

# Widening the Lens

Exploring the Role of Social Justice in Suicide Prevention  
A Racial Equity Toolkit



**Written by:**

Pata Suyemoto, Ph.D.  
Jennifer Kelliher

**With Members of the MCSP  
Alliance for Equity:**

Sharette Bello-Suazo  
Tanoy Burton  
Kathryn Casella  
Sarah Gaer  
Ysabel Garcia  
Barbara Nealon  
Greg Tocco  
Susan Weinstein

**Contributions by:**

Karen L. Suyemoto, Ph.D.

**Design by:**

Rachel Jackson | [binahdesign.com](http://binahdesign.com)

**Acknowledgments:**

The project is a collaborative effort and we would like to acknowledge the following organizations and individuals who have contributed to this work by reviewing materials, editing drafts, beta-testing exercises, and otherwise supporting our efforts.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Program

Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention's Executive Committee and General Membership

Karen L. Suyemoto, Ph.D.

Massachusetts Coalition Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity members

Copyright © 2019 Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention, This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. (CC BY-ND 4.0)

## mcsp mission statement

The MCSP is a broad-based inclusive alliance of suicide prevention advocates, including public and private agency representatives, policy makers, suicide attempt survivors, families and individuals who have been impacted by suicidal behavior or lost loved ones to suicide, mental health consumers and providers, public health officials, and concerned individuals and organizations dedicated to working in partnership to reduce the incidence of self-harm and suicide in Massachusetts and mobilize a broad-based group of activists at the community level. The MCSP's mission is to prevent suicide through statewide collaboration and advocacy.

## mcsp alliance for equity mission statement

The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses and shares the mission of both of these groups to work toward integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention

- » The People of Color Caucus of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work.
- » The White Ally Caucus of the MCSP is committed to developing an understanding of how to most effectively give voice to communities of color, to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and to use our roles as allies and our white privilege to reinforce the understanding of the ways in which intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work

# table of contents

- 1. Introduction..... 1**
- 2. Getting Started:**
  - Assessing and Developing Foundational Knowledge ..... 7**
    - How to Use This Section ..... 8
    - Issues of Race and Suicide Prevention:**
      - Racial Equity and Suicide Prevention: Why is it important? ..... 9
      - Understanding Resistance ..... 11
      - Countering Resistance..... 13
      - How to Be a White Ally ..... 15
      - Pitfalls of Allyship ..... 18
      - What is White Privilege? ..... 20
      - Understanding White Identity and White Privilege ..... 22
      - White Supremacy Culture ..... 24
      - Doing Social Justice and Racial Equity Work as a Person of Color ..... 25
      - Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility ..... 27
      - Intersectionality ..... 29
      - Shattered Assumptions: Exploring Racial Justice in America ..... 31
    - Exploring New Knowledge:**
      - Background Information: Knowledge Inventory ..... 33
      - Resource List ..... 35
      - Case Study: MCSP Alliance for Equity..... 41
- 3. Initiation Organizational Change:**
  - Understanding Your Organizational Climate and Mission ..... 43**
    - How to Use This Section ..... 44
    - Climate Assessment and Planning:**
      - Initiating Organizational Change – Organizational Inventory ..... 45
      - Personal Diversity Action Plan..... 47
    - Models of Organizational Operation:**
      - Organizational Action/Initiative Examples..... 49
      - Continuum of Organizational Climate  
in Relation to Diversity and Equity ..... 51
      - Organizational Mission Service Approach Continuum  
in Relation to Diversity and Equity ..... 52
      - Case Study: MCSP Executive Committee ..... 53

<b>4. Tools to Begin: First Steps in Becoming a Racially and Socially Just Organization</b> .....	<b>57</b>
How to Use This Section .....	58
Framework for How to Do Social Justice and Racial Equity Work in Suicide Prevention ..	59
How White People Can Do This Work .....	60
Reframing Tool:: Evaluating Your Mission and Activities Through an Equity Lens .....	62
<b>Addressing Communication Diversity:</b>	
Identifying Cultural Differences in Communication .....	65
Communication Inventory .....	68
Culturally Responsive Approaches to Outreach, Invitation and Collaboration .....	69
MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure .....	71
MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure Text .....	72
Case Study: MCSP Initial Process and Framing Short and Long Term Objectives .....	74
<b>5. Continuing the Journey: Apply Knowledge within the Oganizational Structure and Within the Organization’s Activities</b> .....	<b>77</b>
How to Use This Section .....	78
<b>Assessment, Development, and Implementation of Racial Equity and Social Justice Goals:</b>	
Structural/Governance Inventory .....	79
Equity Follow Up Chart MCSP EC .....	80
Focus Group Recommendations .....	84
Case Study: Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition Activities .....	90
<b>Social Justice and Racial Equity Exercises/Activities:</b>	
Facilitators Guide .....	91
Racial Justice Reframing Tool (Blank) .....	94
Racial and Social Identities Exercise .....	95
Levering Systemic Privilege Exercise .....	96
Window of Tolerance .....	97
Wheel of Oppression .....	98
Case Study: MCSP General Membership .....	99
<b>6. Appendices</b> .....	<b>101</b>
Definitions .....	102



1

introduction

The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention (MCSP) is a broad-based, inclusive alliance of diverse stakeholders, including state agencies, mental health providers, community-based organizations, mental health providers and consumers, suicide loss and attempt survivors, and other concerned community members, all committed to working together to reduce the incidence of suicide and self-harm in Massachusetts.

The MCSP has five priority areas: advocacy, Regional Coalitions, structural development, strategic plan evaluation, and membership. Through these five priority areas, the MCSP engages stakeholders from all across the state to collaborate and foster partnerships that maximize available resources, encourage best practice sharing, and ensure that statewide suicide prevention efforts are cohesive, comprehensive, and effective.

The MCSP is comprised of a General Membership and an Executive Committee (EC), both of which meet bimonthly.

The MCSP is the organization tasked with reporting on what is being done in Massachusetts to further the objectives of the Statewide Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention. The MCSP works with evaluators to document how the resources allocated through the state budget's suicide prevention line item serve communities across the state. To request a copy of the most recent strategic plan evaluation summary, email [info@masspreventionssuicide.org](mailto:info@masspreventionssuicide.org).

The MCSP has 10 Regional Coalitions, each of which has a seat on the Executive Committee to ensure that the work of the Coalition truly represents the interests of the entire Commonwealth. The Coalition is funded both through the Massachusetts Department of Health (DPH) Suicide Prevention Program (through the line item) as well as through MCSP membership dues, which fund all MCSP advocacy efforts.

The MCSP Alliance for Equity—and the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses within it—came about as a direct result of one of our Executive Committee members' experience as the only person of color on the EC at the time. We understood that this racial equity work needed to be done collaboratively and that it was crucial that the white allies at the table recognize their role in moving forward. Thus, the White Ally Caucus was established to work closely with the People of Color Caucus. We recognized that the work would diverge at times, but that our mission and our workplan had to be closely aligned.

*The People of Color Caucus of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work.*

*The White Ally Caucus of the MCSP is committed to developing an understanding of how to most effectively give voice to communities of color, expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP, and using our roles as allies and our white privilege to reinforce the understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work.*

*The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses and shares the mission of both these groups to work toward integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention.*

Once the Caucuses started meeting regularly, a workplan emerged, which included reviewing the revised Statewide Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention with a particular focus on social justice and racial equity, as well as social determinants of health, which so often have different outcomes for different communities, especially communities of color. The Caucuses also reviewed and made recommendations on the MCSP's priorities. Finally, the Caucuses decided to create a Toolkit [on social justice and racial equity] that would be a growing, evolving document, starting off by being the document we wished we had had at the beginning of this process of moving toward racial equity and social justice.



What is it that we wished we had? Mostly, we wished we had had some resources that provided foundational information and guidance about how to talk about these issues effectively so we could improve our suicide prevention efforts. Talking about race is often uncomfortable. For white people, it can evoke feelings of guilt, shame, and helplessness. For People of Color people of color (POC) it can be an exhausting process of engaging in emotional labor by repeatedly educating people who are often well-intentioned but don't always understand the impact of their words, actions, or decisions. For all of us, talking about race can mean highlighting the uncomfortable ways that our organizations—our well-intentioned, nonprofit, altruistically inclined organizations—are embedded in the same inequitable structures that we need to question and change.

Like many organizations devoted to mental health and suicide prevention, the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is predominantly, but not exclusively, white. Like many other organizations, we have struggled to address issues of social justice and racial equity. These conversations were not easy conversations to start, and they were not easy conversations to bring into every level of the organization. We were fortunate to have a strong example of integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Program, but coalition work is unique in that it must address the needs and perspectives of many stakeholders. Our strength—and our challenge—is that we have so many different perspectives and experiences that inform our members' and participants' experiences [approaches? Perspectives?] and values in approaching suicide prevention and mental health, as well as issues of social justice and racial equity. We also recognize that integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention takes considerable time, energy, and collaboration, and that we need leadership from both people of color and white allies. None of us can do this work alone and expect true change.

When the MCSP began the process of working toward integrating social justice and racial equity into our work and organization, we did so with several agreements. The first was that this work could not be siloed into a subcommittee; social justice and racial equity needs to be a lens through which we all view all of our work, rather than a separate, additional priority area. Our work with all populations, not only racial and ethnic minority populations, will be enhanced by greater attention to and understanding of race, culture, and ethnicity. We also understood that the goal of becoming a socially just organization would take considerable effort, since we would need to increase our understanding of social justice and integrate that [new knowledge?] into our ongoing work. This would take time, especially because the issues of racial and cultural justice are emotional and difficult to consider and talk about. We understood that exploring one's own experiences can be a major initial step to understanding the importance of diversity, equity, and social justice, so we have included exercises at the end of this Toolkit that can help individuals in your organization begin to take this step. All the while, we knew that if we were to address these issues solely during regular, already full MCSP meetings, it would take too long to effect real change. Additional, directed focus was needed.

Thus, we created the MCSP Alliance for Equity as a separate committee that could delve more deeply into social justice and racial equity and bring back recommendations to incorporate in the work and structure of the Coalition at all levels, from the Executive Committee to the General Membership. The Alliance also provides information for our stakeholders, particularly our Regional Coalitions and Member Organizations, to use to examine their own work and organizational norms and structures.

We do not have all the answers for how to integrate racial equity and social justice into our—or any other—organization. We still have many questions, and the more work we do, the more questions come up. Yet we have some insight into our own processes and challenges. We have organizational strengths that have helped us begin to move toward being a more equitable, racially just organization; however, we recognize that we have not arrived at an “endpoint” and that such an endpoint doesn't exist.

We have been more deliberate about the conversations we have been having, focusing internally and externally on what we could be doing better. There are many areas we could still do better in as we consciously take the necessary steps to move toward being a more racially equitable organization.

Hopefully, the resources included in this Toolkit will help you come up with answers that work best for you and your organization. We hope that you will share your challenges, questions, and successes with us so that we can continue to add resources, questions, and—some—possible answers to this Toolkit.

What we have learned and hope to share in this Toolkit is our process. This process has been incredibly beneficial and challenging and has led to some progress, but is not one-size-fits-all, is not necessarily linear, and is by no means an endpoint. We will continue to navigate this process within our organization and work and will expand this Toolkit accordingly.

The information in this Toolkit is largely based on what we wish we had known at various points during our own process, frequent questions about how racial equity relates to mental health and suicide prevention, and how this work relates to our organizational norms and structures.

While there are many aspects of social justice that we could have picked to start with (gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, etc.), we decided to lead with racial equity for a number of reasons:

- » In the US, race is a defining aspect of social identity.
- » One's race can be an indicator of a person's and a community's access to opportunities.
- » -Racism is a ubiquitous problem in the US.
- » Of the many types of oppression, racism is often the one that is put on the back burner.
- » We have prioritized an antiracist strategy to create a more equitable society and a wider range of suicide prevention approaches.
- » Suicide prevention work has paid little attention to communities of color, race, and racism.

At the MCSP, although we have diversity across many other dimensions (gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, etc.), there was a noticeable lack of racial and ethnic diversity.

Although we are starting with race, we are not saying that other oppressions are not equally important to examine in suicide prevention. By examining race, we also begin to develop a process for addressing other social inequities. Race—and any other oppressed social identity—does not stand alone. To understand the interactions between different oppressions, understanding the concept of intersectionality is critical.

Intersectionality, the theory that oppressions intersect and must be examined together rather than in isolation, is a concept that is integral to all effective social justice work. From the outset, our thought process focused on examining the ways in which different oppressions are compounded. Currently, our work focuses on racial equity and social justice in general. We look at how oppression is compounded when racism intersects with other oppression(s) (i.e., gender, sexual identity, class, religion; see Intersectionality handout). In the future, our focus on intersectionality will be instructive as we move into other areas of oppression. Regardless of the oppression we are currently focusing on, it is essential that all our work be done with the understanding that no part of our identity exists in a vacuum. Whether a part of our identity is a “dominant” or “oppressed” one, the oppression(s) and privilege(s) we experience exist as the sum total of all our identities. This allows us to understand, make space for, and honor an individual's identities and experiences in a more nuanced way. For example, white women and women of color both experience misogyny and oppression based on their gender, but they do not experience all gender-based oppression in the same way.

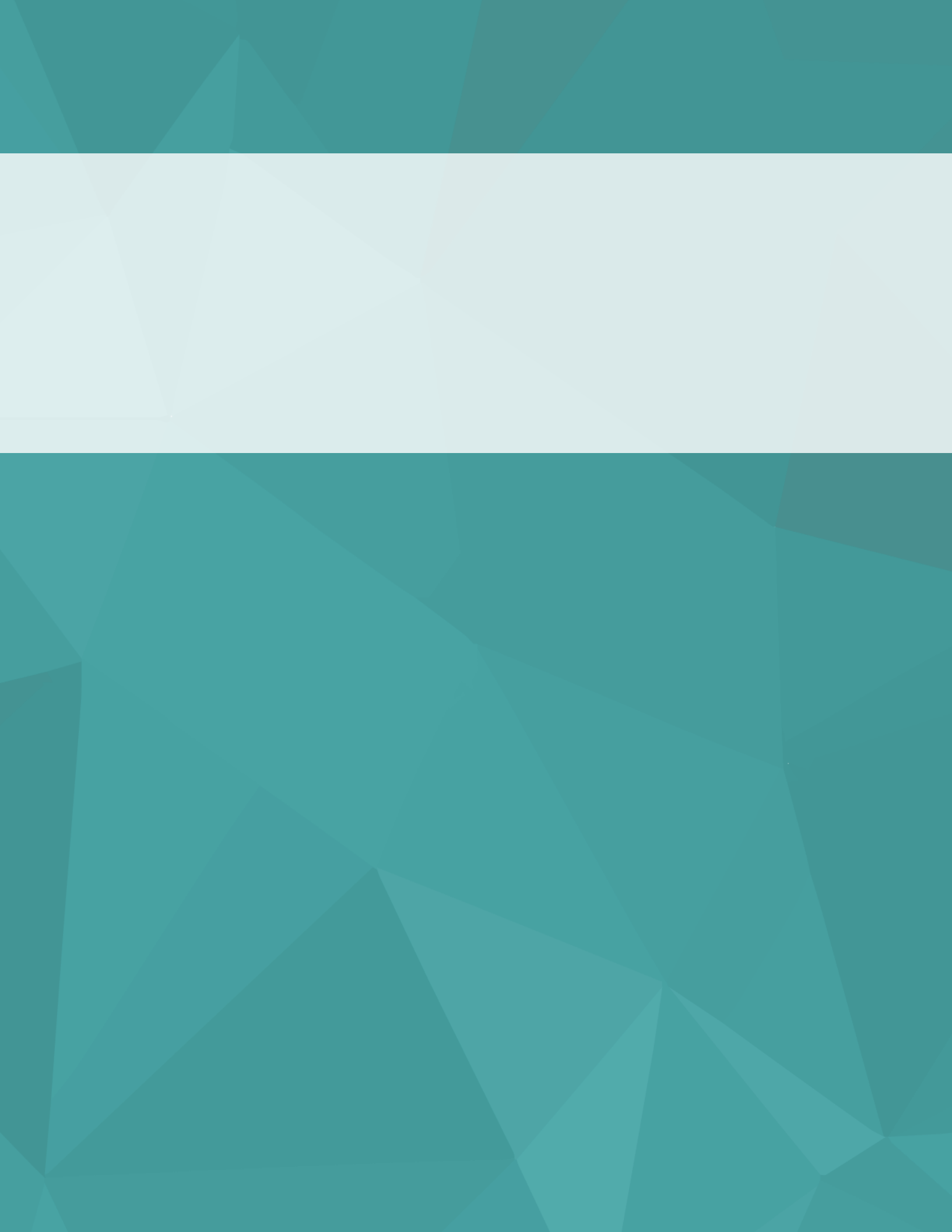
In envisioning and implementing our work in this Toolkit, we started with the belief that intersectionality is integral to all social justice work. Even as we lead with racial equity, we understand the importance of the connections between oppressions and how dismantling one oppressive structure can provide a roadmap for future social justice work.

This Toolkit's chapters examine various areas of action and processes that an organization might engage in to move toward social justice and racial equity. We include handouts, resource lists, exercises, and organizational inventories that will help your organization or community group explore social justice concepts and begin to integrate social justice and racial equity into your organization and community. Some topics we cover are suicide prevention and social justice, cultural humility versus cultural competence, intersectionality, doing social justice and racial equity work as a person of color, and shattered expectations.

We have included case studies that provide examples of how a particular section's information and action steps can be implemented. These real-life examples (often our own) include challenges, approaches, outcomes, and narratives, all of which illuminate our process and resistance we encountered along the way.

Note that in implementing the exercises, handouts, and concepts from this Toolkit, especially if your organization is predominantly white, there will be points of resistance that will often present themselves in unexpected ways. Through the case studies, we have tried to demonstrate the ways that resistance can be instructive opportunities for further discussion and growth.

This Toolkit is a living document, and just as there is no endpoint to working toward becoming a socially just organization, there is also no endpoint to providing resources, engaging in conversations, and sustainably and effectively implementing structural change. Thus, this Toolkit will eventually be available in many different iterations as we continue to expand it by adding materials on other oppressions in addition to race, as well as materials for specific stakeholders such as clinicians and other providers, community members, and Regional Coalition chairs.



# 2

## getting started: assessing & developing foundational knowledge

How to Use This Section

**Issues of Race and Suicide Prevention:**

Racial Equity and Suicide Prevention: Why is it important?

Understanding Resistance

Countering Resistance

How to Be a White Ally

Pitfalls of Allyship

What is White Privilege?

Understanding White Identity and White Privilege

Doing Social Justice and Racial Equity Work as a Person of Color

Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility

Intersectionality

Shattered Assumptions: Exploring Racial Justice in America

**Exploring New Knowledge:**

Background Information: Knowledge Inventory

Resource List

Case Study: MCSP Alliance for Equity

## How to Use This Section

As you begin the process of examining foundational social justice and racial equity concepts and integrating these concepts into your organization and work, the handouts and resources in this section offer information for you and your colleagues to begin internal conversation within your organization by providing clear explanations of foundational knowledge. These handouts explain the connections between racial justice, social equity, and mental health; racism and white privilege; and cultural competence versus cultural humility, to name a few topics covered.

We have assembled the information in the order that we were introduced to (or were asked about) many of these concepts, with slight deviations, in order to provide a cohesive, cumulative framework. There is no prescribed order for the handouts in this section, especially if your organization is coming to this work because of a particular inciting incident or shared concern. Use the materials in an order that you think will help your organization understand and integrate these concepts most effectively.

It might make sense for one organization to discuss white privilege and cultural competence versus cultural humility as an initial foray into social justice before attempting to discuss suicide and racial equity. For another organization where there is skepticism about the relevance of these concepts, starting with the Racial Equity and Suicide Prevention handout might make more sense.

These handouts can be used in a number of ways:

- » As the foundation for intentional dialogue within your organization. Handouts can be used in pairs, for small dialogue groups, or presented to a larger group. When people first encounter this information, they often have both intellectual and emotional reactions. Therefore, there need to be spaces where people can talk to others about these reactions, as well as the content of the handout. Often, this more intimate conversation can't happen in a large group, so invest ample time in considering how to introduce this material.
- » As background reading for informational purposes prior to events, such as a board retreat or a speaker on racial equity in suicide prevention.
- » As resources for other organizational work, making the information available (as appropriate) to community partners who are also interested in this work.

Working toward making your organization more racially equitable and socially just is not linear; it is instead recursive, so some of these concepts may require additional work as you proceed along your path. They might need to be addressed when your organization has gained more knowledge, had more in-depth conversations, or done more exercises. If you are finding that a particular handout or concept is generating enough pushback to the point where you feel it is counterproductive, you may want to move to a different topic. You will, however, want to come back to the concept at a later date for a more nuanced and in-depth conversation about how each concept impacts your organization and your work.

# Racial Equity & Suicide Prevention: Why is it Important?

## **Suicide Affects Everyone**

Any death by suicide is important. Any deaths by suicide are too many.

