent entity willing to organize the partners on this issue.

Wisconsin

When 19-year-old Tony Robinson, an unarmed African-American man, was

shot by a Madison, Wis., police officer in March 2015, the news media and community leaders turned to the Race to Equity (R2E) project, which was created by the state's KIDS COUNT organization, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). Talking about race was nothing new for WCCF. For more than a year, R2E leaders had been bringing together community leaders, clergy, policymakers and groups ranging from civil rights organizations to the Rotary Club to talk about race equity.

Erica Nelson, R2E's project director, was interviewed by national news media after the horrifying shooting to get the project's perspective. The shooting sparked outrage, and protests were impassioned, but the community response was peaceful in a county that already was undergoing intense self-examination through dozens of substantial, data-informed conversations.

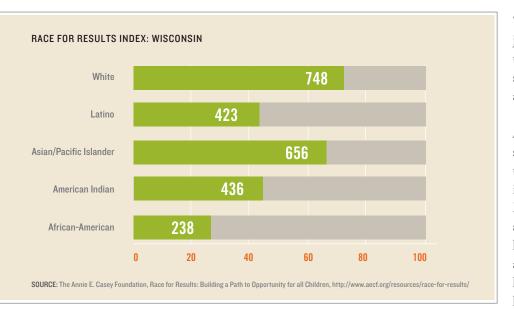
In its report and in numerous community conversations, R2E committed itself to working with those most affected by racialized policies and systems to get to the bottom of issues that were causing disparities. It joined with the African-American community to sound a trumpet on creating opportunity for children of color, and it has been heard by the mayor of Madison and the Dane County Executive.

The project's work started with a report WCCF released in October 2013 that found gaping disparities between black and white children in Dane County. The county stretches outward from the city of Madison, the state's capital and home of the University of Wisconsin, the state's flagship university. It was Madison, after all, believed to be one of the nation's most progressive and best cities to live in. But the report highlighted profound inequities for African Americans in unemployment and family income, as well as contact with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

- The official African-American unemployment rate in Dane County averaged 21.4 percent, compared with 5 percent for whites. Black adults were almost 4½ times more likely to be without earnings than whites.
- From 2010 to 2012, the median income of black families in Dane County was \$27,437, amounting to less than one-third of the median family income of whites at \$86,986.
- The black child poverty rate from 2010 to 2012 averaged almost 58 percent; well over half of all the county's black children lived below the federal poverty line. By comparison, the percentage of white children living in poverty was 5.6 percent.
- African-American children were 15 times as likely as white children to be in foster care and 25 times more likely to be in secure juvenile justice confinement.

To prepare the community for this information, the *Race to Equity* report was not distributed until after the project's staff met with leaders from around the county. Nelson said the findings showed the importance of bringing a race equity focus and examining the reasons behind such disturbing gaps. "They showed that we needed to redouble our effort and reinvigorate ourselves," she said.

The report was a wide-ranging indictment of all the systems and institutions in Madison and in Dane County. In every indicator, it was clear that systems and institutions had



developed structures over the years that were giving black children some of the worst odds to succeed.

"Systems become defensive because they are seen as being responsible for racial disparities," Nelson said. "We're not here to blame, but we can't let systems off the hook."

Between WCCF and R2E, there were 30 group presentations and more than 100 individual meetings over coffee. The groups were divided into nine key sectors: government, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, policy institutions, corporations, communitybased organizations, individuals, health institutions, and the philanthropic community. All have helped to shape policies and programs in Dane County.

"Our goal was to cast a wide net so that we included all people from the community, whether they were working in grassroots organizations staff with two people or corporate boards representing the region's most influential businesses," said Torry Winn, who leads R2E strategic partnerships and engagement. "We wanted to avoid meeting with just recognized stakeholders. Often those who are considered stakeholders sometimes contribute to the status quo and racial disparities."

A key to successful conversations, Winn said, was that R2E made a commitment to listen to the community and even use its feedback. One community member, Michelle Robinson, asked good questions about the research and data, and since has been hired by the organization as a reseach consultant. The project also has hired community ambassadors to help disseminate information, advance community discussions and act as a liaison to the community. There is also a community historian who can provide context about the data.

With such wide disparities, much more needs to happen in Dane County and in the state. The Casey Foundation's *Race for Results* report, released in early 2014, found that Wisconsin was worst among all states in disparities between black and white children.

"The report served as a catalyst for renewed commitment and engagement around greater racial justice across almost every sector. For example, The University of Wisconsin-Madison chancellor formed a Racial Disparities and Opportunities Gap committee, the university integrated the R2E report and disparity issues into the curriculum of more than dozen courses.

In addition, there has been increased investment in early childhood initiatives and in employment and training programs. Local associations of private sector human resource professionals have agreed to make increased hiring and retention of underemployed workers of color their top priority. Racial disparities also became a key issue in the mayoral campaign and the county board decided to fund mental health services and invest in other communitybased services to reduce disparities instead of funding a new jail.

