TOOLS FOR THOUGHT
using racial equity impact assessments for effective policymaking

a race for results®
CASE STUDY

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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Using Racial Equity Impact Assessments for Effective Policymaking

Introduction

In 2014, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released Race for Results, a groundbreaking KIDS COUNT policy report that elevated the importance of race in determining quality of life and opportunity for families and children in the United States. It also introduced the Race for Results Index, which provides a single composite score to compare by race and by state how children are progressing on 12 key developmental milestones from birth to adulthood.

The picture painted by this data was clear: Children of color face far more obstacles and are presented with far fewer opportunities than their white counterparts. For example, while only about 14 percent of white children live in high-poverty neighborhoods, more than half of African-American and Latino kids live in census-tract neighborhoods where the poverty rate is more than 20 percent. By fourth grade, only 17 percent of African-American students, 19 percent of Latino students and 22 percent of American Indian students score at or above proficiency in reading, compared with 45 percent of white students. And white students graduate on time from high school at a rate of 83 percent, compared with 66 percent for African-American students, 69 percent for American Indians and 71 percent for Latino students.[1]

Race plays — and has always played — a role in the policies, institutions and systems that drive American society. As a society, these inequities must be addressed so that every child has a brighter future.

In Race for Results, the Foundation outlined four recommendations to help policymakers at all levels of government, as well as nonprofit organizations, businesses and community leaders, improve outcomes for children of color. Those recommendations included: 1) gather and analyze racial and ethnic data to inform all phases of programs, 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 youths of color, and 4) integrate economic inclusion strategies with economic and workforce development efforts.[2]

This case study examines the second recommendation: use data and impact assessment tools to target investments that will yield the greatest benefit for children of color. Specifically, it illustrates how racial impact assessments have been used by governmental entities to inform their decision-making processes and create policy changes that serve communities of color in more equitable ways.

How Racial Equity Impact Assessment Tools Inform Decisions

Race Forward, a pioneering organization in exploring and promoting racial equity, was one of the first organizations to introduce Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) tools in the United States. According to Race Forward, an REIA is "a systematic examination of how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision. REIAs are used to minimize unanticipated adverse consequences and identify unrealized positive benefits in a variety of contexts, including the analysis of proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans and budgetary decisions."[3]

REIA tools are instruments that use data about race to project the effect of decisions on different populations. REIA tools can take the form of questionnaires, discussion guides, surveys, manuals or other devices that bring race-related information into a decision-making process.

Race Forward advances racial justice by conducting and sharing research, advancing race conversations in the media and providing tools and expertise to support racial justice practice. According to Terry Keleher, a thought leadership and practice specialist at Race Forward, the use of equity tools for creating public policy originated in the United Kingdom as part of an intentional effort to address equity, unity and inclusion in society. The U.K. first used equality impact assessments in 1998 in Northern Ireland to address religious tension and the needs of ethnic minorities in policy decisions. By 2000, the U.K. had adopted the use of these tools throughout the country. Although not targeted exclusively toward race, these early equity tools set the stage for REIA development.

In 1999, Race Forward (then called the Applied Research Center) created an REIA tool to pilot in the United States as part of the Grassroots Innovative Policy Project. For several years, Race Forward continued to hone and tweak the tool, based on user experiences. In 2006, it developed a new REIA Toolkit, a 10-question guide that local government

entities began using.[4] One of those cities was Seattle, which adapted a Race Equity Toolkit for its own use and began applying the toolkit questions to a broad range of policy decisions.