Suicide is a public health issue that doesn't discriminate. People of color (POC) are dying by suicide, attempting suicide, and struggling with suicidal ideation. Although some statistics indicate lower rates of suicide among people of color, there are confounding issues such as underreporting of suicides and suicide attempts, as well as overaggregation of samples, where high rates of suicide attempts or suicide in specific subgroups of people of color (such as adolescent Asian American girls) are obscured because these subgroups are lumped in with others. There are also high levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in many communities of color that need to be addressed so that upstream innovations can prevent possible suicide deaths.

While suicide impacts every demographic, approaches to suicide prevention often do not. Prevention efforts need to respond better to the needs of communities of color.

As a Coalition, we want to be a group that is responsive to all people and communities. We want everyone to be represented in, engaged in, and have an impact on how our work is done. We understand that most of the work in suicide prevention has been done in white communities, for white people. Our work as a Coalition, therefore, is vital and important. Given the statistics on suicide, it is clear that in order to make our suicide prevention work effective, we need to dedicate more attention to people of color, social justice, and racial equity.

## **Oppression/ Systems Of Oppression Intersect With Suicide And Suicide Prevention In A Number Of Ways**

Racism and oppressive systems are pervasive and inescapable. Race isn't a personal thing; we have no control over our racial identity and no control over whether we experience racism or are protected from racism and seem to receive benefits (privilege) because of our race. Racism hurts both people of color and white people, albeit differently, because racial systems tell us how we are supposed to be, think, and interact with others, as well as how we will be treated by others. With respect to suicide, racism increases risk of mental health concerns and suicide for POC.

We have no control over our racial identity or whether that identity puts us into a position of privilege, but if we have privilege, we can use that privilege to address systemic racism and social injustice.

We've found that most white people move along by:

- » First developing an understanding of race, racism, and their impact.
- » Then developing an awareness and understanding of how race and racism are systemic, not personal, and that each white person is also a part of that system.
- » Then developing an understanding of privilege and how they are or are not privileged within a racialized system. Also, simply stating that folks have privilege and can use it can be ineffective if people don't really understand what privilege is.

Both people of color and white people have our own healing to do in this process to address how we have specifically been harmed by systems of racial oppression.

The effects of racism are present not only in the individual, but also in our systems, such as in mental health work and suicide prevention. Oppressive systems create additional barriers for people of color to find support and resources during a suicidal crisis, and existing resources may not be culturally responsive or appropriate.

In communities of color, addressing racism and its effects is a form of suicide prevention.

### **Using a Lens of Racial and Ethnic Responsiveness Improves Our Efficacy and Impacts Our Ability to do Our Work and Save Lives in All Communities**

Addressing social justice and racial equity positively impacts the lives of both individuals and communities of color and white communities and individuals.

White people have traditionally been the developers of suicide prevention materials and resources, which have usually focused on helping white communities. To achieve equity, we need to move beyond only doing suicide prevention work in white communities. However, attending to racial equity does not mean shifting the entire focus of our work to communities of color, but rather expanding the perspectives, frameworks, and approaches to suicide prevention to serve both communities of color and white communities.

Resilience looks different in communities of color; we can learn about various forms of resilience from many communities.

When we talk about social justice, we are talking about the ways systems of oppression create risk mental health issues and suicide; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color, but for other oppressed groups as well. We can address multiple demographics (not just race, but also gender, religion, etc.) better when we examine and consider change on the systems level.



# Understanding Resistance, Part I: Why Are (White) People Resistant to Racial Equity?

## *Why Are People Resistant?*

**Lack of awareness:** Many white people don't believe there is a need for action against racial inequity, and not necessarily for malicious reasons. Sometimes, resistance simply comes from not seeing or acknowledging the existence of the racism that POC encounter on a daily basis and, thus, not understanding how prevalent and damaging it is. Possible explanations are that many white people don't know what racism actually looks like, or that they think only of overt, violent, and egregious acts as racism.

**Misunderstanding what constitutes racism:** White people have been taught and conditioned to believe that someone or something is not racist unless it is based on hatred, is an overt act of aggression, and was intended to be racist. We think of hate groups, racial slurs, and violence as racist. In other words, we tend to think of overt rather than aversive racism (unintentional racism) as racism.

What don't we think of? What it's like for a person of color when a white person crosses the street to avoid them; how it feels when they hear the doors lock as they walk past a stopped car; or when someone asks, "Where are you really from?" We don't think of when a Black teen is asked how they got into an honors class, or when employees assume that a POC manager got a promotion because of their race, rather than actually deserving it. You can think of other scenarios where a white person might do a double-take or assume that a POC has received unwarranted advantages that are unavailable to white people. This, too, is racism. All these situations reflect problematic yet often unacknowledged beliefs and attitudes that we have to consciously work to undo. We must shift our core beliefs away from their racist foundations and undergo personal, cultural, and institutional transformation so that we stop causing harm and instead move toward equity.

**Disavowal of white privilege:** White people can be reluctant to acknowledge the advantages that come to them by virtue of being white. These advantages increase the chances that our hard work will result in the outcome that we expect or is proportional to the effort we have expended. For POC, the outcome from the same hard work often does not result in the same or similar outcomes. It's uncomfortable to admit that our privilege influences our outcomes so that we benefit more than we may deserve. When we see the benefits based on race that accrue for white people, we can acknowledge our unwitting complicity in the racist systems that have oppressed POC for centuries. This is a painful and difficult reality to accept.

**Aversion to change:** Change is almost always uncomfortable, but it is especially unsettling when the inherent problems in the status quo are invisible. To avoid having to confront the biases in our systems, we label these problems as "just the way things are" or "the optimal or more efficient way to do things." It is especially unsettling to be asked to change things we have never questioned before. Rigorous questioning makes us examine how we think, act, and work, and how our own organizations and structures uphold the dominant narrative in a way that is exclusionary and problematic. Understanding this core problem compels us to action, which is uncomfortable, frustratingly slow, and laden with uncertainty, and missteps. We all like to be good at what we do and how we go about solving problems. Stepping out from where we are comfortable

and what we have come to know as “normal” and into a new and uncertain set of rules and relationships feels like a big risk, even though we know it is essential to move us closer to true equity.

### How Does Resistance Manifest?

**Relevance:** “Racial equity and social justice are important, but why are they important to suicide prevention, when we know that more white men die by suicide than any other demographic?”

**Counter:** POC are dying by suicide in significant numbers. We know that POC are impacted by different factors than white people, which in turn contributes to the development of mental health conditions and suicidality. As part of an overarching public health strategy, we utilize our knowledge to develop appropriate strategies for different populations, aiming for maximum effectiveness with each group.

**Time:** “Racial equity and social justice are important issues and may even be relevant to our work, but given that we already have so much on our plates, can we really find the time to undertake this work?”

The issues and work that we make time for reflect what is important to us. As we devote our time, thought, and effort to racial equity and social justice, they become integral to our work. In turn, we naturally begin to look through the lens of racial equity and social justice for any issue that arises in our suicide prevention efforts. Thus, racial equity and social justice seamlessly become a part of every conversation without being designated as “time for racial equity and social justice.”

**Discomfort, deflection, and denial:** “Why focus on race when others (such as women, LGBTQ+ people, poor people, religious groups, etc.) have also been discriminated against and are disadvantaged in our society? *Why aren't we talking about other forms of oppression instead of racism?*”

**Counter:** Frankly, we need to start somewhere. Our examination of racial equity does not deny or negate the biases, hardships, and discrimination that other marginalized groups face. Instead, as we learn more about the intersection of race and suicide, we are more able to identify the similarities and differences between other factors (gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.) and suicide, informing our continuing work on effective suicide prevention measures. Eventually, we will learn how to examine the status quo, question the why and how we do things, and open up the conversation for dismantling all forms of oppression, not just racism. The truth is that all forms of oppression are interconnected, and therefore, anti-racist work is social justice.

**Repetition, a.k.a. “We’ve already done this:”** “Haven’t we already done this? I know I went through racial equity training somewhere else. Is this really necessary?”

**Counter:** (1) This work is not “one and done.” As long as racism still exists, this work will never be finished, because hegemonic (white) norms still unjustly influence all of our organizational cultures and modes of operation, and POC are still being denied access, opportunity and the systemic power to influence structure and decision-making. While some of us may have taken steps to mitigate this, the reality is that *as long as racism creates inequity, this work is still essential and ongoing for all of us.*

(2) Whether we’ve done the work in an organizational setting or at another time does not make it less necessary now. Some of this MCSP’s member organizations have undertaken social justice work, often to comply with grant requirements. However, prior to beginning this work, we had not examined our organization, meaning we couldn’t make any progress toward becoming more equitable unless we were willing to specifically examine the systems, policies, and practices of our Coalition. This has been an opportunity to draw on our separate experiences and expertise to enhance our collective efforts. Encourage people who feel that they’ve “done” this work before to take a more active or prominent role in helping implement these processes related to the current work.

Remember that because each organization is different, the manifestations of white privilege and white supremacy are embedded differently in each organization’s structures, practices, and norms. Therefore, the strategies needed to dismantle this embedded white supremacy will also be different. Even if some of us have done this work before, *it is still necessary for all of us to do this work, again, together.*

## Countering Resistance, Part II: How to Counter Resistance in Your Own Organization and Work

How do we counter resistance? What are some strategies for getting buy-in despite people's reluctance to do the work and make the necessary changes?

### **Meet people where they are at and begin where your organization is.**

Take the time to set expectations. People need scaffolding from the outset: a sense of where they're going, what they need to do, and what their role will be as a part of this process.

Provide context. Explain that yes, anti-racism work is time consuming, but it's also a privilege to not have time for it. POC constantly encounter racism in their everyday lives and don't get the option to say, "I don't have time for racism today."

Unpack resistance. When confronting any type of resistance, it is crucial to try to figure out what might be underneath it. While this can be hard to do in real time, it's worth the effort, because it addresses the actual point of resistance at a much deeper level. Sometimes, "we don't have time for this" really means "I'm overwhelmed and don't think we have time," and sometimes it's about white guilt. Without making assumptions, asking further questions can help the whole group clarify not only where the resistance is, but how it can be mitigated.

### **Manage your own expectations and acknowledge your own positionality as a facilitator of this process.**

The most difficult aspect of resistance is that you don't know when it's going to come up; there are ways in which you can be ready, and ways in which you can't.

Be as prepared as you can. Although you can't be prepared for every possible scenario, you can be prepared in terms of knowing that resistance is going to come up and trusting that you can counter it.

Make sure you understand what the real resistance is. Ask a question to make sure you know what the person is saying. This gives you more information to formulate a response.

Set your own expectations in that you're not going to be able to deal with everything perfectly.

In this work, authenticity is critical. It is important to acknowledge your own privilege (if you are white, it is important to acknowledge white privilege; if you are a POC, other social identities). It is also important to own your process and imperfections because this gives people permission to make mistakes too.

### **Counter specific types of resistance.**

**Time:** When the resistance is about time, one of the most important questions you can ask during this process is, what would allow people to have bandwidth? In our own Coalition, we had a situation where people felt that we didn't have time at Executive Committee meeting to address an agenda item focused on racial equity comprehensively enough, but people were willing to do a retreat. This gave us more time than we initially asked for. By exploring the issue, we realized that there were two concerns: 1) not having enough time at the meeting and 2) not having enough time to do the activity well and in a meaningful way.

**Relevance:** If the resistance is about "relevance," point out that people in communities of color are dying, and we have a responsibility to be responsive to all people. Right now, we're not being responsive to communities of color, and we're not addressing the specific needs of those communities.

Remind them that oppressions are interconnected, and that examining systemic racism will help create a process to address other inequities.

**Discomfort:** If the resistance is about discomfort, it's important to note that being uncomfortable is okay and a part of the process (and is not the same as being unsafe). What's important is what you do with your discomfort: do you look the other way, or do you sit with it and try to understand why you're uncomfortable? Discomfort is an important part of moving forward because it means you're addressing things you haven't talked about before. Our job is to understand why we are uncomfortable and go from there.

In fact, we decided to lead with race intentionally with this Toolkit because it's something uncomfortable and often brushed under the rug, and because our culture has not come to any sense of equity around racism and racial justice.

**Repetition:** If the resistance is that "we've done this before," it's important to remember that this work is not "one-size-fits-all." Instead, we must look at our organization's unique situation to create an appropriate plan that addresses equity.

### **Where to Begin**

Start with identifying gaps and areas of concern. Then, begin implementing changes that people are willing to implement right away; are feasible for your organization where it is now; and move your organization and members toward further change.

The process of identifying and questioning these broader and often unquestioned norms is critical when looking at equity, as it helps us remove our blind spots. It helps us understand that there's no such thing as neutral. This step can't be ignored, but it is often met with a significant amount of resistance because people are used to doing things the way they have always done them and will often want tangible "proof" of why it is important to do things differently.

Draft an action plan and framework for doing social justice and racial equity work. This is a great way to make sure everyone is on the same page with respect to the steps you feel ready to take.

### **Next Steps in Countering Resistance**

Countering resistance gets easier as people within your group gain experience and knowledge with these issues. The more people who commit to this work as allies, the more voices you will have to counter resistance. Hearing from someone other than the two or three leaders can be beneficial and transformative.

When resistance comes up from white people, there can be a question of who "should" speak up, particularly if you're on a team with POC. This is a conversation that has to happen between leadership and should happen in advance of any discussion, in order to make sure everyone is on the same page. And sometimes, unfortunately, a response from a white ally might be initially more impactful and difficult to dismiss than a response from a POC.

It is important for POC to know they have white allies who can and will speak to resistance, and it's important for allies to acknowledge that they should not speak over POC during these conversations.

Sometimes resistance can be derailing and you do have to continue the work, but you also have to address why resistance came up. In this way, resistance is instructive. Resistance, like learning, is recursive, so be prepared for different types of resistance as you move along the process.

**Don't give up. Persistence over resistance.**

# How to be a White Ally<sup>1</sup>

## Why do White People Need to Talk About Race?

- » All of our behaviors, actions, and perceptions take place within a context of power and privilege and are informed by our particular lens, background, and experiences. There is no such thing as “neutral.”
- » Privilege is not just access to opportunity or socioeconomic advantage, nor is it the avoidance of negative consequences of systemic oppression. Privilege is also the assumption that when we walk into a room, the people in the room will likely share our norms, viewpoints, and methods of communication, including how to approach differing viewpoints.
- » If we don't understand our privilege and work against systemic racism, the system will not change, we will not change, and our work and organizations will not change. People, perspectives, and experiences will continue to be systematically excluded from the table, including at the MCSP, and our work, our society, and our institutions will suffer as a result.

## What is an Ally? What is Necessary to Become an Ally?

*“Ally: “An ally is a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he [or they] receives the benefit. Allied behavior means taking personal responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society, and so often ignore or leave to others to deal with. Allied behavior is intentional, overt, consistent activity that challenges prevailing patterns of oppression, makes privileges that are so often invisible visible, and facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression.”<sup>2</sup>*

- » White people can enter into racial equity work by understanding privilege and systemic bias, questioning the lenses through which we view our work, and working to become an ally. We must recognize that in addition to changing individual attitudes and behaviors, antiracism work is about dismantling systems of oppression and matching action to language. As white people, we can do the following to work toward racial equity.
- » LISTEN and TRUST the words, experiences, and perceptions of people of color when they tell us what racism means to them and how it has impacted them. Even if we can't see or haven't seen the impact, we must understand that not seeing the impact of racism is a part of our privilege.
- » ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY and APOLOGIZE for problematic and harmful behavior. Recognize the difference between intention and impact. Our intentions do matter, but they do not matter more than or erase the impact or harm caused. It does matter that we intend to ensure that we don't repeat our actions or the harm we've caused. The goal is to align our intentions with our actions so that we can have the positive impact we aim for.
- » Sit with discomfort, uncertainty, and guilt. It requires patience with ourselves, as well as resilience, and sometimes outside support to ensure that our guilt doesn't derail our continued efforts.

---

1 . Syemoto, K. Understanding ethnicity and race: foundations of cultural responsiveness and ensuring equity for effective service provision. Walter, A.W., Ruiz, Y., Tourse, R. W. C., Kress, H., Morningstar, B., MacArthur, B., & Daniels, A. (2016). Leadership matters: how hidden biases perpetuate institutional racism in organizations. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership, & Governance*, 41(3), 213–221. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23303131.2016.1249584>

2. Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression: The Role of Allies as Agents of Change. Ayvazian, Andrea. *Fellowship*; New York Vol. 61, Iss. 1-2, (Jan 1995): 6-9.

- » Hold ourselves accountable for our words and actions by educating ourselves and other white people. In this process, we can't expect people of color to take on the emotional labor of educating us.

One model is the **AVAF** model<sup>3</sup>

- › **A**cknowledgement involves accepting that one has committed an injury (regardless of intent) and communicating that awareness to the injured party.
  - › **V**alidation legitimates the wounded party's feelings about the harm done.
  - › **A**pology involves taking responsibility for the harm one has done.
  - › **F**orgiveness follows only if the wounded party is ready.
- » Hold other white people accountable for their words and actions
- » There is no such thing as a "perfect" ally. Even as allies, we have all been exposed to biased and racist beliefs that have shaped our perspectives, and we all benefit from racist social structures. We all have more to learn, more blind spots to identify, and more work to do.
- » It's critical to take antiracist action, make mistakes, and learn from them, rather than be paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake that inadvertently upholds racism.
- » As we grow in our allyship, part of the process is uncovering privilege we have not been aware of. This can be a shameful, difficult, and emotional process. It is helpful if we can talk to other white people about this process, for a few reasons. First, it means that we are not expecting POC to do the emotional labor of working through our guilt by providing affirmation, validation, or absolution. Second, it shows others that we can sit with and work through difficult and intense emotions around our own position of power related to race, racism, and white privilege. Watching and being involved in our process may help people other white people give themselves permission to begin the messy and difficult emotional work of unpacking their own intense feelings. They will also have a safe person—us—to share that process with.
- » This work will always be ongoing. We will not arrive at an "endpoint," but we will arrive at better and better iterations of ourselves, our organization, and our work.

### What are Our Responsibilities as Allies?

- » Understanding that racism is a complex system of beliefs, norms, and social structures that impact both the agent ("dominant") and oppressed groups; recognizing how we have been shaped by these norms and systems.
- » Talking with people who share our identity and privilege as white people. This is important, as they may be more receptive to our voices because we share a common experience and identity. We also share common goals and responsibilities because we share a common position with respect racial justice and social equity.
- » Learning how to leverage our privilege in the appropriate contexts, by using our privilege as white people to get other white people to listen; by using our privilege as white people to, whenever possible, amplify and create space for the voices, ideas, and experiences of POC; to help open spaces for POC without taking them over.

---

3. Hardy, K. V. (2017). The Validate, Challenge, and Request Approach: A practical tool for facilitating difficult dialogues. In K. V. Hardy, & T. Bobes (Eds.), *Promoting cultural sensitivity in supervision: A manual for practitioners* (pp. 45–53). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

- » Remembering that we are working with people of color and are not there to set the agenda or “rescue” anyone. People who are oppressed are the experts in their own liberation. We are instead holding ourselves accountable to work against oppressive norms and structures to achieve equity and racial justice.
- » Recognizing the agency and authority of people of color’s lived experiences to guide the agenda and direction of racial equity work, while understanding that we have equal responsibility in working toward our shared objectives.
- » Most importantly: being an ally requires ACTION. Concrete next steps include:
  - › Join the White Ally Caucus of the MCSP Alliance for Equity
  - › Visit RACEJustice.org and READ.
  - › Have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.
  - › Call out (or call in)<sup>4</sup> racist behavior and racist language
  - › Educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions

---

4. This Is What It Means To Call Someone In, Instead Of Calling Them Out” from Bustle. <https://www.bustle.com/p/what-does-call-in-mean-when-call-out-culture-feels-toxic-this-method-can-be-used-instead-9056343>.

# The Pitfalls of Allyship

## Lack of Accountability

- » *Not owning your mistakes and not taking responsibility for and growing from them.* A common mistake allies make is focusing on **intent** instead of **impact** when you've done or said something hurtful. This approach keeps the focus on you rather than on the POC you have harmed; instead, it is crucial to try to understand why your words or actions were hurtful and problematic from the POC's point of view.
- » Instead of saying something like, "I didn't mean for that to be offensive," consider saying something like, "I see that what I said was hurtful to you. I made a mistake and I apologize, and I'll use this as an opportunity to reflect on my words and actions, change, and do better." This keeps you on the path to becoming a stronger ally.
- » When you try to defend or explain away your mistakes, not only do you tell the POC you've harmed that their pain is less important than your intentions (which it isn't), but you also miss an **opportunity** to learn from what you've done wrong, hold yourself accountable, and become a stronger ally.