Dane County and the city of Madison have adopted ordinances to require equity-impact assessments of proposed policy, legislative and budget decisions. In addition, there has been increased investment in early childhood initiatives and in employment and training programs. Local associations of private sector human resource professionals have agreed to make increased hiring and retention of underemployed workers of color their top priority.

Finally, there has been a commitment from local media outlets to significantly increase the extent and depth of coverage of poverty and race issues. For example, the *Capital Times* daily newspaper in Madison has created a website called "Together Apart" looking at race specific issues locally and throughout the nation.

Washington

In Washington, the KIDS COUNT partnership of Children's Alliance and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center has long committed itself to being more intentional about incorporating race equity into every area of work and every conversation. Their approach involves a continuous series of small meetings with individuals and organizations to discuss race and to deepen those conversations by introducing reliable, disaggregated data that is placed in context.

"We made a kid-centered commitment to being an anti-racist organization in the late 90s. We've learned a lot about the impact of institutional racism on kids. When we pulled together our current strategic plan in 2010, we decided that we had to lead with racial equity and make it our focus," said Paola Maranan, executive director of Children's Alliance. "We lead with race equity because we won't succeed for all kids unless we succeed for those kids who are farthest away from opportunity."

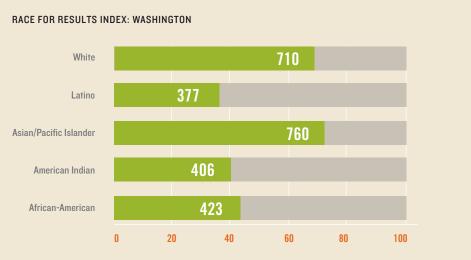
Jon Gould, deputy director of Children's Alliance, said a sense of urgency drives race equity efforts there because Washington is a state where children of color are losing ground on the path to opportunity, with disturbingly widening gaps in K-12 education as well as being subject to health disparities, disinvestment in communities and lack of equitable access to high-quality early childhood education.

Children's Alliance has developed a detailed theory of change that focuses on building strategic alliances with a range of individuals and groups. It believes that communities must be empowered so they are instrumental in informing changes in policies and systems that affect children of color. That is why it has convened a series of conversations with leaders representing Asian American and Pacific Islanders, African Americans and Latinos as well as American Indians living in both communities governed by tribes and in urban environments.

The meetings with organizations across the state could be described as consultations, and the sessions result in better policy recommendations that are informed with nuanced insight, such as data about subcategories of ethnic groups that otherwise would be excluded. So listening is not only the right thing to do, it is essential to developing the most accurate information. "Systems become defensive because they are seen as being responsible for racial disparities. We're not here to blame, but we can't let systems off the hook." "We believe that in order to succeed, to change policy to improve the lives and outcomes of kids of color, we need to be good partners with folks in communities of color who are fighting for change for their own families and kids." "We go out and meet with leaders individually and separately," Maranan said. "We ask them to tell us what they think of KIDS COUNT, and we ask them, 'What is the story that's not being told.""

The story of Washington reads like the narrative of many other states. Its demographics are changing rapidly, and there is a chasm between older white residents and a younger population of color. The state's total population is 71 percent white, but children of color comprise 40 percent of its child population, according to a Washington State Budget & Policy Center (BPC) analysis of Census data. The BPC knew it needed to dig deep into data to tell an accurate story.

"When I started at KIDS COUNT in 2003, we were putting out indicators that showed whether child poverty was going up or down, but we were not breaking down things by race and ethnicity," said Lori Pfingst, the BPC's research and policy director. She said the center now disaggregates all data and uses it to tell more accurate stories about what is happening with children in the state.



SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for all Children, http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/

"We can't claim that indicators are improving if we are not disaggregating data by race. That is something we are committed to doing with Children's Alliance. Even disaggregating data is not enough. Inevitably, people ask what the data mean. We know that disparities exist, but to get at the root causes, you have to dig deeper," Pfingst said.

She said her organization's work involves supporting groups working on racial equity. It involves conversations with people across the state – from progressive areas like Seattle for talks that are open but often superficial, to the state capitol of Olympia to conservative places in eastern Washington. The reception to conversations can be significantly different, depending on the location and audience.

Pfingst said, "Using the data to talk to white people about race is especially important. We use the data to engage people about institutionalized racism, which often makes people uncomfortable. But we have gotten better at helping people grow comfortable with the discomfort. We acknowledge that these are hard conversations. And as we have these conversations with many different partners, we know the work is messy and hard and scary – and necessary."

In particular, Maranan said, joining the conversations among Washington's diverse communities is an important part of creating better solutions.

"We believe that in order to succeed, to change policy to improve the lives and outcomes of kids of color, we need to be good partners with folks in communities of color who are fighting for change for their own families and kids," Maranan said. "We need to learn from them so the policies that are developed are wellinformed and have the support of people we hope to impact."