Seattle's interest in promoting equity grew through internal and external efforts coinciding with the election of Mayor Greg Nickels in 2001. Within city government, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Neighborhoods had already initiated department specific efforts aimed at eliminating institutionalized racism. During the mayoral campaign, community groups raised questions of racial equity in multiple settings. As a result, when Nickels took office in 2002, he created Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative. The initiative was housed in the city's Office for Civil Rights, which was created in the 1960s. A key strategy of the city's Race and Social Justice Initiative is to build infrastructure to support the development of employees' skills, including the use of its Racial Equity Toolkit. Glenn Harris, previous Race and Social Justice Initiative Manager with the City of Seattle and now president of the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI), and Julie Nelson, previous director of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights and now senior vice president at CSI and director of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), continue to promote the use of REIA tools to local, county and regional government entities across the country.

Why REIA Tools Are Important

When decision makers use racial equity impact assessments to inform their decisions, they take advantage of several benefits:

- **FIRST**, the use of an REIA tool helps keep the focus of the decision on data and fact, rather than assumptions or ingrained beliefs. For example, a city councilmember may assume that a community of color would support the closing of a dilapidated community center in exchange for a new building less than a mile away, but the community may value the location of the old center more than a new structure and prefer renovation rather than a move.

- **SECOND**, REIA tools provide a systematic way to engage the opinions and voices of those who will be affected by the decision in question. Engaging those communities during the decision-making process will ultimately increase understanding of and buy-in for the new policy. In the example above, the councilmember could use the questions incorporated in an REIA tool to engage in conversations with community leaders or residents through surveys or a community meeting, or through one-on-one conversations with community leaders.

- **THIRD**, REIA tools can shed light on the unintended consequences of policy decisions before those decisions are made. Continuing the example above, if the councilwoman used an REIA tool as part of the deliberations about the community center's condition and placement, she might learn that those in the affected community would not have adequate transportation to the proposed new community center site, especially for the younger children and older adults who most often use the existing community center.

- **FOURTH**, REIA tools can provide a wider range of options for policy choices. In many cases, options arise that may never have emerged otherwise. Again, the councilwoman, armed with a

better understanding of the issues and the needs of the population, now can consider the transportation factor as part of the decision. Her policy options now may include renovating the existing site, building a new center on a different site that is closer to the community, building on the proposed new site but incorporating a transportation plan, or other creative solutions. She can also extend the use of REIA tools to the government's contracting process to ensure that an "equity lens" is applied to the selection of firms to construct and maintain the new facility.

Since Race Forward introduced its first REIA tool in 1999, many iterations have emerged. Today, groups such as Race Forward, CSI and GARE have developed REIA tools specifically for budgeting processes, policy evaluations and communications, as well as report card tools to evaluate existing policies and the actions of legislative bodies. (see resources listed at the top of this page.)

Why REIA Tools Are Attractive and Gaining Traction

As issues of racial equity continue to gain national attention, there is growing pressure on governments to incorporate equity into their decision making. REIA tools bring three positive, compelling reasons to engage in efforts to achieve equity, according to Keleher, Harris and Nelson:

- THE VALUES CASE — Racial equity is a commonly held value among most Americans. REIA tools provide a concrete way to act on those values and, once incorporated into institutional operations, can prevent inequity from occurring.

- THE ECONOMIC CASE — Race Forward, CSI and GARE report that the most equitable solution to a community challenge often ends up being the least expensive. Preventing inequity is more cost effective than repairing an inequitable system. (For example, providing quality early learning to a low-income child is much more cost effective than providing remediation services if he drops out of high school.)

- THE LEADERSHIP CASE — The use of REIA tools provides more choices and options for those charged with making policy decisions. In using REIA tools, government leaders can become role models in embracing and advancing stakeholders' shared value of equity.