## Ally Exceptionalism

- » Another way you might inadvertently shift the focus to yourself and center the conversation on white people is through "exceptionalism," or trying to demonstrate that you're "one of the good white people." This approach dismisses and ignores the broader experiences of POC. You also miss an opportunity to recognize and dismantle your own thoughts and behaviors that make you complicit in systems of oppression. Your energy would be better spent working to systematically dismantle racism within our society, organizations, relationships, and yourself.
- » This is incredibly important, because while you can and should grow as an ally, *when you focus on proving your own lack of complicity, you recenter the conversation around white people and dismiss the broader experiences of POC and your own role in maintaining structural racism.* You miss the opportunity to dismantle your own behaviors and thoughts that contribute to your complicity.

## Ally Savior Complex

- » While you may have the best intentions, your role is not to come in and "save" POC and communities of color. Your involvement is not about "rescuing" POC, but instead taking ownership and responsibility for your complicity in the harm that structural racism and white supremacy culture causes. Your role is to work in *partnership* with POC and communities of color to do as much as you can to undo the structural and systemic racism that harms POC while providing you with unfair advantages.

## Taking Over/Taking the Lead Away from POC

- » In your eagerness to do anti-racist work, you might get carried away and push too hard for what you think the solution(s) should be, rather than following the leadership of POC and communities of color. It is essential that white people follow the lead of POC in setting goals around what equity looks like in our work, organizations, and communities. Following POC leadership is also necessary for us to take action toward equity and assess our progress.



### **Lack of Communication**

- » Communication is always important. When you don't maintain direct, open, and honest channels of communication with the POC you're working with, you lose the essential opportunity to figure out how they want you to act as an ally and what the most meaningful way to advance the work would be.
- » If you don't speak with other white people as a part of this process of being an ally (when appropriate), you miss the chance to exercise your leadership. Don't shy away from educating other white people about issues such as white privilege, allyship, and white supremacy culture. Answer basic questions for other white allies. It shouldn't be on POC to take on this role.

### **Lack of Effort on Self-Education**

- » It may seem like natural curiosity, but asking POC to educate you about topics of racism and inequality indicates a lack of earnest interest and effort. Instead, do research to educate yourself first, then ask POC to have the conversation at a time that is convenient for them. Also, be sensitive to the emotional burden that these conversations can justifiably have on POC. It's not up to POC to make white people feel like they are doing good by engaging in social justice work.

### **Selective or Performative Allyship**

- » A selective or performative ally might post or repost anti-racist information on social media, sign petitions, and go to rallies, but does not undertake the difficult internal, systemic, and structural work to undo white supremacy culture and racism. This person might only engage with issues of racial equity when it is convenient for them or when they feel like it. True allyship requires that we are consistent in our allyship, that we take risks, and that we integrate social justice and racial equity as much as we can into every aspect of our lives and work.

## What is White Privilege<sup>5</sup>

White privilege is a system of unearned rights and benefits, as well as exemption from certain negative experiences based solely on the construct of race. White privilege not only confers unearned benefits on white people, but also upholds racism.

White privilege is not just access to opportunity or socioeconomic advantage, nor is it just avoidance of systemic oppression based on race. It is also the assumption that when we walk into a room, the people in the room will tend to share our norms, viewpoints, and methods of communication.

All of our experiences take place within a context of power and privilege; with white privilege, this context often means that the advantages conferred by being white are unseen and unacknowledged.

Every white person in this country has white privilege, whether we are aware of that privilege or not.

### How Does White Privilege Intersect with Other Forms of Oppression?

White privilege functions as an advantage based on race; because we each occupy many different identities, it is possible to be disadvantaged in one area (class, gender, sexuality, etc.) and privileged in another area (race).

Being disadvantaged in another area of one's identity (i.e., class) does not erase white privilege. It simply means that with all other variables being equal, if you are white, you will have certain privileges that allow you to avoid consequences that people of color cannot.

### What are Some Examples of White Privilege?

- » The communication norms of most groups you interact with, personally and professionally, reflect the norms that you are accustomed to and that are typical in your racial group.
- » Not having to speak for your entire racial group as if it were a monolithic entity.
- » Not being subject to racial profiling in stores, in job interviews, and by law enforcement agencies.
- » Assuming that you will be seen, judged, and treated as an individual, rather than based on others' preconceived notions about people who share your ethnicity or racial identity.
- » Being viewed by default as competent, unthreatening, trustworthy, and worthy of respect, if there is nothing that suggests otherwise.

### How can I Use White Privilege to Highlight Racial Injustice?

Speak up when another white person says something racist. As a white person, you can do so without being told you are being overly sensitive or attributing everything to race, which people of color are often told. You don't have to fully educate anyone; you can simply say that you disagree or would prefer that they don't use words like that, or that you have a different experience.

Notice when people of color are being talked over, call out the interruption, and request that the person being talked over have the opportunity to finish speaking.

---

5. or more resources on understanding white privilege see: "What Is White Privilege, Really?" by Cory Collins, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>. "10 White Privileges You Don't Know You Have" by Grace Goodwin, <http://whiteprivilege.org/10-privileges-you-dont-know-you-have/>. "10 Things White Privilege Has Done for Me in 10 Days" by Olivia Cole, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege\\_b\\_5658049](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege_b_5658049). "White Privilege Checklist" by Peggy McIntosh, <http://crc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>

Point out instances where there are no people of color in the room. Ask yourself and everyone else at the table why there are no people of color present. More importantly, ask yourself how you can work together to change this.

Use a lens of social justice and racial equity to ask questions about how and why norms are created and adhered to, how priorities are set, and how decisions are made.

# Understanding White Identity and White Privilege

## White Identity

Unpacking our identities as white people is uncomfortable work, because it means understanding and questioning our privilege and our unwitting complicity in racism and white supremacy culture. It means acknowledging that these things have shaped us in ways we don't want (and may not want to acknowledge). But if we want to do anti-racist work—if we want to be allies—we need to acknowledge and examine our whiteness and what it means, including all the aspects of whiteness that make us uncomfortable.

When we examine and question our whiteness as a lens through which we see the world, we can begin to unpack the ways that the norms of white supremacy culture have been passed onto us: perfectionism, a sense of urgency, power hoarding, the fear of open conflict, etc. When we begin to see these things for what they are, a specific and cultured way of interacting with ourselves and the world around us, we can begin to question:

- 1) Whether or not the norms we have taken for granted really make sense, whether they work for us as well as for people who aren't white.
- 2) What we can do to find different norms that fit us, the people around us, and our organizations and communities better.

In suicide prevention, we have to acknowledge that our field, like everywhere else, has a tendency to see white as the “default.” We also have to recognize that many awareness efforts, interventions, and services are not created in a way that is culturally relevant for POC. We have to understand and acknowledge that, unless we are willing to stop using “whiteness” as the default, our efforts will never reach POC communities the way we want them to.

To work toward equity and create truly culturally responsive approaches to suicide prevention, it isn't enough just to examine the way service delivery and awareness efforts are structured. We also have to examine our organizations for the characteristics of white supremacy culture (power hoarding, fear of open conflict, sense of urgency) and ask ourselves whether the norms we operate under are beneficial or detrimental to our work and our organizational and institutional evolution.

We have to consider other approaches and prioritize other cultures' values and norms, which may be unfamiliar to us but ultimately more impactful by reaching more diverse communities.

## White Privilege

White privilege is an often-misunderstood concept: having white privilege doesn't mean that you have lived a privileged life; it just means that, of all of the things making your life more difficult, your race isn't one of those things. You can have white privilege and be the target of other forms of oppression, such as sexism, religious discrimination, homophobia or transphobia, ableism, etc.

White privilege means that, compared to someone who shares all your identities except race, you will have been protected from experiencing additional race-based hardships. You will not have had to work harder to attain a level of success proportional to your effort.

White privilege is a set of systemic advantages that we have been given, without having done anything to deserve them. Our white privilege can impact every aspect of our lives, including employment, education, access to housing, “fairer” treatment within the criminal justice system, and even access to appropriate physical and mental health services.

This isn't to say that people with privilege haven't worked hard to get where they are. Most of us have. But we also have to acknowledge the very real advantages we have been given along the way. We must recognize that having white privilege means that our hard work is much more likely to equate to success(es) that are proportional to our effort. This is often not true for POC.

Whether our advantages come in the form of education, networking, a shared understanding of cultural capital, or even just being given the benefit of the doubt, while we have had to work to get where we are, we have not been dragged down by racial inequities along the way. Again, people don't have just one identity, so you could have white privilege but have socioeconomic disadvantage, and some of these advantages may apply more to some of us than others. But the very fact of our being white gives us advantages that POC do not have.

Types of privilege include but are not limited to:

**Economic privilege:** access to higher paying jobs, loans, credit cards, generational wealth

**Physical privilege:** being able to feel safe as we walk in the world

**Emotional privilege:** not having to deal with constant microaggressions; having access to culturally relevant support and services

**Educational privilege:** access and ability to pay for education

**Structural privilege:** being surrounded by systems and structures that reflect the "norms" we have been taught to value

**Cultural privilege:** being able to assume that we'll see ourselves reflected back in cultural spaces (art, music, literature, movies)

**Institutional privilege:** people in positions of power are likely to look like us and to prioritize the same "norms" that we have been taught to value

Until we recognize and work to dismantle the systems that uphold our white privilege, we will not live in a racially equitable society, and our work in suicide prevention will not be as impactful as it could be.

## White Supremacy Culture

**White supremacy culture** views white people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions as being superior to those of POC (People of Color). White supremacy culture uses systemic, institutional, and interpersonal racism to rationalize inequity between white people and POC.

**White supremacy culture is systemic, interconnected, and impacts every aspect of our lives and society.** It impacts our economy. It impacts our educational systems. It impacts our legal system. It impacts where we live, the resources we have access to, and how we are defined by the people around us (as well as how we do or don't define ourselves). It also impacts our mental and physical health, as well as our access to appropriate care.

**For effective suicide prevention, we have to understand, recognize, and address how white supremacy culture negatively impacts people and communities of color,** how it contributes to inequities and disparities in the physical and mental health of white people and POC.

**White supremacy culture must be understood in terms of the causes of mental illness and suicidality, as well its role in shaping mental health services and interventions.** We must acknowledge white supremacy culture and actively work to dismantle and decolonize its impact on our institutions, organizations, and work. Otherwise, if we don't examine and dispel our fundamental biases, our approaches and services will never be as effective for POC as they are for white people.

**White supremacy culture perpetuates itself by creating the misconception that systems and structures are not impacted by racism.** White supremacy culture also perpetuates itself in other ways. By obscuring the need for systemic change, racist systems remain unquestioned and unaltered. By reducing racist behavior at only the individual or interpersonal level, we ignore racism at the broader cultural, institutional, and systemic levels that have the most impact on maintaining power, privilege, and the status quo.

Under white supremacy culture, those of us with privilege think that because we've worked hard for what we have, we must deserve it. This belief encourages the false narrative that people who have less must not have worked as hard as we did.

To perpetuate itself, white supremacy culture justifies systems that unfairly benefit some people while unfairly harming others. It renders these benefits and harm nearly invisible, and so we accept them without question. By advancing the idea that people's lives and status reflect their abilities and efforts, white supremacy culture perpetuates a narrative that both rationalizes and conceals existing power structures.

**Above all, white supremacy culture maintains power for the people who already have it and denies opportunity to those who don't.**

How do we combat these insidious and entrenched norms, structures, and beliefs that affect practically every aspect of our lives?

**White supremacy culture requires us to be unaware, silent, and unwilling to act.**

When we as individuals and organizations begin to identify and question the fundamental premises of white supremacy culture and enact change, we can begin to undo some of the harmful ways these norms and practices shape our own and other people's lives.

When we understand and question why certain values—those which we have subconsciously internalized and accepted as the “norm”—are prioritized in our culture and institutions, we can begin to make conscious, deliberate choices to behave in ways that actively reject white supremacy culture and instead promote more equitable norms and values.

The more that individuals, communities, and organizations take the time to understand and question white supremacy culture and undo its harmful norms, the more impact we will have.

## Doing Racial Equity and Social Justice Work in Primarily White Communities (or Primarily White Fields, Such as Suicide Prevention) as a Person of Color

- » **Take care of yourself. Burn out is real.**  
Doing racial equity and social justice work as a Person of color in white communities can be tough and exhausting, and sometimes this work can be traumatic. It is important to recharge and combat the trauma of racism related to suicide prevention work, as well as the unrelated trauma of the racism we face every day.
- » **Find other POC colleagues and safe spaces that nurture people of color.**  
Finding people of color in suicide prevention who have similar experiences can be helpful. They can validate your experiences and also be sounding boards for approaches and strategies for doing this work.
- » **Identify your White Allies**  
White allies are important in racial equity work. People of color shouldn't have to do all the labor, emotional and otherwise. Identify specific allies who can help you with specific concerns and to whom you can refer questions from other white people. It is not your job as a POC to educate all white folks who might have questions about racial equity and social justice.
- » **You cannot and do not have to speak for all people who share your identities.**  
Often an individual of color is expected to speak for all People of color. When we allow white folks assume that we can speak in sweeping generalizations about people of color, we erase our and others' unique experiences. This is not to say that there are not common experiences that many POC face when it comes to racism, but we need to go beyond this simplified narrative to a more nuanced one. Even if there are common experiences, I shouldn't have to speak for the whole group.
- » **You can insist that white folks educate themselves and take responsibility for their own piece of the work.**  
White folks will often ask you questions about racism and your experiences with it. Although you may choose to answer these inquiries, you are not responsible for educating white people. There is ample literature, podcasts, and videos that explore and explain systematic oppression and racism. You do not have to do the emotional labor of explaining racism, white privilege, or white guilt.

However, if you are in leadership in the organization, you do have a responsibility to find a balance between your obligation to engage with your organization in racial equity work by sharing your expertise and setting boundaries around what you can and cannot do.

- » **You do not have to *defend* your existence as a POC or your personal experience**  
Sometimes white people will attack POC, especially those of us who point out racism in its individual, cultural, and institutional manifestations. In my experience, these conversations

are not always helpful to me or the white person. It's okay to protect yourself, including walking out of a conversation that is harmful.

- » **Realize that change takes time and that it is not your sole responsibility to effect change.**

The work cannot be done by only a handful of people. There needs to be buy-in from the larger group, including leadership.



# Cultural Humility vs. Cultural Competence

Everyone, both a personal and professional level, we all bring various lenses and perspectives to our work, including our cultural lens. When we talk about being in cultural spaces that are not our own, we must ask, how can we become educated, responsive, and effective in building cross-cultural partnerships that lead to effective work? Cultural competence is often regarded as a key concept; however, we believe that the concept of cultural humility allows us to be better partners by allowing us to respect the expertise and authority of the communities we work with.

*Cultural competence* assumes we can 'know' or 'gain expertise' about a culture other than our own and that in doing so we can eventually come to a full understanding of the needs of a particular group and how to address those needs.

*Cultural humility* assumes we must listen and rely on the expertise of members of the cultural group with which we are working, not only to better understand the needs of the group, but also to better frame our work in relationship to their cultural norms and context.

*Cultural competence* assumes that once we have reached a certain level of knowledge, we are able to speak to the needs of a particular group without asking for the input of any members of the group.

*Cultural humility* assumes that we must continually educate ourselves and that no matter how much we learn, we can amplify the knowledge and expertise of people of color, but can never fully understand what it is like to be a person of color.

*Cultural competence* assumes that a member of the dominant group can come to fully understand the experience, context, and needs of a particular culture.

*Cultural humility* assumes that, while we can empathize with many aspects of another person's lived experience based on our own marginalized identities, we can never fully know or understand what it is like to be a part of a group to which we don't belong.

*Cultural competence* assumes that we can adapt existing mental health and suicide prevention approaches that exist within the "dominant" framework by using the language and norms of the culture or group with which we are working, without questioning whether these materials would work or could be adapted directly into a different cultural framework in the first place.

*Cultural humility* understands that culturally and linguistically adapted approaches are only a part of the necessary framework. Cultural humility understands that in many cases, existing models cannot be adapted to meet the needs of the group and that new models and educational approaches must be created.

*Cultural competence* often assumes that culture is fixed, unchanging, and monolithic.

*Cultural humility* understands that culture is fluid and not monolithic, but instead, varied and multilayered.

*Cultural competence* assumes that the dominant cultural perspective is normative, rather than one cultural lens just like any other cultural lens.

*Cultural humility* assumes that there is no “normative” or monolithic cultural perspective, but instead, that we are all influenced by our own cultures, identities, and experiences. Cultural humility does not place the values of one culture (especially the dominant culture) above other cultural norms and values.

*Cultural competence* emphasizes cultural difference instead of considering power, privilege, oppression, and systemic obstacles.

*Cultural humility* recognizes the systemic obstacles that prevent nondominant cultural groups from experiencing our society as a meritocracy. Cultural humility recognizes that opportunities in our society are disproportionately available to members of dominant groups.

*Cultural competence* is based on a superficial understanding of what oppression means and assumes that adjusting language and acknowledging inequity constitutes understanding. Cultural competence assumes that recognition of the problem is a solution in itself, rather than a first step.

*Cultural humility* has greater depth and encourages us to ask difficult questions: not just what inequities exist, but why do these inequities exist, and what can we do about them? Cultural humility understands that identifying inequities creates a responsibility to address and dismantle them.

## Intersectionality

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is a social justice concept that refers to the interconnectedness of social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, that create overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression or disadvantage.

Intersectionality addresses how systems of oppression are both cumulative and compounded by each other.

Take the pay gap, for example. White women earn 82 cents for every dollar made by a white man. African American women earn 68 cents. Latina women earn just 62 cents. While Asian women on average earn slightly more than white women, it is important to note that on average, Asian American women still make only 75 cents for every dollar their Asian male counterparts make.<sup>7</sup>

In this pay gap example, African American and Latina women experience the intersectionality of their racial and gender-based oppression, resulting in exponentially negative consequences. The effect of their racial oppression is compounded by their gender-based oppression.

It is important that an intersectional approach not just examine the pay gap, but also address who has access to employment, who holds positions of power within organizations, whose norms are valued and will lead to success and promotion, etc. For example, although Asian American women make slightly more than white women, they still face the “bamboo ceiling” that prevents their professional advancement and opportunities to access leadership roles.

Lack of an intersectional approach to social justice can lead to a “wait your turn” mentality, where different oppressed groups are expected to ignore their intersectional oppression in order to address a single cause of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism). While each form of oppression manifests differently and must be addressed accordingly, having too singular a focus on any particular identity can impede progress in changing systems of oppression.

If we look at mental health as a disability, we see the intersection of mental health and racism:

- » Although reported rates of mental illness in groups of color are similar, mental health conditions such as depression are likely to be more persistent and severe resulting in a higher percentage of disability compared to white people.<sup>8</sup>
- » Youth of color with behavioral issues are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system instead of being treated in the mental health system.
- » In general, people of color are less likely to access mental health care. While 48% of white people with mental illness received mental health services, only 31% of Blacks and Hispanics and 22% of Asians received services.<sup>9</sup>

Even when people of color receive services:

Lack of cultural understanding by health care providers may contribute to underdiagnosis and/or misdiagnosis of mental illness in people from racially/ethnically diverse populations. Factors that contribute to these kinds of misdiagnoses include language differences between patient and provider, stigma of mental illness among minority groups, and cultural presentation of symptoms.<sup>10</sup>

Intersectionality not only provides a broader framework for addressing social inequities, but also allows movements and initiatives to address the needs of the individuals and communities who experience the most oppression and also have the least access to support and resources to overcome these oppressions.

An intersectional approach also values the voices, experiences, and suggested agendas of the individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression. Therefore, an intersectional approach is more inclusive of voices that are normally silenced across multiple dimensions (like oppression, silencing is not just cumulative, but also compounded).

Above all, intersectionality is a lens through which we can view our social justice work. Focusing on intersectionality enables us to be better allies, more effectively dismantle systems of oppression, and create unity and collaboration among oppressed groups that benefits everyone.

---

7. Hegewisch, A., & Williams-Baron, E. (2018). The gender wage gap: 2017 earnings differences by race and ethnicity. Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/publications/gender-wage-gap-2017-race-ethnicity/>.

8. American Psychiatric Association. (2017). Mental health disparities: diverse populations. <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/Mental-Health-Disparities/Mental-Health-Facts-for-Diverse-Populations.pdf>.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

# Shattered Assumptions: Exploring Racial Justice in America

Becoming aware of issues of racial justice or injustice is a journey that requires self-reflection and a willingness to reconsider your own understanding of race in America. It is, at times, a painful journey filled with mixed emotional reactions. In order to effectively approach this issue, we believe it is important to acknowledge this process and prepare you for the experience ahead.

For a large portion of white America, we were taught to believe that if you “work hard,” you can be anything you want and achieve any social status you aim for. Becoming aware of racial inequality means being willing to explore this belief system. At first glance, this does not seem like an overwhelming task; however, questioning what you believe about American culture also requires questioning your own identity as an American. This can prove to be a daunting task and raise our defenses.

As you embark on this process, we are asking you to consider the following:

» **Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility:**

In recent times, the term “cultural competence” has been challenged due to a recognition that while we may be able to learn about a specific culture in great depth, it is impossible to be competent in all cultures. With this understanding has come a realization that what is most needed isn’t competence, *per se*, but instead, cultural humility. Cultural humility means recognizing that we view the world and social issues through our own cultural lens. Just as the people we work with have been enculturated to their culture, we have been enculturated to our culture. Cultural humility means having a willingness to challenge our own belief systems and an awareness that our worldview has been created through a particular cultural lens and may not be the only truth.