Maranan dispels the notion that children of color will automatically benefit if solutions are simply structured to improve the lives of all kids. "A rising tide lifting all boats? We reject that," she said, "You know that historically, programs were not built for kids of color. There may be aspects of some systems that are more benign than others, but because systems were not built for these kids, the inequities did not result just from something benign, it was the result of design."

The Washington KIDS COUNT partnership has released two reports covering issues of race equity over the past two years, and they are working to engage policymakers. Although changing state policy is difficult, the state does have a racial equity impact tool (http:// kidscountwa.org/racial-equity-tool/), and a bill requiring racial impact statements be attached to state legislation was introduced in both houses this year." Both KIDS COUNT partners are committed to keeping the conversations going and to bringing about equityfocused policy change.

"We will never achieve our goals for kids if we don't close the gaps," said Pfingst. "If we're all dedicated to improving opportunity for all kids, you have to be committed to racial equity, and you have to figure out what works best for your organization and local communities. There's no recipe."

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Lessons Learned

Although communities across the country have used different approaches to create conversations on racial equity, the Foundation has found a number of common themes and strategies in talking to leaders of the KIDS COUNT organizations. It seems the ability to take the first critical steps toward removing racial barriers that harm children of color include having reliable data, the right context and strong, committed leadership. These are some of the lessons they learned:

Decide what results will be achieved.

First decide how to have a conversation about race and who will be included. Stakeholders need to understand the organization's objectives and need to be clearly aligned to understand structural racism. Using the 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion within Your Organization can provide guidance.

Use data as a point of entry. Lead

with disaggregated data in context. Organizations engaged in race equity emphasized the importance of leading with disaggregated data that are explained well. When two organizations in Washington brought data to an Asian American Pacific Islander leader, they were cautioned that the data could be harmful if not disaggregated and contextualized to show the differences within subgroups. Provide context to avoid misinterpretations of data. Analysis by people from the community involved is critical. Often, white researchers concluded that disparities are caused by by poor individual choices rather than systemic racism.

Messengers are important. Involve experts in race equity who can frame the work and act as a third-party facilitator. Also, having a multiracial team visibly It seems the ability to take the first critical steps toward removing racial barriers that harm children of color include having reliable data, the right context and strong, committed leadership. share responsibility for collecting, presenting, analyzing and interpreting the data has proved critical to the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. This has helped the council build trust, credibility and legitimacy for both the data and efforts to create broad-based coalitions.

Inclusion is key. Engaging stakeholders and others who are most affected is critical to the success of any authentic conversation on race. Often, people of color are the most direct stakeholders in the elimination of racism and those with the most firsthand experiences with its effects. Strive to engage stakeholders who have active and authentic connections to their respective communities. The sooner a diverse mix of stakeholders is involved, the better, so they can help establish the agenda, strategy and leadership.

Don't pull punches. Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children's Alliance in Washington, said she was cautious about focusing on race equity when talking with policymakers because she feared they would not talk with her afterward or would not be as candid. "It doesn't make sense to pull a punch because eventually you're going to say what it is. We have done that now, and I would say people are still talking with us."

Don't scapegoat. It is neither fair nor helpful to hold systems entirely responsible for the deep racial disparities without also honestly acknowledging the social, economic, historical, and structural forces that put children and families of color at much higher risk of system involvement. But don't let the systems off the hook, either. Current policies and practices can and do exacerbate the disparities.

It is rewarding, hard work. Be passionate, committed and clear so that obstacles won't drive the initiative off course. "It's harder than anything I've done in my career," said Carolyn Rooker of Voices of Children in Nebraska. "There will be lessons learned along the way, trial by error, but it's important to be tenacious."

RESOURCES TO HELP CONVENE CONVERSATIONS ON RACE

- RACE FOR RESULTS: BUILDING A PATH TO OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL CHILDREN http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/
- THE RACE EQUITY INCLUSION ACTION GUIDE: http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-andinclusion-action-guide/
- RACE MATTERS TOOLKIT: http://www.aecf.org/ search?q=race+matters+toolkit

- RACE MATTERS HOW TO TALK ABOUT RACE TOOLKIT: http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-matters-2/
- RACE MATTERS INSTITUTE: http://racemattersinstitute.org/
- WKKF RACIAL EQUITY RESOURCE GUIDE: http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/ build/directory
- CRACKING THE CODES: THE SYSTEMS OF RACIAL INEQUITY (film designed to deepen the national conversation on race): http://crackingthecodes.org/

- POLICYLINK GETTING EQUITY ADVOCACY RESULTS (GEAR) TOOL: http://www.policylink.org/gear
- RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS: RacialEquityTools.org
- RACE FORWARD RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT: https://www.raceforward.org/practice/ tools/racial-equity-impact-assessment-toolkit
- OPPORTUNITY AGENDA SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMUNICATION'S TOOLKIT: http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/narrative

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