Case Study: Minneapolis

The use of REIA tools in Minneapolis began at the grassroots level. In the spring of 2008, when the Board of Education for Minneapolis Public Schools needed more revenue, it introduced a $60 million ballot referendum to raise local taxes.[5] Concerned about approval among voters, the board approached a grassroots coalition of groups of color called the Education Equity Organizing Collaborative, anchored by Voices for Racial Justice (then called the Organizing Apprentice Project, or OAP) to see if it would publicly support the referendum. The coalition included organizations that represented the Somali, African-American, Latino and Native American communities in Minneapolis. Voices for Racial Justice (VJR) had training from Race Forward on using tools such as the REIA, legislative report cards and budget analyses on racial equity. Coalition leaders decided that before they offered their support for the referendum, they first wanted VRJ to conduct an assessment to determine whether increased funding would indeed have a positive 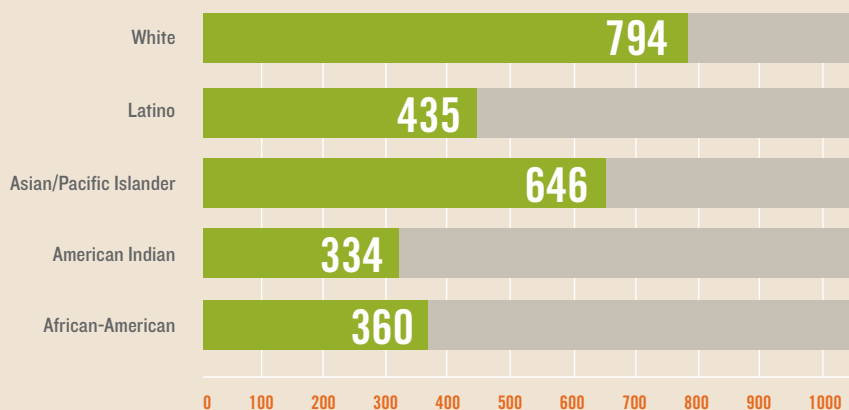effect on communities of color. To analyze the ballot initiative, OAP used an REIA tool it had created for use with state lawmakers, the "Pocket Guide to Budget Proposals: Racial and Economic Equity Assessment Questions."

After the VRJ concluded its assessment, the coalition determined that it could not say for sure that new revenues would deliver any additional benefit to its communities. However, the coalition also realized that if the measure did not pass, the attendant cutbacks would disproportionately affect communities of color. As a result, the coalition publicly supported the ballot initiative and it was approved by the voters.

Impressed with the coalition's REIA tool and its use, the school board asked for another assessment that same year to determine the potential effect of closing some schools and changing transportation services to save money in the wake of declining enrollment in the school system and rising transportation costs. This time, VRJ declined, saying instead that the school system itself should lead the REIA as part of its decision-making process.

The school board agreed and mobilized its staff to conduct the assessment using the pocket guide developed by VRJ. Initially, school system staff was resistant to conducting the assessment, but the school board insisted, providing an outside contractor to assist with research, data analysis and writing and coordinating an interdepartmental team to lead the effort.

"The board realized they could make a more informed decision, representative of the constituencies they were serving, and that any impacts could be anticipated and accounted for before the final vote," said Keleher.

RACE FOR RESULTS INDEX: MINNESOTA
The Race for Results Index provides a single composite score from 0 to 1,000 to compare how children are progressing on 12 key developmental milestones across racial groups.

Group	Score
White	794
Latino	435
Asian/Pacific Islander	646
American Indian	334
African-American	360

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000

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/

The school system team engaged key community stakeholders in conversations and collected data about the effects that three different cost-cutting options would have in different ethnic communities. Through their analysis, they learned that the option that would save the most money and disrupt the fewest students overall — including the fewest students of color, low-income students, English language learners and white students — would disproportionately affect Somali students and Native American students, a large percentage of whom would be forced to change schools.[6]

Those findings triggered conversations with the Somali and Native American communities to find ways to alleviate these effects. Because the cost-saving plan would redraw school boundaries in a way that would force Native American students to change schools, the district provided flexibility for Native American families to choose between their old and new school assignments. And seeing that the plan would close an elementary school that was critically important to the Somali community, the district chose to keep that school open. As a result, the Minneapolis school board ended up with a plan that did the least harm and was the most cost-efficient.