» **Understand the concept of Shattered Assumptions:**

*Shattered assumptions* is a term that we use often in trauma response work. Experiencing a traumatic event often challenges our assumptions about the world that we live in, the people we know, and sometimes even ourselves. Perhaps the most powerful example of shattered assumptions is the change in many white people’s belief about the safety of America before and after 9/11. For example, imagine that we asked you on September 8th, 2001, “How likely do you think it is that we will have a massive terrorist attack on United States soil that kills thousands of Americans in one day?” What would your answer have been? What if we were to ask you the same question on September 13th of 2001?

Your answers would have likely been dramatically different. This is an example of a shattered assumption. Prior to 9/11, you likely felt very safe in the United States and probably did not think a terrorist attack was likely. Yet immediately following the attacks, most Americans thought that another attack was not just likely, but imminent.

Exploring racial justice in America as white allies requires us to accept that some of our assumptions have not been true for all Americans.

» **Recognize your own feelings of defensiveness:**

It is likely that, as some of our assumptions about racial justice in America are shattered, we will feel defensive. There may be moments that elicit a sense of guilt over the social advantages white people have had, but understanding racial inequality does not mean that you or other white people haven’t worked hard or don’t “deserve” what you have

earned in life. What it does mean is that as a white person, the likelihood that your hard work would equate to social success is significantly higher.

The term White Privilege also tends to trigger defensiveness. The concept of white privilege does not mean that if you are a white person, life will be easy or that success is assured. What it does mean is that as white people, we benefit from systemic advantages, ranging from employment, to education, to access to housing, to interactions with the criminal justice system. Statistically speaking—and the numbers sadly do support this statement—people of color remain more likely to be convicted for the same crime and be given larger sentences and less likely to access a private attorney and be released on bail. We know that our system favors wealthier Americans, and we know that people of color are statistically less likely to be wealthy, which makes our systems inherently discriminatory, and yet we have taken little effort to rectify this disparity.

Before you begin this process, we would encourage you to ask yourself the following questions.

- » What demographics do I identify with including race, gender, culture, religion, sexual identity or orientation?
- » Are any of these identities groups that have historically experienced oppression or discrimination? Do they still, and what does that look like?
- » Do you feel emotionally guarded when talking about racial justice? If so, what are the emotions or thoughts that it brings that up for you?

### **Why is racial justice important in suicide prevention when the data suggests that most people dying by suicide are white?**

We cannot fight injustice of one form and ignore another. If you are invested in suicide prevention, you also must be invested in shifting the narrative around suicide and fighting the judgment and discrimination that individuals and families impacted by suicide face. We cannot accomplish this goal for all individuals and families without addressing social inequity in all areas.

## Background Knowledge Inventory

- » Have you had conversations about racial equity or social justice within your organization? Has the conversation already been started? Are you aware of who is at the table and who is missing?
- » Have you considered how different barriers might exist for different communities to participate and feel welcome in your organization?
- » Have you discussed the social determinants of health and the disparities in outcomes for different communities?
- » How do people in your organization understand how racial inequity is relevant to your work and how your organization operates?
- » Are members of your organization aware that racism functions on individual, institutional, and systemic levels? Can they explain the differences between the impacts of racism at each level?
- » Are members of your organization aware of the concepts of overt and aversive (unintended) racism? Can they understand and explain the difference between the two and how they may impact interpersonal behavior or organizational functioning and structure?
- » Are your organization's members familiar with the concept of white privilege? How does white privilege impact your lives on a personal and professional basis? How does white privilege shape the structure of your organization?
- » Do people in your organization understand the glossary terms? What terms do people have difficulty conceptualizing or have different definitions for?
- » What terms are unfamiliar or need clarification? What knowledge gaps do you need to address moving forward?
- » Is there an article that your group or organization can read together to assess knowledge and create shared understanding? See Resource List for possible ideas.

### Follow Up

- » Discuss how members of your organization can examine these concepts in relationship to their own attitudes, experiences, behaviors, and beliefs. Discuss how individuals can increase their knowledge and commit to goals and action steps to become more equitable in attitude, behavior, and belief, and how this relates to your organizational functioning.
- » Discuss how your organization might work together to address common knowledge gaps and how these gaps can be instructive in shifting your organizational approach, especially around what questions you are asking as you move forward with your work.
- » Add agenda items related to social justice education and select one or two members to take initiative in bringing information to meetings (you can use the handouts in this section as a starting point).

- » Repeat this knowledge inventory after some time has elapsed and see how your organization has progressed, to reevaluate your approach to incorporating social justice and racial equity knowledge into your work.



# Social Justice and Racial Equity Resource List

## Racial Justice and Mental Health Resources

- » *How Racism, Trauma and Mental Health Are Linked* (interview, 4 minutes)  
Sharé Smith from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Interview by Christine Herman, NPR  
<https://www.wglt.org/post/how-racism-trauma-and-mental-health-are-linked-0#stream/0>
- » *Families of Color Face Challenges When Seeking Treatment for Mental Illness* (article, 4 minute read) Real Talk: WOC & Allies, Medium  
<https://medium.com/@realtalkwocandallies/families-of-color-face-challenges-when-seeking-treatment-for-mental-illness-46ddc0cbd938>
- » *Part II: How We Talk About Mental Health is Racist* (article, 5 minute read)  
Real Talk: WOC & Allies, Medium  
<https://medium.com/@realtalkwocandallies/part-ii-how-we-talk-about-mental-illness-is-racist-9cc79fa108c4>
- » *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health Care: Evidence and Policy Implications* (research article) Thomas G. McGuire and Jeanne Miranda  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3928067/>
- » *The Effects of Racism on Mental Health How to Cope* (webinar, 90 minutes)  
Dr Karen G. Martínez, MD, MSc, Jessica Graham-LoPresti  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
<https://adaa.org/webinar/consumer/effects-racism-mental-health-how-cope>
- » *The Link Between Experiences of Racism and Stress and Anxiety for Black Americans*  
Tahirah Abdullah, PhD and Jess Graham, PhD  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/link-between-experiences-racism-and-stress-and>
- » *Racism Lingers in Mental Health System* (news article)  
Aaron Levin  
American Psychiatric Association  
<https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2013.11b16>
- » *Suicide Isn't Just a White People Thing*  
Kimya N. Dennis. The Conversation.com  
<https://theconversation.com/suicide-isnt-just-a-white-people-thing-77367?fbclid=IwAR1kX62xFN8sl83qFmkRxxm8zfkJdr10byyxu6s-7ntY-9iEwNAODUIRtk>

## Intersectionality

- » *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*  
Kimberle Crenshaw, University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.  
<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf>

- » *Intersectionality 101—Why ‘We’re Focusing on Women’ Doesn’t Work for Diversity and Inclusion*  
Jennifer Kim, Medium.com  
<https://medium.com/awaken-blog/intersectionality-101-why-were-focusing-on-women-doesn-t-work-for-diversity-inclusion-8f591d196789>

### Allyship Resources

- » *Curriculum for White Americans to Educate Themselves on Race and Racism—From Ferguson to Charleston*  
Jon Greenberg  
<http://citizenshipandsocialjustice.com/2015/07/10/curriculum-for-white-americans-to-educate-themselves-on-race-and-racism/>
- » *11-Step Guide to Understanding Race, Racism, and White Privilege*  
Jon Greenberg  
<http://citizenshipandsocialjustice.com/2017/10/14/11-step-guide-to-understanding-race-racism-and-white-privilege/>
- » *We Need Co-Conspirators, Not Allies’: How White Americans Can Fight Racism*  
Rose Hackman  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/26/how-white-americans-can-fight-racism>
- » *11 Things White People Can Do To Become Anti-Racist Allies*  
Kali Holloway  
<https://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/11-things-white-people-can-do-be-real-anti-racist-allies>
- » *What is Whiteness? (Opinion)*  
Nell Irvin Painter  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html?referrer=&\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html?referrer=&_r=0)
- » *5 Tips for Being an Ally*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_dg86g-QIM0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dg86g-QIM0)
- » *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally-Industrial Complex*  
<http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

### Resources for Self Care for People of Color Doing Racial Justice Work

- » *POC Online Classroom*  
<http://www.poconlineclassroom.com/self-care>
- » *Love as Political Resistance; Lessons from Audre Lorde and Octavia Butler*  
<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/love-time-political-resistance/transform-valentines-day-lessons-audre-lorde-and-octavia>
- » *Self Care for People of Color After Psychological Trauma*  
<http://www.justjasmineblog.com/blog-1/self-care-for-people-of-color-after-emotional-and-psychological-trauma/>

- » *Filling Our Cups: 4 Ways People of Color Can Foster Mental Health and Practice Restorative Healing*  
Threads of Solidarity: WOC Against Racism  
<https://medium.com/@SolidarityWOC/filling-our-cups-4-ways-people-of-color-can-foster-mental-health-and-practice-restorative-healing-64e5e7584127>
- » *Self-Care Strategies for Survival: Sustaining Oneself in Social Justice Movements*  
Lauren Lofton  
<https://www.compasspoint.org/blog/self-care-strategies-survival-sustaining-oneself-social-justice-movements>
- » *Racial and Cultural Trauma: Self and Community Care Resources*  
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling/racial-and-cultural-trauma-self-and-community-care-resources>
- » *Family Care, Community-Care and Self-Care Tool Kit: Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma*  
<http://www.abpsi.org/pdf/FamilyCommunitySelfCareToolkit.pdf>
- » *The Transforming Of Silence into Language and Action*  
Audre Lorde

### Combatting Aversive Racism

- » *You're Calling Me a Racist? The Moral And Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism*  
Sarita Srivastava  
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/432738?journalCode=signs&>
- » *Your Calls for Unity Are Divisive as F\*ck*  
DiDi Delgado  
<https://medium.com/the-establishment/your-calls-for-unity-are-divisive-as-f-ck-3d6584bca72f>
- » *Be Less Racist: 12 Tips for White Dudes, By a White Dude*  
Dan Zanes  
<http://www.mashupamericans.com/issues/be-less-racist-12-tips-for-white-dudes-by-a-white-dude/>

### Understanding White Privilege

- » *What Is White Privilege, Really?*  
Cory Collins  
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>
- » *10 White Privileges You Don't Know You Have*  
Grace Goodwin  
<http://whiteprivilege.org/10-privileges-you-dont-know-you-have/>
- » *10 Things White Privilege Has Done for Me in 10 Days*  
Olivia Cole  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege\\_b\\_5658049](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege_b_5658049)

- » *White Privilege Checklist*  
Peggy McIntosh  
<http://crc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>

### **Bystander Intervention**

- » *How to Intervene When You See Street Harassment: An Illustrated Guide*  
Soo Oh  
<https://www.vox.com/identities/2016/12/28/13799756/bystander-intervention-deescalation>
- » *Intervention and De-escalation Resources, including Anti-Harassment 101*  
<http://deescalationandintervention.weebly.com/resources.html>
- » *A Practical Web Tutorial to Bystander Intervention and De-escalation Tactics*  
Jes Solnik  
<https://watt.cashmusic.org/writing/deescalation>
- » *Bystander Intervention Resources* from the American Friends Service Committee
  - › *Dos and Don'ts*  
<https://www.afsc.org/bystanderintervention#>
  - › *Bystander intervention webinar*  
<https://www.afsc.org/story/recap-bystander-intervention-training>
  - › *Video: Don't Just Be a Bystander—6 Tips for Responding to Racist Attacks*  
<https://www.afsc.org/video/dont-be-just-bystander-6-tips-responding-to-racist-attacks>
- » *Do's and Don'ts for Bystander Intervention*  
OCA-GLA  
<http://oca-gla.org/programs/dos-and-donts-for-bystander-intervention/>

### **Resources on the Enduring Trauma of Systemic Racism in Communities of Color**

- » *Slavery to Mass Incarceration* (video)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e\\_djVSag4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e_djVSag4)
- » *Infographic: Racism in the Criminal Justice System*  
<http://www.arrestrecords.com/infographic-racism-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>
- » *America's Original Sin: Slavery and the Legacy of White Supremacy*  
Annette Gordon-Reed  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-12-12/americas-original-sin>
- » *There Is No Middle Ground Between Racism and Justice*  
Ijeoma Oluo  
<https://theestablishment.co/there-is-no-middle-ground-between-racism-and-justice-8838f14e46a3/>
- » *Police Killings Have Harmed Mental Health in Black Communities, Study Finds*  
John Eligon  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/us/police-shootings-black-mental-health.html>

### Resources on How Systemic Racism Perpetuates Itself and How to Dismantle it

- » *Cycle of Socialization*  
Harro et. al. 2000
- » *Cycle of Liberation*  
Harro et al. 2000
- » *Leadership Matters: How Hidden Biases Perpetuate Institutional Racism in Organizations*  
Walker et al. Human Service Organization; Management Leadership and Governance (2017)  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23303131.2016.1249584>

### Trainings

- » *Re-Center*, <http://re-center.org>
- » *The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond*, <https://www.pisab.org>
- » *Human in Common*, <https://www.humanincommon.com>
- » *The Truth School*, <https://truthschool.org>

### Books

- » *Dear Universe*, Yolo Akili
- » *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Resmaa Menakem
- » *When Affirmative Action was White*, Ira Katznelson
- » *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown
- » *Pleasure Activism*, Adrienne Maree Brown
- » *The New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander
- » *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Robin DiAngelo

### Community Organizations Focused on Direct Services

- » *Gandara Center, Holyoke*; <https://gandaracenter.org>
- » *Lowell Community Health Center*; <https://www.lchealth.org>
- » *Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma*; <http://hpert-cambridge.org>
- » *Cambridge Health Alliance Multicultural Mental Health Programs: Latino, Asian, Haitian, Portuguese*;  
<https://www.challiance.org/cha-services/specialty-services>
- » *La Alianza Hispana Inc.* <http://laalianza.org/>
- » *Casa Esperanza*, <https://www.casaesperanza.org/>
- » *Codman Square Health Center*, [http://www.codman.org/services/behavioral\\_health.html](http://www.codman.org/services/behavioral_health.html)

### **Community Organizations Focused on Education and Advocacy**

- » *DeeDee's Cry*; <https://www.facebook.com/DeeDees-Cry-1968152186789308/>
- » *Asian Women For Health*; <http://www.asianwomenforhealth.org>
- » *North American Indian Center of Boston*; <http://www.naicob.org/programs--services.html>
- » *Arredondo Family Foundation*; <https://arredondofoundation.org>
- » *The Transformation Center*; <https://transformation-center.org>

To provide feedback on or suggest additional resources email: [MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com](mailto:MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com)

## Case Study: MCSP Alliance for Equity (People of Color and White Ally Caucuses)

### Challenges

- » Integration of the work of the Alliance into all levels of the organization
- » Understanding that this would not just be an 'add on' but would be integrated through the whole organization
- » Outreach and recruitment of MCSP Alliance members
- » Structuring meetings and process in an equitable and inclusive way, and getting existing members used to the new schedules/ structure.

### Approach & Solutions

- » Approaching the formation of the Alliance as a collaboration between people of color and white allies, ensuring that each group could function both separately and in partnership.
- » Ensuring that the agenda of the Alliance was formed and executed by both groups.
- » Ensuring that the structure of meetings and process took into account social justice and racial equity; ensuring that the structure of the Alliance encouraged involvement by community members.
- » Ensuring feedback and buy-in beyond the Alliance.
- » Ensuring that the work of the Alliance was not siloed, but rather impacts the entire organization at every level from Executive Committee and General Membership and informed our structure, priorities, approach, etc.

### Outcome

The outcome has been the creation of an Alliance that works constructively and collaboratively on a shared agenda, that is able to evolve and expand as necessary, and that impacts the larger work of the MCSP, while hopefully providing resources for stakeholders outside of the Coalition as well.

### Narrative

In 2017, the MCSP Executive Committee approved the creation of two separate but connected groups, the People of Color Caucus and the White Ally Caucus, which then came together as the MCSP Alliance for Equity. Initial approval for the creation of these two groups was easier than anticipated. However, continued buy-in when the Executive Committee began discussing the extent to which the work of these subcommittees would inform our organizational priorities, structure, and operation was significantly more challenging. Fortunately, the initial buy-in was enough to get the Caucuses off the ground, and later resistance was addressed openly and constructively (see the next case study on MCSP Executive Committee).

The structure of the Caucuses was established very deliberately and intentionally. From the outset, it was clear that both groups would need to work closely together, and that, in fact, the bulk of the work would be done as the combined MCSP Alliance for Equity. However, it was equally clear that there remained a need for

two distinct groups that would have space to work separately when needed. We knew there would be times when the People of Color Caucus would need to discuss social justice and racial equity in an affinity group context that would allow for common understanding, experience, and perspective. This was also true of the White Ally Caucus. It was clear from the outset, however, that when the groups did work separately, all of our work would come back to the larger Alliance for discussion.

The initial launch of the Alliance was slow. The first meetings were intentionally scheduled in the evenings in order to accommodate community members with full-time jobs that were not in mental health and suicide prevention. Meetings were also scheduled at locations that were accessible by public transportation and required no identification to enter. Our first two meetings were scheduled at a public library, and attendance was essentially nonexistent. Our third and fourth meetings still had limited (and mostly white) attendance.

After our fourth meeting, we decided to try something different that we hoped would enable more people to participate: we switched to virtual Zoom meetings, still scheduled for the evenings. Only after we made this switch and we reevaluated our outreach strategy within communities of color, specifically through individual invitations to join the Alliance, did we begin to have more participation from people of color (as well as white allies) from all over the state.

Our group remains small but dedicated. We average five to seven people at a meeting, but attendance can fluctuate. We have been meeting monthly for the better part of two years, with our attendance continuing to grow, and recently, we have had two or three meetings where there were more people of color than white allies. We are still working on outreach and engaging more people of color and white allies. We also involve individuals who cannot participate in meetings by giving them specific tasks they are interested in (i.e., doing research for resource lists or being beta readers for our Toolkit).

The initial work of the Alliance was to evaluate and provide feedback on the existing priorities of the MCSP (membership, advocacy, structural development, strategic plan evaluation, and Regional Coalitions). We discussed ways each area could incorporate social justice and racial equity more effectively. This feedback was then brought back to the Executive Committee, where we discussed these suggestions, and whether, how, and in what timeframe they could be incorporated effectively. Much of this feedback was also used in preparation for the MCSP Executive Committee's two retreats on social justice and racial equity.

Our next task was to evaluate the revised Statewide Strategic Plan to ensure that social justice and racial equity were effectively included. The Alliance scrutinized the revised plan, identified areas for improvement, and made suggestions that would enhance the overall Strategic Plan and make it more socially just. This feedback was brought back to the Strategic Plan Revision Committee and incorporated into the plan.

Our third and current project is this Toolkit for integrating social justice and racial equity into a coalition, organization, or other group. In creating this Toolkit, our intention is to provide resources for organizations (including our own), communities, and community groups who want to integrate social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention and mental health work. When we began this Toolkit, there were no resources that we could find that clearly articulated how the two were connected, much less how to help an organization evolve both individually, interpersonally, and structurally. This Toolkit is a living document, and we hope that a part of the process is engaging with and learning from people all across Massachusetts, the US, and even globally.

The role of the Alliance in shaping the Toolkit was to provide input on what would be helpful and review materials drafted by Alliance members in between meetings. We also solicited outside feedback from the MCSP Executive Committee, General Membership, and other stakeholders.

We are eager to continue to develop and share resources for stakeholders (and ourselves!) to keep integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention, and we are excited to see where our work takes us.



# 3

## initiating organizational change: understanding your organizational climate & mission

How to Use This Section

**Climate Assessment and Planning:**

Organizational inventory

Personal Diversity Action Plan

**Models of Organizational Operation:**

Organizational Action/ Initiative Examples

Continuum of Organizational Climate in Relation to Diversity and Equity

Organizational Mission Service Approach Continuum in Relation to Diversity and Equity

Case Study: MCSP Executive Committee

## How to Use this Section

This section represents an organization-wide approach in terms of both individual and organizational accountability.

You may want to begin with the inventory to assess where your organization is in relation to racial equity and social justice. Based on the inventory, you can discuss actionable changes and discuss which sections of the toolkit you want to explore.

The materials in this section can be used in a number of ways:

- » The inventory can be used to discuss leadership/ directions to engage memberships of the organization to talk about where people feel the organization is and agree upon a unified vision/perception of where everyone thinks the organization is with respect to social justice and racial equity.
- » The Diversity Action Plan is for individual accountability and follow up, and allows individuals within your organization to set personal goals around social justice and racial equity including further educating themselves or taking action steps to become more engaged in moving themselves and the organization forward.
- » The Action Initiative Examples, Continuum of Organizational Climate and Mission/ Service Approach Continuum all serve as foundational information that can ground your organization's conversations in terms of where you are, where you would like to be headed, and what intermediary steps you will have to take to reach your longer term goals.
- » The case study for the MCSP Executive Committee shares our own process in using some of these tools, and the result of beginning this work.

