

Foundational Assumptions ***of the Equity and Empowerment Lens Logic Model***

Truth is by nature self-evident. As soon as you remove the cobwebs of ignorance that surround it, it shines clear. - Mahatma Gandhi

The following assumptions integrate the voices of leaders of color and new partners, scientists and researchers in the fields of trauma-informed care, conflict resolution, mindfulness, and brain wellness, to name a few. We believe incorporating these new works in progress:

- ✓ Changes and adds to the conversation about what transformation looks and feels like as it relates to achieving racial equity, providing a backbone to our emerging logic model;
- ✓ Introduces the significance of strengthening individual and institutional purpose to achieving racial equity; and
- ✓ Better articulates the interdisciplinary nature of transformation and empowerment.

Transformative Change Towards Racial Equity and Empowerment

In Multnomah County an individual's positive or negative chances for life success are largely driven by race and ethnicity. Data and reports from the Urban League, the Coalition of Communities of Color, Multnomah County's Health Department, and other efforts speak clearly. Across major indicators of well-being and across institutions, people of color fare worse than their white counterparts, and across several indicators, these inequities are more grave than those experienced at the national level.

Although there has been some progress in addressing overt racial discrimination, deeper racial inequities still persist for communities of color, including more subtle racism affecting mental and spiritual safety. Eliminating the root causes of such inequities requires a more thoughtful, complex and direct analysis of all contributing power dynamics and legal, financial, and environmental factors, accompanied by the understanding that racial, class-based and gender-based inequities intersect and complicate the analysis. In order to be truly successful, racial equity work must be addressed at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

Local, regional, state, and federal governments have played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequities, from our country's beginnings. Racial equity analysis tools such as the set of nine questions of the Equity and Empowerment Lens and other culturally responsive

instruments¹ can help make the invisible visible, acknowledge negative impacts and enhance the positive, and create recommendations for change.

Transformative change leading to racial equity, however, goes beyond simply applying questions (i.e., the use of the Lens and other tools) to an issue at hand. Transformation occurs when such tools are a part of processes embodying transformative models, leading to shifts in composition, character, structure, and power relations. The following practices consistently appear at the core of transformation:

- ✓ Deconstructing barriers and impediments to racial equity in the form of policies, procedures, and practices
- ✓ Reconstructing creative and successful racial equity strategies (integrating cultural responsiveness and accountability at every step);
- ✓ Supporting what is working;
- ✓ Engaging and leading with multiple paradigms, focusing on cultural transformation worldviews from communities of color; and
- ✓ Shifting consciousness via thoughtful inquiry and the practice of compassion (in the realms of values, decision-making, perception, and feeling).

Engaging in these strategies successfully, sustainably, and through time requires connecting to and maintaining a deep sense of purpose to racial equity. A cultivated sense of purpose in this work is furthered by environments that revolve around truth-telling, demonstrated courage, space to think and reflect, community-mindedness, shared power, hope, and openness to difficult conversations without being tempered or silenced by fear.

Quality Improvement (QI)

To comprehend the workings of a system and thus be able to improve its efficacy, we must see the system as a dynamic entity unto itself. We are after whole system performance, not simply the deconstruction and reconstruction of certain organizational components. By viewing our system and institutions as living and dynamic, as well as socially constructed, we see barriers to racial equity as removable, able to be healed, and transformable.

Since racism exists at the three levels of the individual, institutional, and systemic, quality improvement calls for continuous, ongoing effort within and across all three. Meeting the needs of the communities most affected by inequities is a crucial component for success. Therefore, meaningfully integrating the voices of communities of color into decision-making and planning must happen to not only meet the needs of those served, but to also positively

¹ In our region, the two leading detailed tools are: the Culturally Responsive Standards (*partnership between Coalition for Communities of Color and Portland State University*) and the Equity Crosswalk (*City of Portland, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability*).

affect change at the root cause level of decision-making by building the best solutions via inclusion of a diversity of voices. Lastly, any activities, policies, procedural pathways, and mindsets that help break individual and institutional habits leading to racism are required.



Processes leading to high quality results that exceed expectations happen best in environments conducive to transformative change, environments that stress innovation and constant learning, and those that challenge the status quo. Such environments and positions within them also stress the importance of purpose, defined as the difference an organization (or individual) is trying to make in the world. Purpose-driven systems call for:

- ✓ Individuals receiving the support and time to identify and revisit her purpose in this work;
- ✓ Institutions transparently integrating racial equity values and beliefs and building time for reflection and learning; and
- ✓ Systems collectively acting upon similar purposes and hold leaders accountable to such.

For the above reasons, the quality improvement cycle for the Lens has always included at least one step for reflection. In order to reflect all of the above, our new quality improvement cycle (above), now integrates reflection every step of the way, and also requires that in order to improve quality, we must initially define and consistently revisit our individual and institutional purposes towards racial equity.