After going through the REIA process, the Minneapolis School Board was convinced of its value and passed a new policy authorizing the use of REIA tools for all key decisions related to student learning and resource allocation. The community also realized a significant and welcome change in the way school policy was created.

"This almost never happens," said Elaine Salinas, president of Migizi Communications, a firm dedicated to countering misconceptions of Native People in mass media. "Normally, the parent has to follow what the new rules of the game are. This time, the policy was not so arbitrarily implemented because it had the flexibility to take on parent choice. This approach was more empowering for the parents and the American Indian community in general. The American Indian community is used to being victimized by policy. This choice flipped that script on its head."[7]

"This is a great example of a community using the tool, getting government to use it and then codifying it," said Keleher. "As a result, the community and the school board have moved from a posture of challenging institutional racism, which is more of a defensive stance, to incorporating equity in all their decisions, which is a very proactive approach."

Minneapolis Public Schools subsequently slashed funding and have been slow to utilize racial equity assessments for its major policy decisions. VOJ and other community groups have vowed to independently assess the progress the school district and other city agencies are making toward achieving race equity.

Case Study: Seattle

Harris and Nelson lead the CSI and GARE. CSI works with groups from the grassroots to the national stage to help promote policy strategies that transform structural inequity and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. GARE, a joint program of CSI and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, supports local and regional governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all.

Before joining CSI, both Harris and Nelson learned about the importance of using REIA tools as employees of the city of Seattle. From 2008 to 2014, Harris was manager of the Race and Social Justice Initiative while Nelson was director of the city's Office for Civil Rights.

"We recognized that racial inequity isn't accidental," said Nelson. "Government has played a key role, and there are systems and structures in place that enforce inequity. You can see this in budget decisions, policy decisions — the full gamut of decisions large and small. We wanted to use REIA tools to intercede in those decision-making processes. We had seen REIA tools used on pieces of policy in the community, and we recognized that they also had a value in terms of transforming culture and practice."

Together, the two learned about REIA tools from Race Forward and other

advocates in the field. By 2008, they and their colleagues had developed a suite of customized tools for the city to use for budget and policy program decisions. They also created topic area tools as well, for use in outreach and public engagement, information technology, communications, planning and more.

Using REIA tools within the internal confines of budgeting is one thing, but taking them to the streets is another. Harris shared the story of one of the city's early forays into applying REIA tools to an issue of neighborhood safety.

In 2009, there was a spate of "street" street shootings in Seattle. The mayor was concerned about youth violence and conducted an evening tour of the city's south end. He noticed a number of streetlights that were out and asked why. The city's public utility, Seattle City Light, found 80 lights out in the area and began to use one of the city's REIA tools to determine the implications for communities of color, low-income communities and refugee communities. The assessment found that residents in these communities were not using the city's "complaint-based" system of light replacement, in which residents had to call and report streetlight outages in order for those outages to be fixed. This realization resulted in a practical change to the replacement process: Streetlight bulbs are now automatically replaced every few years.

"The streetlight issue begged the question of the bigger picture surrounding complaint-based systems and how they tend to replicate inequity," said Harris, noting that some communities either distrust or are cynical about interactions with the city. "That conversation led to a whole series of changes in the way the

city addresses a whole host of issues, from potholes to graffiti to garbage pickup."

Harris and Nelson have expanded on their Seattle experience through GARE, now working with more than 50 cities, counties and states. GARE uses REIA tools as a primary strategy for workplace organizing within government entities.

Harris described REIA tools as key to a three-part approach of "normalizing, organizing and operationalizing" equity. "REIA tools help people have conversations about race, which is *normalizing*. Then the tools help employees use those conversations to create structures for coordinating people along their lines of work, such as police, or parks or utilities. That's *"organizing,"* according to Harris. And finally, REIA tools help people apply equity questions into their daily work and use it to inform changes in policy and practice — not in a one-off way, but as a skill set they use daily as a regular part of their work. That's *operationalizing*. All three of these things work together to build an infrastructure and culture for equitable decision making within an institution, according to Harris.