## Initiating Organizational Change: Organizational Inventory

- » Does your organization address social justice and racial equity on a regular basis? If so, how?
- » Does your organization incorporate social justice and racial equity into every level of the organization and as a lens through which your work is viewed?
- » Is there a subcommittee or group specifically dedicated to examining your organization's work and structure and making recommendations to the organization as a whole? If so, how are these recommendations integrated? If not, do you think this would be beneficial to your work?
- » Does your organization actively promote equity? If so, how? If not, how might you envision doing so?
- » What partnerships does your organization have with organizations that are focused on serving communities of color or promoting social justice and racial equity? If none exist, what organizations might you want to partner with?
- » To what extent are inequities (i.e., lack of representation) normalized or tolerated rather than challenged within your organization? What is preventing individuals in your organization from challenging these disparities?
- » What barriers can you see that prevent your organization from becoming more socially just and equitable? How might you begin to address these barriers?
- » To what extent does your board and membership feel invested in becoming more equitable and socially just?
- » What are your board and members willing to contribute to this effort? How much time and attention are your board and members willing to devote to addressing these issues?
- » What is the composition of your board and membership? Who is missing from the table? If the composition of your board is not very diverse, do the individual board members who belong to different cultures and communities feel heard and respected? What concessions do they feel they have to make in order to participate in your organization? What would they like to see changed?
- » When issues of social injustice and inequity present themselves, how are they addressed?
- » What issues have remained unaddressed? Has your organization discussed how racism and social inequities shape your organization and your work?

### Follow-Up

- » Make a list of concrete steps you can take to address any inequities identified by this inventory; include a timeline and concrete outcomes, as well as the individual(s) responsible for making sure change is discussed and implemented in a sustainable way.
- » Identify who is missing from the table and identify organizational norms that might make particular individuals and groups (people of color, LGBTQ people, low-income people,

and people with little access to education, etc.) feel unwelcome, and identify a strategy to move your organization toward more inclusive structures and norms

- » Repeat this inventory after some time has elapsed to measure progress and set new goals

# Personal Diversity Action Plan<sup>11</sup>

What are area(s)/issues am I interested in working on to increase equity and diversity?

What motivates me to do this work?

What are potential challenges for me personally moving forward in this area?

Identify supportive people and supportive activities to help you sustain this work.

Specific issue I will address:

*This can be an individual or relational issue, such as improving your knowledge or awareness, or being more active in addressing inequalities in interpersonal processes and communication.*

Contextual challenges or difficulties:

My potential blind spots and concerns:

11. An adaptation of a handout by Alissa Hochman and Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net).

I need to know more about:

Specific learning I will engage in by \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_:

Specific action I will engage in by \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_:

Action partner's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Their learning: \_\_\_\_\_ Check-in on: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Their action: \_\_\_\_\_ Check-in on: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

---

11. Ibid.

## Organizational Action/Initiative Examples<sup>12</sup>

Examples of actions that an organization might take to improve their racial, ethnocultural, and social justice responsiveness and prioritization.

### Organizational Climate Examples (within Board and organization as a whole):

- » Designate a diversity ombudsperson or advocate (long term or per meeting)
- » Conduct organizational climate check-ins
- » Participation, invitations, and checks
- » Emphasize the interpersonal process as an integral part of business
- » Personal introductions and positionality
- » Leadership identity explorations
- » Cultural shifts: types of food, openings, sitting, speaking, for the purpose of introducing active thinking about how things are cultured

### Organizational Mission and Approach/Enactment of the Mission Examples

- » Representation:
  - › Identity/positionality of leadership and management, consider strategies to address identified issues (e.g. outreach)
  - › Representation in images and information (e.g. updating images)
  - › Representation of information that considers links to oppression (e.g. updating information)
- » Representation:
  - › Identity/positionality of consumers, consider strategies to address identified issues
- » Values and culture of the organization (making this explicit means that the values and culture are not just by default the values of the dominant group within the organization within society)
  - › Communicating values to community people
  - › Addressing diversity not just for people of color, but for everyone
- » Population specific services: e.g. People of Color Caucus

### Both areas:

- » Diversity check ins about all agenda items
- » Emphasize explicit attention to the process of decision making: Whose voices are missing? How might this affect our decision making

---

12. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

- » Dedicate explicit attention to the impact of decision making, so that any policy or procedure discussion considers diversity impact (e.g., how will this decision affect POC, LGBTQ people, and others who are marginalized, interpretive power)?
- » Items above might be collectively shared each meeting, put in place as standard practice, and/or have an individual responsible for each meeting



## Continuum of Organizational Climate in Relation to Diversity and Equity<sup>13</sup>

- » Hostile: challenging and rejecting; antagonistic to inclusion that may be acknowledged or denied; toxic climate; damaging impact for POC and others with primary oppressed identities within the organization.
- » Unconscious denigration: surface “performance;” integration is not truly valued, climate of microaggressions; damaging impact.
- » Marginalized: diversity and equity are addressed as add-ons in content or mission but not in organizational culture; issues are tokenized within particular people who are marginalized with little power; climate of tolerance, as long as the marginalization is not challenged; stressful to neutral impact.
- » Marginalized-supported: diversity and equity are addressed as add-ons; appreciative climate if diversity and equity issues remain separated or within tokenized people; minimally competent practice; neutral to positive impact.
- » Integrated: Integrated both/and model (both integrated and focused attention); responsibility or action for diversity and equity still located primarily within some people, but less tokenized; appreciative climate with recognition of inherent connections of diversity to organizational climate, relationships, and success; positive impact.
- » Transformed: Fully integrated both/and model; responsibility and action for diversity and equity is proactive and dispersed; more genuine relationships; maximized contributions related to expanded perspectives and perspective taking (interpretive power); appreciative and committed climate; positive impact and growth.

### Challenges to Positive climate

- » Values in our society:
  - › Socialization for bias: Implicit bias, invisibility of oppression, exceptionalism
  - › Individualism, values of meritocracy, ethnocentric monoculturalism
  - › Taboo of discussion and associated fears of having difficult conversations or facing implications of inequities/lack of social justice
- » Lack of our own socialization and training in diversity and equity issues, both the content and the process of engaging them

---

13. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Organizational Mission/Service Approach Continuum in Relation to Diversity and Equity<sup>14</sup>

- » Lip service to diversity
- » Do no harm
- » Multiculturalism
  - › Valuing difference, equality, we all contribute
  - › Emphasis on cultural differences and human similarities
  - › Little attention to power
- » Diversity and inclusion:
  - › Whether and how people feel included, connected, and see themselves
  - › Better understanding of others' diversity, proactive outreach, actively work to develop cultural sensitivity and inclusion, cultural responsiveness with community participants
  - › Avoidance or repair of major harmful actions (unconscious or conscious)
  - › Attention to power as it affects community members and services (e.g., addressing damage done by oppression)
- » Social justice: equity, advocacy, and activism
  - › Promoting distributive, relational, and procedural justice
  - › Working to address the systemic injustice through outreach, advocacy, and services that challenge systemic injustice

---

14. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Case Study: MCSP Executive Committee

### Challenges:

- » Getting buy-in and commitment to doing social justice and racial equity work as part of our overall suicide prevention efforts, not only individually and as a Board, but structurally, as an organization.
- » Introducing new and difficult concepts within our organization.

### Approach/Solutions:

- » Ensuring that social justice and racial equity was brought to every level of the MCSP, including the Executive Committee (EC).
- » Ensuring that the Committee had adequate time to focus on issues of social justice and racial equity.
- » Hiring a qualified consultant whose field of expertise is diversity training, social justice, and racial equity trainings.
- » Committing to follow-up and consistent evaluation of our progress.

### Outcome:

The outcome has been an Executive Committee that has grown tremendously in terms of understanding of the importance of and connections between social justice, racial equity, and suicide prevention. We still have a lot of work to do, but we have begun to create space for conversation and question our previously unchallenged assumptions about our priorities, organization, and approach. Although we have a ways to go, we are committed to being involved in this process and working toward an organization and approach that is more equitable and inclusive.

### Narrative:

As mentioned in the previous case study, the initial buy-in for the creation of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses—which would then go on to form the MCSP Alliance for Equity—was not difficult. However, we were met with more resistance when it became clear that (a) continued buy-in would require additional work and growth on the part of the entire Executive Committee and the MCSP, and (b) the work of these subcommittees would need to actually inform and perhaps change our organizational priorities, structure, and operations in order to be effective.

Common points of resistance were, “We don’t have time to take on anything else” and “How is social justice and racial equity even connected to suicide prevention?” Other pushback was, “We don’t have enough time in this meeting to give this conversation the space it needs.”

Subsequent discussion included:

- » Discussing the lack of representation in leadership: there was only one person of color currently serving on the Executive Committee. Discussion included questioning why this was so and how this affected the ability of the organization to effectively meet its goals.

- » Discussing the importance of examining the connection between social justice, racial equity, and suicide prevention and, additionally, addressing the ways our organization was not mindful and did not address this connection.
- » Discussing knowledge gaps and addressing what people did not know and were not aware of.

This discussion highlighted the need for further—and deliberate—work on social justice and racial equity. Recognizing not only the need but also the gaps that existed, the EC agreed to two retreats to figure out how our organization might be unwittingly unwelcoming to people of color and how to fix this.

The first retreat focused on organizational structure and organization, and the second focused on individual and interpersonal social justice and racial equity, which allowed EC members to begin to discuss how their own values, beliefs, and perceptions were shaped and how they influenced the way they interacted with other people, personally and professionally. We ended up adding a third half-day retreat to focus on the ways in which social justice and racial equity could be integrated into the structure of our Coalition, and so that we could set some concrete goals for where we wanted to go as an organization.

In order to ensure that our retreats were as productive as possible, we hired outside consultants, one with expertise in organizational restructuring and one with expertise in diversity training, social justice, and racial equity. This enabled us all to approach the discussion from the same position, as retreat participants. It removed the power dynamics inherent in any EC member facilitating the dialogue. Most importantly, it enabled us to tap into a wealth of knowledge, skills, and approaches that, as a committee, we would not have brought to the conversation ourselves.

There was much discussion before the initial retreat about what our goals were. It became clear that, while we initially conceptualized a single, day-long retreat, this would not be possible with the depth and breadth of information we wanted to cover and the transformation we wanted to begin to effect. Both facilitators were fully briefed on the dynamics and history of the MCSP and had the opportunity to talk to several EC members to get a variety of perspectives.

At the initial retreat, we focused on the current and evolving structure of the MCSP. At the second retreat focused on social justice and racial equity, we focused on personal and interpersonal manifestations of racism and social inequity. The facilitator provided background information for the group on systemic racism and how it impacts our personal lens(es) through which we see ourselves and other people, our work, and the world.

After learning this information, the Committee was challenged to examine their own personal lens(es) as part of either the dominant or nondominant group and to think about how those lenses shaped their behavior and interactions with others, including others in the Committee. Examples of this were cultural norms around communication style, cultural norms around responsibility (individual or collective), etc. The Committee rose to the challenge, and we were able to have some very honest and vulnerable conversations about people's personal positionality within a broader social context. This framed our conversation for the next retreat.

At the third half-day retreat, we discussed different climates of social justice and racial equity within organizations, where we thought the MCSP fell within those categories, and where we wanted to ultimately end up. Our facilitator led us through an exercise where we were split into two groups, and each group had a set amount of time to brainstorm action goals for the Executive Committee specifically and for the broader organization and General Membership, to move toward a climate that was more internally equitable and to better integrate our values into our initiatives. We then discussed each idea as a group and—if we felt the

suggestion was appropriate and achievable—decided on a reasonable timeline for implementation. This was then shared with the MCSP Executive Committee.

It has been just over 6 months since our second retreat, and with respect to our stated objectives, we have been mostly successful in implementing our 6 month-1 year goals of:

- » catching up EC members (who weren't present) on retreat
- » implementing 10-15 mins on each EC agenda to include diversity meanings, work, and knowledge (ongoing)
- » integrating questions about social justice and racial equity into our agenda items (ongoing)
- » including diversity materials and information at General Membership meetings (ongoing).

While we have not yet done our first climate check in yet, we have discussed bringing our facilitator back to consult with us and evaluate the progress we have made.

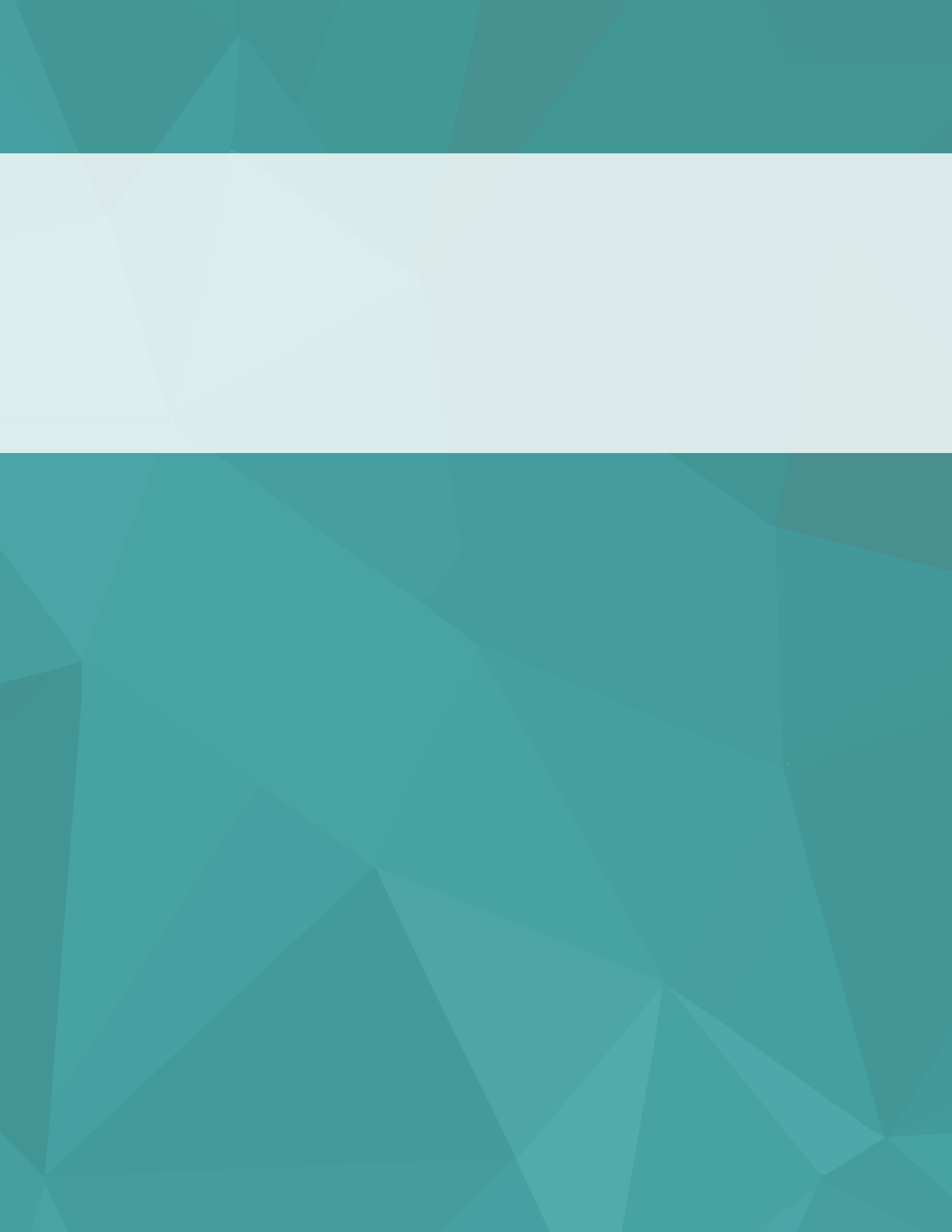
In terms of the 6 month -1 year tasks which we will be looking at next, we plan to implement:

- » accountability check ins, both individual and organizational
- » create a list of benchmarks/ goals/ timelines (ongoing)
- » finalize a list of definitions for shared understanding AND use the words in our meetings,
- » engage in a self-assessment to ask ourselves where we are going, where our gaps are, and what expertise we have

We will also be asking speakers to address social justice and racial equity, working to better understand different cultures' and communities' thoughts on suicide (ongoing), promoting the Toolkit beyond just MCSP (through our Regional Coalitions, providers, member organizations, etc.)

We plan to re-examine our 1-2 year goals at our check-in and assessment.

This process has provided us with a framework for working toward racial equity and social justice, although it has still left much work for us to do. This goal-setting process was a significant step, but it was still an initial step, and continued follow-through is necessary if we are to ultimately effect meaningful and lasting change as an organization.



# 4

## tools to begin: first steps in becoming a racially and socially just organization

How to Use This Section

Framework for How To Do Social Justice and Racial Equity Work in Suicide Prevention

How White People Can Do This Work

Reframing tool (filled out): Evaluating your mission/activities through an equity lens

### **Addressing Communication Diversity:**

Identifying Cultural Differences in Communication

Communication Inventory

Culturally Responsive Approaches to Outreach, Invitation and Collaboration

MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure

MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure Text

Case Study: MCSP Initial Process and Framing Short and Long Term Objectives

## How to Use This Section

This section contains tools to help your organization to take first steps in creating the institutional changes necessary to become a socially just organization. This is by no means a comprehensive guide; however, there are helpful exercises (such as the Social Justice Reframing Tool) that can help your organization begin to unpack the structural ways in which even your framing of the issues of suicide prevention and mental health are not necessarily being seen through a lens of social justice and racial equity.

One way your organization can use this Reframing Tool is to work together to understand that a racially just approach to suicide prevention looks incredibly different from “traditional” approaches and can help you widen your perspective in terms of how the problem is defined, who or what is attributed as the cause of the problem, how we approach the solution, and what action is needed.

Most public health approaches to suicide prevention understand that suicide has systemic and societal causes; however, even these approaches often neglect to consider how racism and racial oppression might be systemically contributing to mental health issues and suicide in communities of color. A racial justice reframing can also help us understand how the systems created by racism can impact and harm white people in very different ways that, nonetheless, may impact their mental health.

The Communication Inventory is intended to help your organization examine the ways that your communication (written, verbal, and nonverbal) is cultured and how these cultured frameworks can impact understanding, miscommunication, whose ideas are heard, whose voice is understood, and who feels welcome and valued within your organization.

We have also included our MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure to represent the group that we’ve formed as one of our initial steps in becoming more socially just and racially equitable. A brochure like this is one example of how other organizations could frame a similar subcommittee, alliance, or group.

Finally, we’ve included a Framework for Doing Social Justice and Racial Equity Work in Suicide Prevention that outlines some fundamental aspects of social justice and racial equity work, and some of what is required to actually do the work on a meaningful, sustainable level. This is not a checklist of steps, but rather a description of a process, that will help you and your organization better understand some fundamental and necessary steps to take in moving forward. We have also included a handout specifically for how white people can enter into this work, specifically through understanding and leveraging their own privilege, challenging systemic racism, taking feedback from People of Color, and assessing and evaluating our own process.



## Framework for How to Do Social Justice and Racial Equity Work in Suicide Prevention

A lot of people ask us, “How do we do this work?” and want a checklist of tasks to complete or a definitive process through which they can work to undo white supremacy culture in their organizations. But the real, deep work of anti-racism is nuanced, ongoing, and fluid. So, while there is no checklist or step-by-step instructions, there are things that people don’t always see as being a part of the work, but that are nevertheless fundamental to racial equity work.

Doing the work is committing to making space for and following through with the processes that make the most sense for your community or organization. This includes identifying, as a group, what this process is.

Doing the work is educating ourselves, and also taking action.

Doing the work is gaining knowledge of and exploring foundational concepts.

Doing the work is allowing ourselves to be uncomfortable, sitting with our own discomfort, and unpacking the reasons behind it. Usually, our discomfort with a particular issue or topic comes from the fact that we have been (as white people) sheltered from the full reality of what we are looking at. Not looking away is also part of the work.

Doing the work is understanding and creating a process. This process includes becoming familiar with and owning our own shortcomings and where we need to do better, as well as setting goals around these “gaps.” It is changing behaviors through follow-through and action. It is interrogating existing systems and norms within your organization. While there is no checklist, part of the work is identifying the next steps that make the most sense for our groups and organizations.

Doing this work is holding ourselves accountable. That means when we set goals, we also think about a timeline, and when that timeline has elapsed, we come back to our goals and ask, “have we met or begun to meet this goal?” If we haven’t, how do we reassess either the goal (Do we need an intermediary goal?), the timeline (Do we need to give ourselves more time?), or our organization or group’s readiness (Is this something we need to come back to later? If yes, include it in your revised accountability plan and come back to it.) Accountability also means recognizing and building on our progress. Where are you going above and beyond what you had set out to do? How can you work towards these areas of strength?

And finally, in response to our ongoing assessment and accountability, this work requires that we adjust and be flexible. It is as important to realize that something isn’t working as it is to realize that something has worked. Both pieces of information can inform our next steps in moving forward.