The soft science is now the hard science. In a purpose-driven system, all partners at all levels align around transformative values, relationships, and goals moving towards racial equity, integrating an emphasis on doing less harm and supporting actions that heal and transform.

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Approaches

It is within the human condition to experience trauma. Trauma can be defined as events, circumstances, and impacts that overwhelm an individual's, institution's, or system's capacity to integrate and process. Trauma-informed approaches require consciously building structures, strategies and pathways, and environments that are restorative in nature, promote resilience,

and acknowledge and avoid inflicting trauma. Trauma as we are using it here should not be confused with the expected discomfort and unease that can occur when we have difficult and challenging conversations around racial equity.

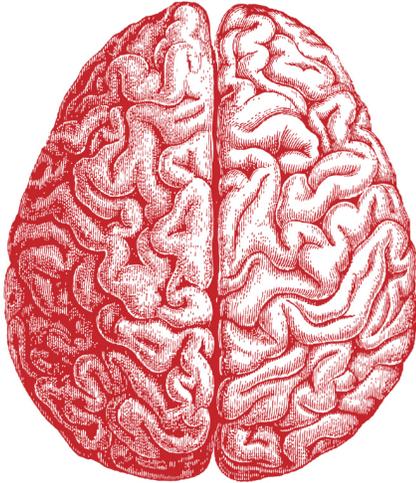
Our governmental structures were created at a time when civil and human rights legislation for all were not present, when populations were more homogenous, and when slavery was an economic and social reality. Historical legacies stemming from slavery are still present in our structures and hierarchies in both obvious and subtle forms. Resulting trauma can be passed down through generations as a result of ongoing oppressions and microaggressions. Organizational cultures that engender fear and learned helplessness help keep trauma and negative hierarchies in place, making it difficult to address complex challenges, improve decision-making towards racial equity, and maintain a sense of purpose and drive.

In order for us to achieve our purpose, we must recognize that a reciprocal relationship exists between racial equity and trauma. In order to do racial equity work, it must be trauma-informed, and vice versa. Trauma-informed racial equity approaches transparently value healing as part of the change process, integrate the realities and effects of historical oppressions in analyses, and address racial microaggressions and implicit bias in addition to structural barriers.

Mindfulness and Brain

Our ability to make sound and just decisions is greatly influenced by the pressures from our surrounding environment, as well as how calm and resilient our minds and brains are. The brain is constantly evolving; nerve cells are constantly reconfiguring themselves in response to what is learned, what is experienced, and what is perceived as injury. Our neurons mirror the experience others are having (mirrored neurons) and are both influenced by and influence the compassionate response in others. Increasing our vagal tone (the vagal nerve connects our brains to our hearts) increases our capacity for connection and empathy. The more compassionate we are, the healthier we become.

Repeated conscious choices to be aware of thoughts, feelings, and our intentions or purposes around racial equity, as well as stretching our brains via complex problem-solving, can strengthen our neural networks, improve our decision-making, and lead to greater community-mindedness. Emotional stress and trauma lead to toxins in the brain that can inhibit the growth of new neurons. In other words: activities and planning that shift our consciousness around racial equity are not only good for our system-wide outcomes and the sustainability of our efforts, but also for our own brains!



Clear minds able to hold today's complex challenges, manage emotions, and maintain clarity could increase the capacity to recognize, deal with, and interrupt racism in its many forms. Especially in the realm of racial microaggressions, and other relational forms of oppression, the practice of self-knowledge and paying deep attention to the present moment can help move towards less trauma in relationships and environments.

Mindfulness has been present on our planet for thousands of years, specifically rooted in eastern traditions. Today, these practices are showing their benefits in modern settings. Critical to mention, however, is that although mindfulness can be just a practice, it is most beneficial when seen as a core pillar and paradigm rather than as an add-on or peripheral activity.

Mindfulness strategies at the individual and institutional levels in the forms of basic breath awareness, making time for reflection and silence, integrating compassion-based trainings, and slowing down can help move us out of our parts of the brain geared solely towards survival and emotional reaction. When we move from the fight-or-flight state, we are better able to access deeper spaces for gleaning wisdom, stay focused on our overarching goals, make better decisions, and relate more authentically to one another in the face of challenges.

Relational Worldview

The Equity and Empowerment Lens was intentionally grounded in the Relational Worldview because it embodies the outcomes it seeks to achieve: collective stewardship, cooperation, transformation, sustainability, systemic and interdependent relationships, and balance. Although deeply rooted in indigenous paradigms in the States, this model, that goes back thousands of years, also represents many of the holistic definitions for population success found in other communities, indigenous tribes, and peoples across the globe.