Lessons Learned

Using REIA tools for policy decisions can be an effective way to address equity at a systemic level, halt long-held inequitable practices and prevent further inequity from occurring. From their own experiences in using REIA tools in various communities, Keleher, Harris and Nelson share lessons about long-term commitment and inclusion:

• **It's not "one and done."** Using an REIA tool shouldn't be a onetime thing. Work toward a goal of codifying REIAs into all decisions and making

them a part of institutional culture. As in the Seattle example, once an REIA tool was used to successfully analyze streetlight outage and replacement, the use of REIA tools grew within a broad spectrum of city functions. This expansion through an institution could result from top-down directives or from organic, peer-to-peer conversations.

• **Look inside and outside the organization.** REIA tools allow users to bring stakeholders and power holders together in ways that unify. To be truly effective, both sides of the equation must be involved. Grassroots users must be willing to engage those in decision-making seats, and those in positions of power must be ready to engage community stakeholders. This type of inside-outside engagement strategy may take participants beyond their normal comfort zones, and may require the use of professional support as it did in Minneapolis. But the information learned from broader conversations will enrich decision making.

• **Build momentum among the willing.** Focus on advocates and allies to build support for REIA use and its attendant change. Then focus on those in the middle to determine and address their reluctance. The resisters will follow. Building momentum requires clear and ongoing communication, with messages targeted to specific populations and mechanisms to support two-way conversations. By keeping supporters and potential supporters informed and engaged, institutions can build a strong base of support for the use of REIA tools.

• **Effectiveness is in the hands of the user.** REIA tools are only as effective as the organizing and communication

strategies that accompany them. They provide a helpful framework, but communities must engage all kinds of stakeholders and generate communications that help shift discourse and, ultimately, policy. At its core, creating equity is about engaging people in face-to-face dialogue. REIA tools can feed that conversation and provide a road map, but individuals and groups must engage directly with one another for an equity effort to be successful.

- **Data comes in many ways.** Grassroots organizations may believe they don't have access to the data needed to inform decisions, or the capacity to analyze and leverage it effectively.

When that's the case, look for partner organizations – such as nearby universities, research organizations, or policy organizations that have more experience and know-how for accessing data sources. Grassroots organizations can shift the burden of data collection to the public institutions they wish to change (such as the school board in the Minnesota example above). And remember, not all data is quantitative. Powerful stories and images from a marginalized community can contribute missing information and perspectives to the broader discussion.

RESOURCES TO HELP FOSTER THE USE OF REIA TOOLS

- RACE EQUITY AND INCLUSION ACTION GUIDE, ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION
  http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide/

- THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION
  http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/

- THE GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON RACE AND EQUITY
  http://racialequityalliance.org/

- RESOURCE GUIDE: ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY AND TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENT:
  http://racialequityalliance.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/GARE-Resource_Guide.pdf

- RACIAL IMPACT STATEMENTS BY THE SENTENCING PROJECT
  http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/racial-impact-statements/

- "MAKING AN IMPACT: ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY IN SCHOOLS"
  (video), bit.ly/RYY9eU

ENDNOTES

1. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children.* Baltimore, MD: Author.

2. Ibid.

3. Race Forward. *Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit.* https://www. raceforward.org/practice/tools/racial-equity-impact-assessment-toolkit.

4. Race Forward. *Racial Equity Impact Assessment.* https://www.raceforward.org/ sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf.

5. Toney, Jermaine & Keleher, Terry. (2013). Using a Racial Equity Impact Analysis in the Minneapolis Public Schools. *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy.* Chicago, IL: Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.

6. Ibid.

7. Toney, Jermaine & Keleher, Terry. (2013). Using a Racial Equity Impact Analysis in the Minneapolis Public Schools. *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy.* Chicago, IL: Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.

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