## How White People Can Do This Work

Because of our unearned power and privilege, much of the burden of dismantling racism has to fall on white people. It is not only our responsibility to use it to dismantle racism, but also the only way structural changes can be made. It is also safe for white people to do this work in a way that is *not* safe for POC.

We need to continually ask ourselves what we can do to be aware, hold ourselves accountable, and create change, not only individually and interpersonally, but also institutionally and systemically.

We need to understand that we have power and privilege that we can leverage in this work. We can call out (or call in) other white people, and we also need to learn from moments when we ourselves are called out.

We need to use our privileged position in the system to question the status quo and suggest more equitable ways of doing things.

Despite the fact that we have power and privilege that we should be leveraging, we shouldn't use it to further our own idea(s) of what we think the agenda should be. Instead, we need to use our power and privilege to elevate the voices, priorities, and visions of POC and communities of color. This means that our work as allies cannot be done without deep collaboration and communication with people and communities of color.

We need to understand that racism exists on many levels, takes on many forms, and can be unintentional or subconscious. We therefore need to be vigilant about our own unseen and preconceived bias(es).

We need to understand the history of oppression and how it continues to manifest in very real, harmful ways, even today.

We need to understand the legacies left by historical racism and the impact of continued oppression (for example, how the legacy of slavery led to the development and proliferation of the prison industrial complex).

We need to listen to and believe POC when they tell us something is racist or inequitable. We also need to listen to POC about what equity would look like and how to achieve it.

We need to challenge our colleagues, friends, family when they say something or do something problematic.

When we do something we don't realize is racist, we need to apologize and then take corrective action. This needs to happen in both our personal and professional lives.

We need to challenge systemic racism in our own organization(s), figure out what we could be doing better, and take action toward becoming more socially just and racially equitable.

We need to talk about systemic racism with other white people and challenge their perceptions of what racism is and how it impacts their work and their lives.

We need to periodically assess our own progress (both individually and organizationally) and ask ourselves: are we taking the steps forward we wanted to take? If not, why not?

We need to take feedback from POC to heart—graciously.

We need to recognize that a person who confronts us trusts us enough to call us out. In fact, we can even thank them for bringing it to our attention; without their calling our attention to it, we would still have a blind spot around our problematic behavior(s).

We need to use feedback as an opportunity to listen, learn, and do better.

When the other person is done talking, we must acknowledge that, and how, our actions have hurt them, and also acknowledge that we want to change our problematic behavior.

We need to not react defensively or focus on our intent. Impact is what matters. We need to recognize that we have caused harm, that there is a problem to be addressed, and we need to take it seriously.

If we don't understand what we did wrong, we can ask if the person is willing to elaborate on what was hurtful, but we also need to recognize that they are under no obligation to do so. If they aren't willing to elaborate, it can be helpful to talk to someone else or do our own research on the topic; the internet is a great place to start.

We need to acknowledge our own biases and blind spots and work to do better moving forward.

It is important that we are prepared to take and learn from feedback in whatever way the other person is able to offer it, whether publicly or privately, calmly or when they are upset. The important thing is to focus on what is being said, not how, when, or where it's being said.

Robin DiAngelo has an excellent set of guidelines for accepting feedback as an ally. She suggests adhering to the following two steps:

1. "How, where, and when you give me feedback is irrelevant – it is the feedback I want and need. Understanding that it is hard to give, I will take it any way I can get it. From my position of social, cultural, and institutional white power and privilege, I am perfectly safe and I can handle it. If I cannot handle it, it's on me to build my racial stamina."
2. "Thank you." (<https://www.alternet.org/2015/06/11-ways-white-america-avoids-taking-responsibility-its-racism/>)

**We need to act where we can.** If we have financial resources, we can give to nonprofits that serve POC. If we have time, we can volunteer for an organization that promotes racial justice. We can promote the work of POC organizations and defer to organizations that serve POC and POC communities where appropriate, especially in prestigious or highly visible forums.

## Racial Justice Re-framing Tool

The Racial Justice Reframing Tool is an exercise that can help us shift the way we think about our mission and initiatives and consider them from a social justice lens. The following is an example of the Reframing Tool that was filled out by the MCSP Alliance for Equity, which represents one example of how to approach a reimagining of suicide prevention and mental health with a focus on racial equity. In some ways, the process is the most important consideration, as there is no one “right” answer or set of answers.

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What’s the Problem?</b>	People are dying by suicide	Disparity in type of approaches/ resources aimed at reaching communities of color and an injustice in the absence of attention paid to these gaps Lack of knowledge about how communities of color deal with suicide Lack of dialogue with communities of color: how can communities of color be reached? What are the needs of individuals/ communities of color with respect to mental health/ suicide? Lack of accurate accounting for number of deaths of people of color by suicide
<b>What’s the Cause</b>	Depression/ Mental Illness	Inequity in access to resources and disparity in how resources are structured and who they are structured to serve
<b>Who/ What’s the Problem?</b>	Access to lethal means Exposure to additional risk factors (domestic violence) Individual responsibility vs. social/ cultural responsibility	Inequity in research (population(s) studied) Eurocentric approach to suicide prevention and education Lack of understanding of different cultural approaches to mental health and suicide prevention; lack of understanding of different cultural approaches to teaching and learning Poverty contributing to stressors for suicide; insufficient resources to address problems Racism and racial injustice as stressors for suicide and also decreasing access to resources Lack of culturally appropriate resources Lack of trust between communities of color and government agencies Emergency interventions are based on assumption that people can trust authority, which isn’t always true in communities of color Understanding of depression and suicide is based on research into mostly white communities and the experiences of white people (men)

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What's the Solution?</b>	<p>Trainings and education including professional and gatekeeper (including educators and parents) training</p> <p>Increased access to providers</p> <p>Means restriction</p> <p>PSA/ public service campaigns</p> <p>Hotlines/ warm-lines</p>	<p>Diversity of approaches (including culturally competent approaches) to suicide prevention and mental health</p> <p>Created education and economic opportunities to encourage people of color to go into mental health field (increase in culturally competent providers)</p> <p>Promoting mental health as equally important to physical health</p> <p>Funding/ more access to (culturally competent) mental health services (esp. through free clinics etc.)</p> <p>Addressing racism and racial injustice in health care and in suicide prevention education, as well as stressor for mental health issues and suicide</p> <p>Addressing different communication styles in approaches to mental health and suicide prevention</p>
<b>What Action is Needed?</b>	<p>More funds toward education and public service campaigns</p> <p>More funding for hotlines/ warm-lines</p> <p>Legislation for means restriction (gun legislation)</p>	<p>More funding to increase number of culturally responsive providers</p> <p>More funding to increase number and frequency of culturally relevant trainings</p> <p>More social services to provide people with access to services (transportation, childcare, etc.)</p> <p>More funding for hotlines in languages other than English</p> <p>More funding for interpreters in emergency rooms and hospitals</p> <p>More funding to train and hire culturally responsive health workers</p> <p>More education about community practices around mental health and mental illness within different communities and cultures; What is already being done and done well? What is working? Where are the opportunities for collaboration?</p> <p>More funding for culturally sensitive research around what happens when there is a suicide in a particular community (or a death that could be a suicide)</p> <p>More funding for accurate research around the number of suicide deaths in different communities</p> <p>Find ways to build trust between communities of color and government agencies that are doing effective work around racial justice and equity</p> <p>More states seeing suicide prevention not only as a public health issue, but also as a social justice issue</p> <p>Research about depression and suicide that includes many different communities and reflects experiences of people of color (may need many approaches and types of research)</p>

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What Values Are Highlighted?</b>	Individual responsibility versus public health approach “Middle class” education values (go to a class to learn something) Help-seeking Western mental health approaches and healing practices	Examining many levels and perspectives beyond just the individual (cultural, systemic, etc.) Valuing the insider knowledge of communities of color and their capacity to speak for themselves and represent their own experiences Self-determination for communities of color with respect to how issues should be addressed Understanding one’s position with respect to race, class, gender, etc. and how it influences particular perspectives and various kinds of suicide prevention work

# Identifying Cultural Differences in Communication

## Our Culture Shapes Our Communication in Ways that are Often Invisible

How we communicate, both in personal and professional settings, is shaped by a series of unspoken and often unseen norms that are a direct result of our cultural background. When people are unaware of the fact that they have different cultural norms, miscommunication can happen—this is particularly important in suicide prevention, because whether we are communicating within or beyond our own organization(s), we are communicating about very critical, life and death, issues.

As organizations, we still exist within our respective cultural contexts, and thus our conversations happen through the filter of a particular communication style or styles. This is unavoidable. However, understanding what these norms are, while being open and educating ourselves about communication styles that may be dramatically different can not only reduce miscommunications and misunderstandings, but can also ensure that individuals with different communication styles are heard, and feel welcome and valued participants in the conversation

In order to do avoid miscommunications based on cultural communication style, we must first acknowledge that there is a dominant framework, and that to participate in systems of cultural power, it is almost always necessary to operate in that dominant framework. We must also acknowledge and understand the existence and value of other aspects of communication that may be less familiar, less valued by or even disparaged by the dominant group.

For instance, white American culture values direct, linear communication and considers eye contact necessary and an indication of sincerity. This differs from many Asian cultures where communication is often less direct, more circular, and eye contact is considered disrespectful in some contexts.

Some of the factors that can impact communication include:

- » Language preference
- » Age
- » Gender socialization
- » Culture/Ethnicity
- » Community norms
- » Place of birth/place of early childhood
- » Familiarity with community
- » Education
- » Training
- » Status
- » Perception of mental health
- » Communication style

Two dimensions of communication that can result in miscommunication if speakers differ are low versus high context communication, and sequential versus synchronic communication.

### Dimensions of Communication: High Context Vs. Low Context

For low-context versus high-context context communication:

- » *Low context communication* relies on the words or the communication itself to understand the full meaning. It is direct and values the meanings of the words rather than the context or relationship of the speakers.
- » *High context communication* is a style that prioritizes nonverbal and other contextual cues to determine the meaning of what is being communicated. The relationship between the speakers is critical and is important to understand what is being communicated.

Western cultures, such as the United States, tend to value low context communication. Many other cultures, however, tend to use high context communication and depend much more on non-verbal and contextual cues to both communicate and to understand what is being communicated.

An example of a difference between high versus low context communication in suicide prevention would be that it is common (and unquestioned) practice in the mental health/ suicide prevention field to ask the question directly “are you suicidal?” In fact, this is emphasized in nearly every suicide prevention gatekeeper training. This practice presupposes that the individual on the receiving end of the communication will also have low context communication—but that may be different in different cultures. For example, it might be experienced as shaming. The answer, also, needs to be considered in cultural context, as a person from a more indirect high-context culture may not answer the question directly, which is what is expected. In sum, asking the question directly in high context cultures might not have the intended outcome.

### Dimensions of Communication: Sequential Vs. Synchronic

Another dimension of communication that is culturally influenced is sequential or synchronic communication.

- » Sequential communication is communication where conversations typically focus on one topic at a time, and efficiency and timeliness are prioritized.
- » Synchronic communication can accommodate various topics at the same time, and view time as secondary to the outcome of the conversation or the task being accomplished

Most Western cultures communicate sequentially, that is one topic is addressed at a time in a linear fashion and efficiency is prioritized.

An example of a professional difference between sequential or synchronic communication might be how agenda items are discussed during meetings—is each agenda item separate, or do topics meld together, and are multiple topics discussed in the same conversation. Additionally, when it is nearing time for the meeting to end, what is prioritized; efficiency in getting through the agenda and finishing on time, or spending a bit of additional time meeting in order to more fully engage around the topic(s) at hand?

### The Importance of Acknowledging and Valuing Different Cultural Communication Styles

It is essential to create an organizational environment that is able to navigate multicultural communication, in which both the individuals and the organization are aware of the communication norms for the group and that these norms are culturally influenced. When it is accepted that specific norms exist (rather than seeing one communication style over another as the “correct” way to communicate), miscommunications can be examined and explained without automatically blaming the person whose communication style is

---

15. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



different from the norms of the group. If you're working with cultures that are not your culture, you need to explore how communication is happening and understand that certain parameters might be different.

The fact that our communication is cultured plays into dominant cultural norms and impacts who is seen and heard, as well as whose ideas and communication styles are seen as valid. When communicating, it is essential to consider that not everyone is going to communicate the same way. Just because something has been said does not mean it will be received in the way in which it was intended. In fact, one communication can have completely different meanings for the speaker and the listener, especially if there is a difference in cultural communication style. In addition, for bilingual speakers and contexts, it is important to remember that translating from one language to another does not necessarily mean the nuance has been retained or that the information was presented in a culturally relevant way.

When trying to diversify an organization, it is imperative that the leadership and membership pay attention to cultural communication styles. Even appropriately inviting someone of another culture to the table can vary greatly in terms of what is said, what is expected, what is done first, etc. If communication is difficult among members in your organization, it may be necessary to consider the communication norms under which you are operating. Is there conflict around the cultural expectations around communication? It's important to be aware of the cultural dimensions of communication so that we can all make sense to each other.

## Communication Inventory<sup>15</sup>

- » How would you describe your organization's style of and norms around communication?
- » To what degree are these norms seen as culturally influenced? How do "white" cultural norms influence your communication style?
- » What value does your organization place on verbal expression and directness or honesty?
- » Is your communication high or low context (low context communication emphasizing the words spoken, high context communication involves non-verbal communication, personal space, volume and speed of response.)?
- » How is communication in your organization impacted by values of self versus the collective?
- » What are your organizational attitudes toward relationships? Are they egalitarian or hierarchical?
- » Do you value independence and competition or cooperation and interdependence?
- » What are the criteria for trustworthiness related to the above factors?

### Follow Up

As a group, discuss factors that might make your communications unwelcoming to different individuals and groups, and create tangible goals around creating a more inclusive and equitable communication format/style.

Engage with members of various communities to get feedback on past and future communications, and consider their feedback

Discuss how your communication style(s) impact your organization's work, functioning and structure and identify opportunities, and how you might shift these style(s) to be more equitable and inclusive of other groups.

Repeat this inventory after some time has elapsed to measure progress and to set new goals.

## Culturally Responsive Approaches to Outreach, Invitation, and Collaboration

So often hear the complaint that communities of color don't participate very much in mental health and suicide prevention efforts, or that communities of color remain isolated and are not interested in collaboration. Often, primarily white organizations use low-context communication such as a direct email or a cold call to "invite" organizations of color to the table. They are then surprised when their invitation is met with no response and are equally surprised when the people of color who show up at a meeting only come one or two times and then stop attending. Most of the time, organizations don't ask themselves why this is happening and tend to place responsibility on individuals and communities of color to adapt to their norms and expectations.

What the organization doesn't realize is that, in order to establish connections with individuals in communities of color, they need to reach out in a more personal and nuanced way to show that they provide opportunities for people of color to make meaningful contributions to the work and the organization. If this is not apparent from the diversity of the current members and the work that they are doing, then the following questions need to be considered:

- » What is your organization doing to show that you are inclusive and open and receptive to true collaboration with communities of color?
- » What work are you already doing in terms of meeting the needs of communities of color? Why would an organization of color would want to work with you?
- » Is your work framed in a way that is relevant to the community that you are approaching? Is a socially just and racially equitable approach integrated into your everyday work? What steps are you taking to become more socially just and racially equitable?
- » Is your organization's approach to suicide prevention and the work you are doing relevant and appropriate to communities of color?
- » Are you examining the norms of your organization to see if they serve all members of the organization and everyone you want at your table? Do you have ways to deal with conflict that might arise from conflicting cultural norms?
- » Are you building relationships with communities of color through personal outreach and building relationships? Does your approach consider cultural communication norms?
- » Who are outreaching to? Do you know and are you connecting with the community leaders who can assist you in your efforts to bring people to the table? (These leaders may hold power in their own communities that may go unrecognized by the dominant culture.)
- » Are you going to where the community is, or do you always expect them to come to you?
- » Are you involved with and at the table of organizations that serve communities of color?
- » Have you considered and presented opportunities for mutual collaboration, such as projects that benefit both organizations?

Until you have addressed these questions and shifted your approach accordingly, you may have difficulties connecting with and engaging people of color and organizations that serve communities of color. Unless

your organization is willing to grow and evolve as a more socially just and racially just organization, it is unreasonable to expect that people of color will see any benefit or impact to joining your organization.

Ultimately, what people want is to know that their voices and efforts have an impact and that their presence matters. When your organization demonstrates this, you will better be able to engage with communities of color and retain a diverse membership.

# MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure

## What Can You Do?

Join the MCSP Alliance for Equity

Educate yourself.  
Visit [RACEJustice.org](http://RACEJustice.org) and read.

» If you are a person of color, expand your knowledge about your history and culture and that of others.

» If you are a white ally educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions

Have conversations about racial equity, social justice and suicide prevention.

» If you are a person of color, have conversations in your community.

» If you are a white ally have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.

Call out racist behavior and racist language.



## Contact Information

617.297.8774

[MCSPAAllianceForEquity@gmail.com](mailto:MCSPAAllianceForEquity@gmail.com)

The Alliance for Equity is a committee of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention



## Mission Statement

*The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity* is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP at all levels of the Coalition, and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to suicide prevention work. The MCSP Alliance for Equity is also committed to cultivating an understanding of how white allies can most effectively use privilege to re-center the conversation around issues of social justice and equity, and ensure that space is made for the experiences, perspectives, and expertise of individuals and communities of color.



## Why is Our Work Important?

Suicide Affects Everyone.

» As a coalition we want to be a group that is responsive to all people and communities. We want everyone to be represented, engaged, and have an impact on how our work is done.

Oppression/ Systems of Oppression intersect with suicide and suicide prevention in a number of ways

» In communities of color addressing racism is a form suicide prevention.

Using this lens improves our efficacy and impacts our ability to do our work and save lives

» Attending to racial equity means expanding the perspectives, frameworks, and approaches to suicide prevention.

» When we talk about social justice we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well.

## How Do We Work?

» The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of two caucuses: the people of color caucus and the white ally caucus. Although most of the time we meet together as people color and white allies, we will occasionally break out into these groups if the discussion warrants.

» We inform the work of the MCSP at every level of the organization.

» We also focus on longer term projects and initiatives that address social justice and racial equity in suicide prevention.

» Most of our meetings are virtual.



# MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure Text

## **Name:**

The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity

## **Mission Statement:**

The *Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity* is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP at all levels of the Coalition and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to suicide prevention work. The MCSP Alliance for Equity is also committed to cultivating an understanding of how white allies can most effectively use their privilege to recenter the conversation around issues of social justice and equity and ensure that space is made for the experiences, perspectives, and expertise of individuals and communities of color.

## **Why is Our Work Important?:**

### **Suicide Affects Everyone:**

As a coalition we want to be a group that is responsive to all people and communities. We want everyone to be represented, engaged, and have an impact on how our work is done.

### **Oppression/ Systems of Oppression intersect with suicide and suicide prevention in a number of ways:**

In communities of color addressing racism is a form of suicide prevention.

### **Using this lens improves our efficacy and impacts our ability to do our work and save lives:**

Attending to racial equity means expanding the perspectives, frameworks and approaches to suicide prevention.

When we talk about social justice, we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well.

## **How Do We Work?**

- » The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of two caucuses: the people of color caucus and the white ally caucus. Although most of the time we meet together as people of color and white allies, we will occasionally break out into these groups if the discussion warrants.
- » We inform the work of the MCSP at every level of the organization.
- » We also focus on long-term projects and initiatives that address social justice and racial equity in suicide prevention.
- » Most of our meetings are virtual.

### What Can You Do?

- » Join the MCSP Alliance for Equity
- » Educate yourself: Visit [RACEJustice.org](https://www.racejustice.org) and READ.
  - › If you are a person of color, expand your knowledge about your history and culture and others' history and culture.
  - › If you are a white ally, educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions.
- » Have conversations about racial equity, social justice and suicide prevention.
  - › If you are a person of color, have conversations in your community.
  - › If you are a white ally, have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.
- » Call out racist behavior and racist language.

## Case Study: MCSP Initial Process and Framing Short and Long Term Objectives

### Challenge(s):

Getting buy-in that structural change was a necessary component of any social justice and racial equity work.

Making time for discussions and conversations on already full agendas.

Dealing with resistance to change, and breaking free from patterns that have existed since the organization was started.

### Approach/Solutions/Outcomes:

We had an initial retreat focused on preliminary conversations about where the organization is currently and how we want to evolve, a second retreat focused on individual and interpersonal understanding of inequity and social injustice—for this effort we brought in an outside facilitator. This meant we were able to devote the majority of our third half-day retreat to structural/ organizational concerns and considerations, as well as concrete goal setting.

The MCSP and the EC are still working to implement the goals set, however we have been tracking our progress and are mostly on target with the goals suggested by the committee.

### Narrative

At our third retreat, the Executive Committee focused on how we might restructure our processes or organization in a way that is more socially just.

Some example goals from that retreat included; carving out space in every meeting for further discussion/ learning/ exploration on issues of social justice and racial equity; asking questions about what were the spoken and unspoken assumptions/norms/etc that influenced the Coalition's decision-making and how these decision making processes could be more socially just by asking additional questions such as whose voice is missing? What perspectives are we not considering? What structural assumptions are we taking for granted that could be changed?