This model also serves the purpose of integrating two key areas researchers have told us are missing from the current racial equity conversation: the importance of mental health to self-agency, and the inclusion of the area of spirit, or as we define it, a sense of purpose, meaning, and a deeper connection to the common good.

The Linear Worldview seeks to treat the person, focuses on the individual and individual satisfaction, is time-oriented, and is based on a more linear view of cause and effect. The Relational Worldview emphasizes the relationship between multiple variables, speaking more



to the complex, systemic nature of racial equity analyses, and espouses the scientific principle that we are all connected. By leading with and integrating the Relational Worldview, we also support distinct indicators of wellbeing leading to individual and community wellbeing of communities of color: positive cultural identity, increased trust in relationships, and increased community mindedness.

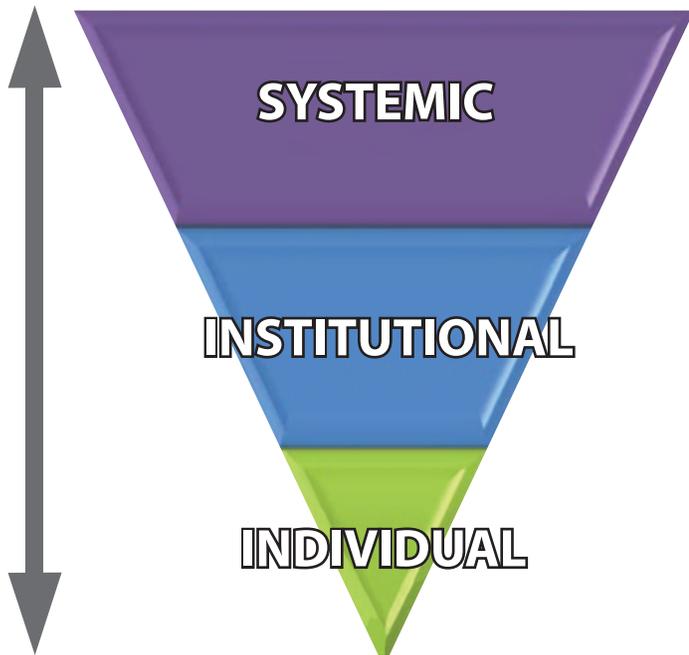
The Relational Worldview does not call for a dismissal of the linear worldview, but rather, includes it, leading to greater cognitive landscapes to draw from while problem-solving. It calls for cooperation with competition, matters of science alongside matters of spirit, and creating the conditions

for much needed structural change. It emphasizes cultural transformation, emphasizing trust, shared power, empathy with others, and respect for nature. Partnership- and sustainability-based paradigms such as the Relational Worldview lead with transformative values and strategies that help achieve racial equity and support our purposes and motivations to do so.

Hierarchy and the Three Levels of Racism

Transformative change leading to racial equity requires that we address racism at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels in empowering ways. Although an organization must focus on institutional strategies, it must also create the conditions necessary to support individual and systemic transformation. Change can and should happen at all levels, but is most effective when all three levels of change support each other, as well as when those in positional authority take on more leadership around addressing racism. In today's work around racial equity, many advances are being made towards addressing structural inequities such as unjust policies and procedures. The role of the individual and of the environmental conditions necessary for transformation are areas that racial equity efforts are just beginning to address in a more focused way separately, and as part of a system of change.

Hierarchy in and of itself provides structure and organization to an institution and is not inherently in and of itself negative in impact. The consequence of negative hierarchy at the institutional and systemic levels, however, is the enjoyment of resources by some (with power)



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and not all, as well as the lack of meaningful inclusion and participation of all community members, especially communities of color.

The Lens highlights five areas of oppression that keep negative hierarchies in place: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (both physical and emotional). As we seek transformation of ourselves, our institutions, and our systems, it is critical to address where and how our policies, procedures, and practices further any of these conditions and, therefore, create trauma. Flattened hierarchies can help promote non-traumatizing environments that are conducive to unearthing and addressing racism at all levels, and are comprised of:

- ✓ Shorter and less complex pathways between those with positional authority and those at other levels;
- ✓ Responsibility and ownership for racial equity at all levels (collective, interdependent leadership is promoted over solely individually-based, dependent leadership);
- ✓ Integration and acceptance of failure and errors into racial equity-based processes and procedures that are often creative and innovative at their core;
- ✓ Integration of cultural paradigms from communities of color that institutions are not leading with and even deeper, have not been founded upon;
- ✓ Accurately seeing that a person is not the disease. Institutions understand and address the systemic nature of racism and other oppressions, and take honest accountability for all roles in such; and
- ✓ Acknowledgment, examination, and addressing of trauma at all levels.

When these conditions and strategies are present, there is less trauma and greater space exists to stay connected to the purpose and transformative nature of racial equity work.