Because not all Executive Committee members were able to attend the retreat, we scheduled an additional Zoom meeting after the second retreat to discuss the goals that had been outlined at the retreat, to ensure that everyone understood all of the goals, and to get buy in from the entire committee. The Committee responded positively to the goals as well as the timeframe, with the understanding that these goals would necessarily be shifted and changed as we continued our work. Meeting minutes from both retreats were also provided to all EC members to ensure that everyone understood what was discussed at each retreat, as well as the next steps agreed upon.

It has been just over six months since our third retreat, and with respect to our stated objectives, we have been mostly successful in implementing our 6 month–1 year goals of catching up EC members on retreat, implementing 10–15 minutes on each EC agenda to include diversity work (ongoing), integrating questions about social justice and racial equity into our agenda items (ongoing), diversity materials and information



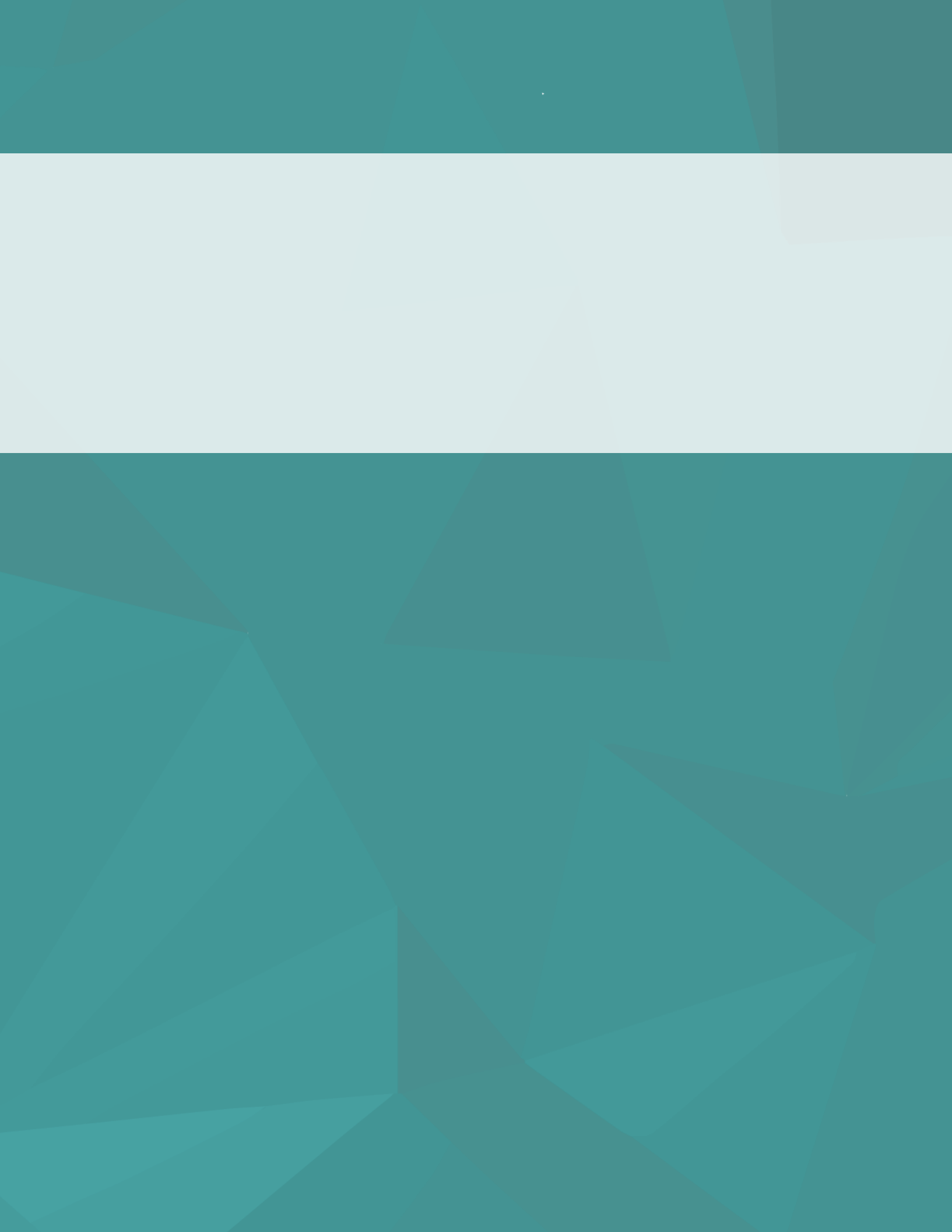
at General Membership meetings (ongoing). While we have not yet done our first climate check-in yet, we have discussed bringing our facilitator back to consult with us and evaluate the progress we have made.

In terms of the 6 month -1 year tasks which we will be looking at next, we plan to implement: accountability check ins--both individual and organizational--,create a list of benchmarks/ goals/ timelines (ongoing), finalize list of definitions AND use the words in our meetings, and engage in a self-assessment to ask ourselves where are we going, where are our gaps, and where/what expertise do we have?

We will also be asking speakers to address social justice and racial equity, working to better understand different cultures/ communities thoughts on suicide (ongoing), promoting the toolkit beyond just MCSP (Through our regional coalitions, providers, member organizations, etc.) We plan to re-examine our 1-2 year goals at our check in/ assessment.

Changing the structure of an organization is a slow process that requires constant re-evaluation of goals, assessment of progress, and buy-in from a large percentage of the organization, particularly organizational leadership. At the MCSP, we are still at the beginning stages of transforming our Coalition into a socially just and equitable organization, although we have taken steps to identify goals, evaluate progress and gain buy in from a large percentage of the Coalition leadership.

This will be an ongoing process, which (since our understanding of social justice and racial equity will continue to grow and expand) doesn't really have an endpoint—we will always strive to better ourselves as an organization. Because it is an ongoing process with changing goals, it is important that we constantly re-assess where our priorities are and where we have (or haven't) made progress. We do not anticipate continuing this process to be easy, particularly as we move toward goals that effect greater organizational change. However, we are engaged in this process as a coalition, and hope that the collaborative approach that we use to set all our goals and priorities will ensure sufficient buy-in to generate significant and continued progress.



# 5

## continuing the journey: applying knowledge within the organizational structure & within the organization's activities

How to Use This Section

**Assessment, Development, and Implementation of Racial Equity and Social Justice Goals:**

Structural/Governance Inventory  
Equity Follow Up Chart MCSP Executive Committee  
Focus Group Recommendations

Case Study: GBRSPC Activities

**Social Justice and Racial Equity Exercises/Activities:**

Facilitators Guide  
Racial Justice Reframing Tool (Blank)  
Racial and Social Identities Exercise  
Window of Tolerance  
Wheel of Oppression  
Levering Systemic Privilege Exercise

Case Study: MCSP General Membership

## How to Use This Section

In this section, you will find materials to inform your organizational structure and governance, as well as the activities of your organization.

The Structural/Governance Inventory and the Equity Follow-Up Chart provide a suggested framework for examining existing structural norms and practices and setting goals and a timeline for shifting those norms and practices towards greater equity.

The Focus Group Recommendations can inform the initial approach and dialogue when discussing mental health and suicide prevention within communities of color. While these findings are not universal, they do span six different populations including the following communities: Haitian, Latinx youth, Bhutanese refugees, Asian (Asian and Asian American), Brazilian, and Muslim.

You will find exercises that you can use within your organization to help explore concepts such as leveraging privilege, oppression and agency, emotional tolerance, and race and social identity.

We hope that these exercises will prompt your organization to engage in direct, honest, and uncomfortable dialogues that lead to breakthroughs in understanding, which will lead to and be reflected in actual organizational change. We have included a facilitator's guide in order to provide you with the objective of each exercise and some common points of resistance that you may face, as well as suggestions for implementing the exercises within your organization.

The case study is an examination of one organization's attempt at considering and implementing structural and logistic changes, with the purpose of proving creating more equitable activities and opportunities for engagement

## Structural/Governance Inventory

What are your organizational norms with respect to:

- » Communication
- » Decision making
- » Outreach
- » Dissemination of important information
- » Operation and day to day functioning (ie. Meeting structure)

How are your organizations norms inclusive or exclusive of other cultural contexts/ norms? How familiar are individuals in your organization with different norms? (To what extent are these 'norms' seen as 'norms' rather than just 'the way things are' or the 'status quo'?) How does your organization respond to having these norms questioned or challenged?

How does your organization (and individuals within your organization) respond to different ideas about communication/ decision making/ outreach/ etc.? How does your organization respond to having these norms questioned or challenged?

What are your organizational norms with respect to:

- » Authority
- » Leadership
- » Accountability
- » Division of labor

In discussing organizational norms with respect to the above, do you notice any patterns about who holds positions of leadership and how tasks are distributed across the organization?

What do you believe is the responsibility of organizational leadership in addressing these organizational norms? How can the rest of the organization support these organizational changes? How is the behavior of your organizational leadership consistent with your stated values of social justice and racial equity?

Do your bylaws, policies, and procedures incorporate social justice and racial equity? If not, how could your written policies better reflect your organizational values of social justice and racial equity?

If so, does the day-to-day operation of your organization reflect your organizational values? If not, what can be done to narrow the gap between the organizational values and day-to-day behavior?

# MCSP Executive Committee Equity Follow-Up Chart

After we gained some foundational knowledge and started to examine our organizational structure and began to discuss what changes we would like to implement, we decided that we needed concrete goals and a timeline in order to be able to 1) evaluate our progress and 2) hold ourselves accountable to moving forward.

The following chart is a draft that we have used to check up on our progress and forward momentum, and which we will continue to revise and update in order to set and evaluate our progress on new goals.

## Immediately-6 Months

Board Climate:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Catch up other EC members fully on this retreat	MCSP Alliance co-Chairs/ Entire EC MCSP Alliance co-Chairs—set up zoom meeting Review Social Justice and Racial Equity Action Plan and Timeline	EC will be on the same page/ have the same information about this process
Implement 10-15 minute space on each EC agenda to include diversity meanings/ work/ knowledge (ongoing)	EC volunteer will coordinate monthly discussions; EC members will rotate presenting	EC members will have the opportunity to share and learn from others EC will engage in new learning and acquire new tools to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our organization
Integrating questions about equity into how all agenda items are framed (ie. Who is included? Whose voice is missing?) (ongoing)	Rotating lead? Entire EC can address questions of social justice and racial equity as they pertain to a specific agenda item	Social justice and racial equity will be more integrated into our agendas and our work
Climate check ins (what can we do as an EC to get on the same page?) (ongoing)	TBD	EC will have a common process, framework, and goals for moving forward

Organizational/Community/Activities/Approach:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Diversity materials/ exercises and information at General Membership meetings (ongoing)	MCSP Alliance for Equity (People of Color and White Ally Caucuses) General Membership/EC members Alternating or rotating presenters	General Membership will engage in new learning and acquire new tools to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our organization as well as their own Brings social justice and racial equity to all levels of the organization

## 6 Months-1 Year

### Board Climate:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Approach/Steps/Leader</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Accountability check ins (action plan handout) (ongoing)	Discussion with group or accountability partners at EC meetings	Continued individual growth and progress on action steps around social justice and racial equity goals See how we are moving forward as a group, identify gaps to be addressed at future meetings
Create list of benchmarks, timelines, goals (ongoing)	Entire EC or task force	Allows us to track our progress, make corrections along the way and set goals (aspirational and currently attainable)
Finalize list of definitions AND use the words during our meetings	Entire EC, with materials provided by facilitator	EC will have a common language and understanding around terms and definitions around social justice and racial equity
Self-assessment (ongoing), assess gaps as well as where/ what expertise do we have?	Entire EC (rotating leadership) Possible outside consultant	EC will have an understanding of what additional work needs to be done EC will have a better understanding of which members have expertise in a particular area that can be shared with the group EC will have a better understanding of what we need to learn to move forward

### Organizational/Community/Activities/Approach:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Approach/Steps/Leader</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Asking speakers address cultural responsiveness and equity	Entire EC MCSP Alliance for Equity	Embeds racial equity and social justice into all MCSP sponsored presentations
Better understand different cultures and communities' thoughts on suicide (ongoing)	Recirculate Greater Boston focus group results Reach out to other communities of color Entire Coalition MCSP Alliance for Equity	Improves MCSP's work in suicide prevention and impact within communities of color Creates better partnerships with communities of color and organizations that serve communities of color Creates culturally responsive Coalition and EC that is welcoming to and addresses the needs of individuals and communities of color

<b>Task</b>	<b>Approach/Steps/Leader</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Promoting toolkit beyond just MCSP; with Coalitions, member organizations, etc. (ongoing)	MCSP Alliance for Equity Bring Toolkit to conferences Promote Toolkit through workshop or webinar?	Establishes the MCSP as a leader in suicide prevention with respect to social justice and racial equity Raises credibility of MCSP with respect to suicide prevention and equity Raises awareness and provides tools for organizations, coalitions, and communities (including our own) to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our work
Climate check-ins (ongoing)	Entire Coalition/ rotating lead(s)	Continued organizational growth/ progress on action steps re: social justice and racial equity goals

## 1-2 Years

Board Climate:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Approach/Steps/Leader</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Representative from POC Caucus on Executive Committee		
Need a consistent onboarding process		
Need more diversity for Executive Committee (ongoing)		

Organizational/Community/Activities/Approach:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Approach/Steps/Leader</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Encourage and require regional coalitions to use some MCSP funding toward culturally responsive and equitable work (ongoing)		
Communications in multiple languages (media, brochure, website) (ongoing)		



Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Diverse leadership: outreach to other communities (ongoing)		
Partner with other groups (Black Lives Matter, Asian Women for Health, etc.) (ongoing)		
Regional Coalitions: provide tools; assessment of benchmarks (ongoing)		
Learning opportunities for coalitions (webinars/ guest speakers) to increase knowledge not just of EC or coalition chairs, but of the entire coalition (ongoing)		

# Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition Focus Group Recommendations Summary of Recommendations<sup>16</sup>

In fiscal years 2015 and 2016, the Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition organized a series of focus groups with both clinicians and community members. Eleven focus groups were held within six cultural communities: Asian (Asian-American and Asian-born), Haitian, Latinx, Brazilian, Muslim, and Bhutanese refugees. The following findings are from those focus groups.

Following the focus groups, this information was used to develop a proposal for mini-grants that were then given to organizations in the Greater Boston area that addressed the needs of and suggestions from people of color. This sparked several community-wide initiatives that were then sustained by the organizations that received the grants.

Three suggestions for services that were mentioned frequently and by all three cultural groups in Year One were:

- » Personal stories from people like me about their experiences with depression, suicidality, help-seeking and treatment
- » Education for parents about mental health and mental illness in children
- » Conversations and support groups

Two suggestions that were mentioned by all three cultural groups that we talked to in Year Two were:

- » Use established community infrastructure (churches, mosques, refugee assistance centers, community health workers, schools, etc.) to provide information about depression and suicide
- » Develop intergenerational and intercultural activities to help increase community connections

Two suggestions that have been made by all six of the cultural groups that the coalition has reached out to are:

- » Increase communication about mental health and mental illness
- » Assure that culturally and linguistically appropriate clinical services are available

## Recommendations

### Increase communication about mental health

- » Conversations with or through the church about what people are feeling lately
- » Inter-generational conversations about mental health and wellbeing
- » Educating kids to educate parents
- » Peer leadership programs to organize info sessions in churches in the neighborhood
- » Yearly church retreats

---

16. Focus group project leader: Emily Bhargava

- » More community workshops
- » Ask pastors to discuss mental health and encourage their congregants to seek services if they need them
- » Support groups
- » Spanish-language support groups
- » Concrete steps and actions to take to survive depression focused more on now
- » Education for parents about youth experiences of mental illness and about raising kids
- » Education through the radio and through live TV shows
- » The “right kind of communication” to feel genuine care from someone
- » Communication from adults that’s not judgmental
- » Engage people in conversations about culture, respecting their expertise and cultural knowledge
- » Help people talk to “someone who has been through it”
- » Invest in talking about depression to break the taboo
- » Increase the number of community health workers
- » Provide an introduction to mental health for recent immigrants that includes information about culture shock and some of the other stressors that they might experience.
- » Increase conversation about suicide

#### **Normalize help-seeking/ reduce stigma**

- » Real life stories, to share their story and then let other people learn from it
- » Public messages such as “even counselors can use a counselor”
- » Information about mental health at community health centers
- » Examples from other people who have been through similar experiences
- » Peers telling their stories
- » Messages coming from sector leaders like spiritual leaders
- » Have more peers and consumers come forward and share their story
- » Normalize discussion of mental health and suicide by asking about it
- » Develop and disseminate a campaign to encourage help-seeking, with the messages: “it’s okay to feel this way”, “It’s not bad that you feel like killing yourself”, “It’s not the only way out” and “It’s a temporary phase”

#### **Make clinical institutions more welcoming**

- » Reduce professional turnover
- » Use of nonjudgmental, nonclinical language
- » Clinicians who listen closely to their patients and don’t make assumptions

- » Begin clinical conversations “gently”
- » More Asian mental health providers
- » More non-Asian providers who have some understanding of Asian upbringing
- » Strong provider-patient relationships
- » Diversity training
- » Welcoming, culturally appropriate centers
- » Create and disseminate more materials in languages other than English to make institutions more welcoming
- » Create additional services for specific cultural groups
- » Train and deploy mental health counselors who speak the languages that our communities speak
- » Teach mental health professionals more indirect ways to ask about suicide. Someone said, “They just ask like it’s nothing . . . ‘Do you want to get a knife and go somewhere where there’s no one and cut yourself . . . Do you want to? Do you want to hang and die . . . Do you want to leave your home?’ It’s like . . . they’re threatening me.”
- » Gather more funding to hire more diverse outreach workers and clinicians
- » Advocate for more members of diverse community to become mental health providers
- » Address immigration status, which causes a “big black cloud of fear and despair”
- » Provide health literacy in multiple languages
- » Create a centralized list of providers who speak different languages, by neighborhood

#### **Make clinical services more accessible**

- » More wrap-around services
- » More clinicians able to handle dual-diagnosis with substance abuse
- » Less immediate discharge of patients from the hospital
- » Care that can be provided regardless of insurance coverage
- » A center where people could come to discuss issues
- » Partial program with Spanish language capacity
- » Reach out to people who might be more open to treatment
- » More therapists who speak Asian languages
- » Make sure that mothers know what resources are available
- » More relaxed catchment areas for service provision so that people can be sent to other towns where they can be connected more quickly to mental health services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate

#### **Educate gatekeepers/ meet people where they are**

- » Integrate mental health within Refugee and immigrant assistance centers for referrals

- » Prepare volunteers from churches to receive people who want to just talk
- » Educate pastors and priests, radio hosts, teachers and church leaders about depression and about where to refer people who need help
- » Have someone in the hospital to talk to people with panic attacks and loneliness.
- » Use the radio to reach out about mental health
- » Provide QPR training for church leaders
- » Provide training about warning signs for suicide
- » Establish an anonymous phone line in different languages
- » Provide training to community health workers about how to identify and respond to mental health concerns and suicidal ideation
- » Ask pastors and priests and Imams to discuss mental health issues during the lectures. Help them teach their congregations that “it’s not about lack of strength or faith”
- » Have kids in high school or a friend talk about their experiences
- » Ask someone at church to speak out at the service
- » Make sure that people know the steps to hospitalize someone who is making a suicide plan
- » Provide youth with a counselor when they first come to the U.S.
- » Educate clinicians about the difference between self-injury and suicide.

#### **Increase community connections**

- » Create opportunities for people to meet others, creating support networks
- » Encourage small acts of kindness and small gestures, like smiling at people each day.
- » Create a recreation center and activities for people of all generations from all parts of the world
- » Create a program that allows open conversation between generations “if not to their own children, [with] other children that are around their age”

#### **Additional ideas:**

- » Address suicide as a long-term initiative
- » Recognize diversity within the culture
- » Connect people to other activities
- » Teach parents that “just like you would go to the doctor and get medicine when you had a fever, you can do the same for mental health and ask for medicine.”
- » Teach parents how to navigate and have an action plan to support their children
- » Provide more opportunities to learn English
- » Offer concrete resources like jobs and college
- » Advocate to make it easier for people over 65 to get citizenship

- » Provide opportunities for creative expression and showcase what people make
- » Provide drug education
- » Offer skills orientation and to send people to work
- » Teach coping skills to college-age youth, young people, those who are divorced and others about “how to feel low, how to come back from that”
- » Talk about identity with immigrant youth and help people recognize that their histories and knowledge of multiple languages makes them rich
- » Teach anger management
- » Collect better data about suicide demographics to identify high risk groups and communities that need support
- » More research on ethnic subpopulations

**Prioritization process:**

**Cross-cultural recommendations:**

- » Personal stories from “people like me” about their experiences with depression, suicidality, help-seeking and treatment
- » Education for parents about mental health and mental illness in children
- » Conversations and support groups
- » Use established community infrastructure (churches, mosques, refugee assistance centers, community health workers, schools etc.) to provide information about depression and suicide
- » Develop inter-generational and inter-cultural activities to help increase community connections
- » Assure that culturally and linguistically appropriate clinical services are available

Many of the specific suggestions for how to implement these changes in one community could be piloted in one community and then replicated and tested in other communities, or could be developed in multiple communities in parallel.

Choose one to two things to do (the coalition could do them collaboratively, or could solicit members to do them, offering mini-grants for piloting, documenting, and disseminating the models)

**Prioritization criteria:**

- » Stakeholder support/ capacity
- » Sustainability of the effort
- » Potential impact on increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors for culturally diverse populations (from long term outcomes in logic model)

**Potential funding allocation:**

- » One focus group (military families? African American Community?) and analysis and/or approaching new communities with a list of recommendations and an offer of partnering with them and offering the coalition's resources
- » A project based on the recommendations from the focus groups
- » QPR kits for community partners

## Case Study: Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition

### Challenges:

- » Accessibility in terms of space, childcare, public transportation, cost, language barriers, etc.;
- outreach to communities of color, particularly in mental health and suicide prevention

### Approach/Solutions/Outcome:

The GBRSPC reframed their conversation, placing event accessibility at the forefront of their planning. As a result, the event was accessible in many ways (such as transportation, meals, childcare, language accessibility, etc. . . ). In addition to accommodating the needs of multiple communities, it also served as a model for future work.

### Narrative:

The Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition has worked to make the events and activities it sponsors as accessible to all as possible. With this mission in mind, events and activities:

- » are either free or affordable
- » accessible by public transportation
- » have free child-care
- » have interpreter services if needed
- » have a “wellness ambassador” (a trained mental health clinician who can check-in with participants) if the subject matter is sensitive or potentially triggering
- » have food, especially if the event crosses a meal time)
- » are advertised in diverse communities

For example, as part of the effort to educate about problem gambling and suicide risk, the GBRSPC co-hosted an event where a play by a local Chinese American playwright was featured. The play deals with problem gambling and suicide in a Chinese American family. After the staged reading of the play, there was a panel of expert speakers who discussed the issues brought up in the play. An interpreter who could speak both Mandarin and Cantonese was present to interpret if needed. The event was in Chinatown and accessible by public transportation. In addition, there was food, childcare, and a wellness ambassador at the event. Posters for the event (in English and Chinese) were distributed not only in the Greater Boston area, but in Chinatown specifically. This is significant because mental health concerns and discussion of suicide are greatly stigmatized in Asian American communities.

The result of these efforts was twofold; first, the event itself was more welcoming for people of color, in particular the Asian American community, second, the event served as a model or example for how using different considerations for how to structure an event (access to childcare and public transportation, interpreter services), that it is not only feasible but quite manageable to incorporate at a day to day level structural changes that integrate social justice into suicide prevention work. The further impact has been that the Coalition has seen what is possible and for their FY20 budget are proposing activities that are all connected to both suicide prevention and social justice.



## Facilitators Guide

As you work through these exercises with people in your organization, it is important not only to be conscious of the climate of your organization in relation to racial equity and social justice, but also to be aware of your own knowledge and comfort as a trainer.

It is important to consider your personal understanding of the material you are going to address. What is your strength as a trainer? Do you feel like you can field questions about this particular topic? If not, it might be helpful to have a cofacilitator for each exercise or postpone doing the exercise until you are more ready. In our work, we have been presenting material and exercises by using cofacilitators, usually one person of color and one white ally. However, it is important to note that the chair of the People of Color Caucus who has presented many of the exercises is also a diversity trainer with experience in dealing with these issues. It might be useful to determine if there is anyone in your organization with experience in presenting material on social justice and racial equity. If not, you will want to consider a number of things before you dive in:

- » Before you work through each exercise, think about your organizational climate and historical response to this work: What challenges do you anticipate may come up? What strategies do you think might be most effective in addressing these challenges within your organization?
- » A large part of this work involves ascertaining which exercises are appropriate in what contexts. Some considerations in choosing exercises and their timing are: Where is your organization in relation to issues of social justice and racial equity? More specifically, where is your organization in relation to the specific topic the exercise addresses? Organizational inventories can be helpful with this.
- » We encourage framing an exercise before doing it, but if a particular exercise seems like it will elicit a good deal of resistance, you may need to ask yourself whether this is the right time to do this exercise and if there is a way to present the material in a way that is appropriate for where your organization is now. You may want to consider what the sources of the resistance are and ways to address it before you do the exercise.
- » It may be helpful, if you feel the exercise is a stretch, to include a brief educational component to assist in framing the exercise—this can be done by the facilitator, another member of your organization, or someone you invite from outside your organization. There are several handouts in the first section that cover some of the main points of resistance we encountered that may be helpful in your process, such as reactions to introducing the concept of white privilege or a lack of understanding of why we are doing racial equity and social justice work within the field of suicide prevention.

Everyone has their own particular blind spots in doing this work, and it is helpful to figure out your own blind spots as a facilitator, perhaps determining whether an alternate facilitator or cofacilitator for an exercise that hits one of your blind spots would be more effective. It is also helpful to try to understand the blind spots of individuals within your organization and within your organization as a whole. Again, sometimes this understanding comes only through trial and error and by analyzing where certain topics and exercises are met with resistance.

Even if you considered all of these issues carefully and adjusted your decisions, you are likely to encounter resistance from some people. While resistance can be difficult and uncomfortable, these challenges can be instructive and provide an opportunity to have further conversation and education. It can be part of the process of understanding new ideas that challenge old belief systems, which is, at best, uncomfortable and unsettling. In many cases, resistance comes quite unexpectedly and may interfere with the stated objective

of the exercise; however, such resistance provides an excellent opportunity to meet people where they are and engage with a particular concern or topic that is a stumbling block for them. It can be helpful to read the room to determine if an expression of resistance seems like a common sticking point, or if one person is holding up the work of the rest of the group. You can ask the group if others share this question or response. If it seems like a common stumbling block, it may be necessary to redirect the conversation until the majority of people at the table understand the concept and how to move forward. If it is just one person, you can encourage others to participate in explaining the concept, which can be even more effective than having a facilitator explain. However, when resistance comes from just one person, this can also mean that after a reasonable period of discussion, further conversation around the individual's resistance should be tabled for a later, one-on-one conversation so the rest of the group can move forward.

It is critical for you, as the facilitator, to keep the exercise's objectives in mind and ensure that you are clear on how to redirect the conversation toward those objectives and understandings while navigating points of resistance. Below, we have outlined some objectives and points of resistance that may come up in the exercises for your reference, as these points are not explicitly included in the exercises themselves, to allow for clean, printable copies of each exercise.

For example, the objective of the Racial Justice Reframing Tool is to understand that, when examining a particular public health issue such as suicide through the lens of racial equity, we broaden our understanding of the topic and come up with new ideas around root causes, approaches, etc. The purpose is to help deepen and shift your organization's understanding of suicide with respect to the values highlighted in traditional approaches, action steps called for, the cause of and solution to the problem.

The challenge with this particular topic using the Racial Justice Reframing Tool is that, statistically, white men die by suicide at higher rates than women and people of color; therefore, people think that you don't need to look at suicide through this lens. If you encounter pushback like this, it might be helpful to note that while white men do make up the largest number of fatalities, most models and approaches related to mental health and suicide prevention are created by and for white people, so it is only with a racial justice reframing that we can understand how to reach communities that are not being reached by current efforts and that this is in addition to and not instead of the suicide prevention work that we are currently doing.

The purpose of the Race and Social Identities Exercise is to understand that each of our identities provides us with a particular lens and that most people have identities that fall in both dominant and non-dominant groups. The exercise also lets us examine the strengths within our nondominant identities, as well as how each identity shapes our professional perspectives.

The challenge with this exercise can be in our cultural conditioning to view the majority group's lens as "normative;" therefore, it might be helpful to give some examples that illustrate what a "white" (or, more broadly, a "majority") cultural lens looks like. It can be interesting to revisit this exercise as you get further along in your organizational and individual understanding to see how answers and resistance shifts.

The purpose of the Leveraging Systemic Privilege Exercise is to help people within your organization understand how they can utilize their privilege in a way that will work toward creating more just outcomes, such as amplifying the voices, ideas, and experiences of the nondominant group and questioning why certain groups and perspectives are not represented. Most importantly, we can learn to use our systemic privilege to help the people and organizations we come into contact with examine the inequities in our social systems and structures and better understand how we can make these systems more equitable.

The challenge in this exercise can be getting people to understand the difference between being "privileged" in the colloquial sense and the ways that unseen privilege has shaped their experience. For example, a woman who has experienced silencing and oppression as a result of misogyny might find it difficult to

see herself in a position of power and privilege, particularly when the inherent nature of that power and privilege is that other people are silenced. It can be helpful to point out that, while a particular identity can put you in a position where you lack power, being a part of any dominant group gives you advantages and freedom from certain consequences that other people who share your marginalized identities but do not share your dominant group identity do not have access to. For example, white women, may be silenced in meetings, but do not fear being shot when they get pulled over by the police. They may be afraid walking home alone at night as a result of rape culture, but are not afraid that their loved ones will be deported without notice. They are not afraid that someone will call the police on them while they are trying to enter their own home. If they are a victim of violence, although their credibility will still be challenged because of misogyny, they will be given more benefit of the doubt than a woman of color.

For the Window of Tolerance Exercise, the objective is to have a framework for your group to understand their level of emotional engagement or detachment and, more specifically, to be able to gauge how they are reacting to a particular topic or exercise, in order to identify resistance or discomfort.

For the Wheel of Oppression, the objective is to provide a framework for understanding the systems of oppression that exist across multiple social identities and to have people position themselves within that framework based on their identities. This can create a sense of empathy and understanding, knowing that all oppressions are held together by power and function on individual, institutional, and systemic levels. Additionally, the exercise can enable people to understand that one move from agent to ally and from victim to empowered, which allow action steps toward systemic change to take place.

We encourage you to use these exercises in a manner and order that are beneficial to you. This is not a prescribed or even sequential curriculum, but instead, a set of resources that can help begin transformational conversations. You know where your organization is and which approach will work best, although there will undoubtedly be some trial and error. If these exercises create dialogue, identify resistance and concern, and ultimately move your organization and work forward, then they will have served their purpose. It can also be important realize that if you are the main facilitator, you may be seen as the only person pushing these issues forward, and this can be detrimental to facilitation, before you even begin.

Also, realize that sometimes it is better to get outside help. If you find that your organization is stymied and that more harm than good is being done by pushing through material and exercises, then you may want to consider hiring a diversity and inclusion trainer to help assess your organization's climate, make recommendations, and move your organization forward in this work.

# Racial Justice Reframing Tool

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What's the Problem?</b>		
<b>What's the Cause Who/ What's the Problem?</b>		
<b>What's the Solution?</b>		
<b>What Action is Needed?</b>		
<b>What Values Are Highlighted?</b>		

## Race and Social Identities Exercise

1. Describe your race and one other social identity (gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. . .)

2. What is one challenge you face in relation to each identity (race and the other one you choose)?

3. What is one strength you have in relation to each identity?

4. How these two identities impact your work.

## Leveraging Systemic Privilege Exercise

We all have many social identities to which we belong. Some of these social identities are part of a dominant group in the United States, and some are part of oppressed group(s). In this exercise, we will identify the groups to which we belong and their position in relation to the dominant or oppressed group. When we are part of the dominant group, we have privilege that we can use to make space for the voices, ideas, experiences, and priorities of the oppressed group.

1. Look at the list of social identities below. Consider if you are part of the dominant group or the oppressed group for each dimension.

### List of Social Identities

- » Race
- » Gender
- » Age
- » Sexual Orientation
- » Size
- » Class
- » Ability
- » Religion

2. Write the social identities in the chart below:

Dominant Group	Oppressed Group

3. For *dominant identities*, how can you think about leveraging your privilege to make space for the voices, ideas, experiences, and priorities of the oppressed group? Think of three examples of things you could do:

# Window of Tolerance

## Hyper-Arousal

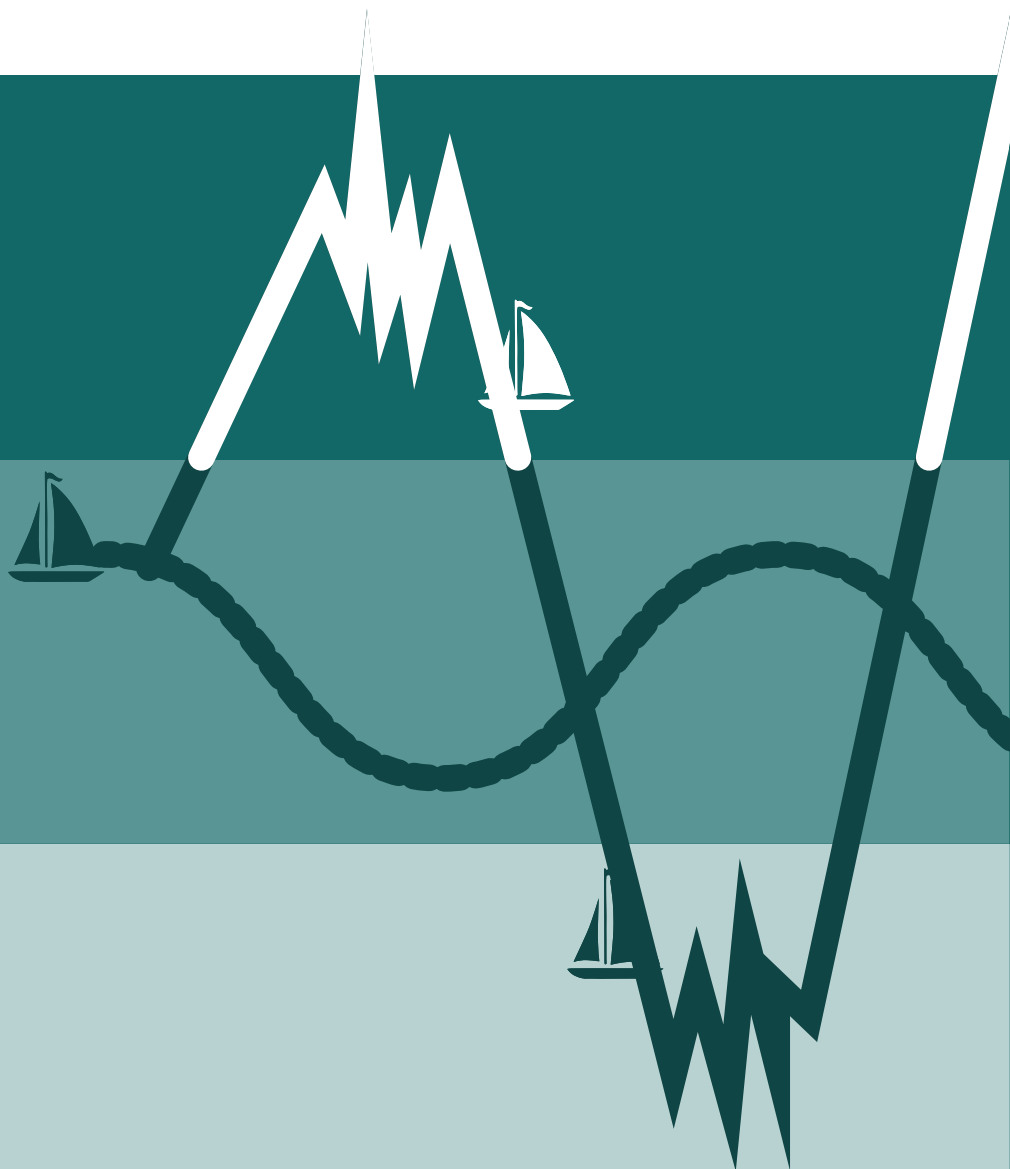
Emotional overwhelm, panic, feeling unsafe, angry, racing thoughts, anxiety, etc.

## Window of Tolerance Optimal Arousal Zone

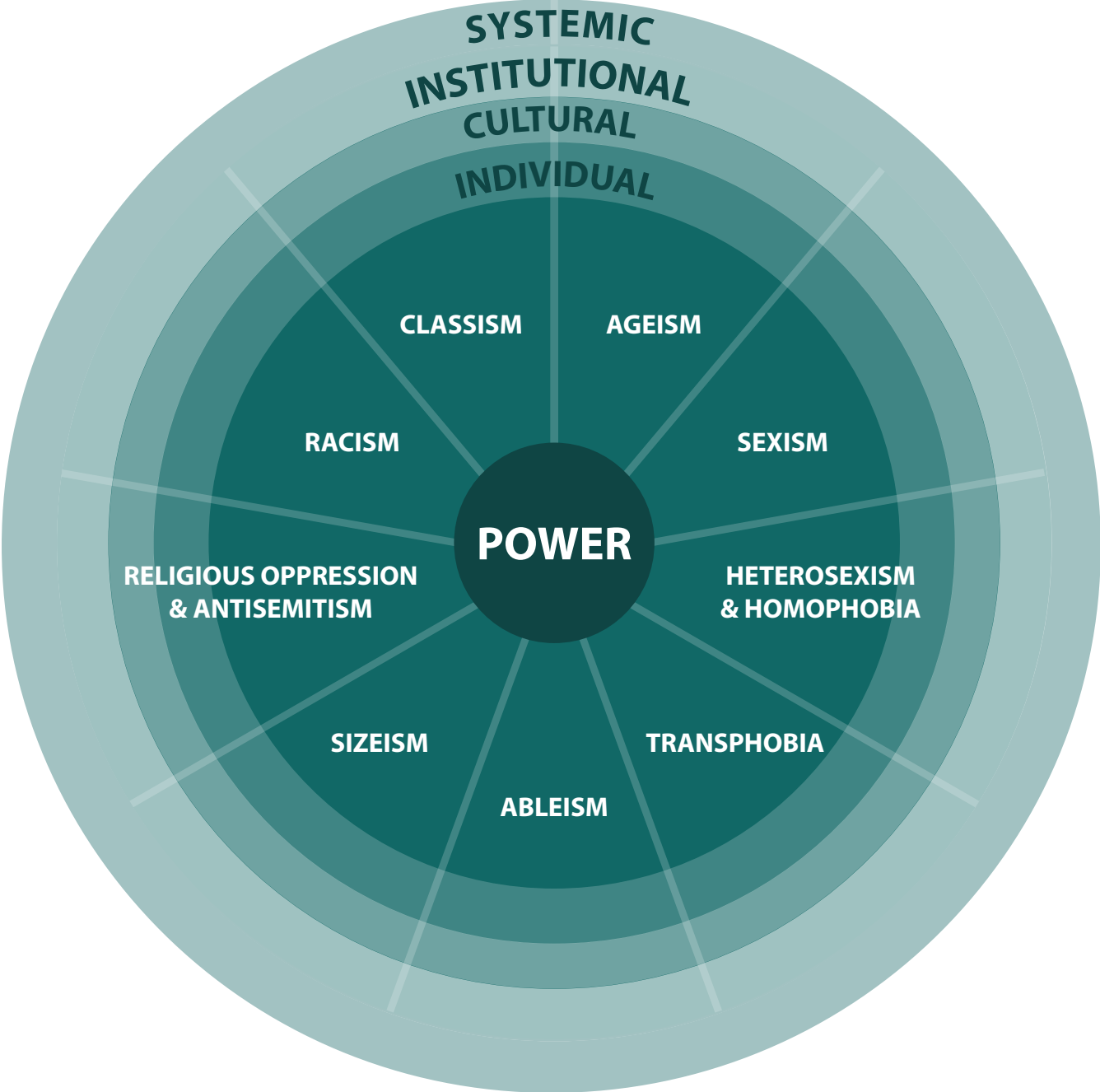
Carrying on with daily life in the river of well-being

## Hypo-Arousal

Numb, no feelings or energy, can't think, shut down, ashamed, disconnected, depression, etc.



# Wheel of Oppression



**Power + Prejudice = Oppression**

**In this model a person can move from**  
agent of oppression to an ally  
victim of oppression to empowered



## Case Study: MCSP General Membership

### Challenge:

Getting buy-in and commitment to doing social justice and racial equity work as part of our overall suicide prevention efforts, not only individually and as a general membership, but structurally as an organization.

Introducing new and difficult concepts within our organization. Sporadic attendance leaving membership at very different levels of understanding and buy-in.

### Approach/Solutions/Outcome:

Ensuring that social justice and racial equity was brought to every level of the MCSP, including the General Membership.

Ensuring that the General Membership had adequate time to focus on issues of social justice and racial equity.

### Outcome:

The outcome has been that our General Membership has begun to understand—and be able to articulate—the importance of and connections between social justice, racial equity, and suicide prevention. We are also seeing more buy-in from the membership in terms of willingness to participate and speak up during social justice and racial equity exercises.

A significant amount of work remains, but we have begun to provide the tools, language, and resources for our membership to make the connections between social justice, racial equity, and suicide prevention. As we continue this process, we hope to engage more stakeholders in the creation of specific resources for different groups (providers, state agencies, Regional Coalitions, loss and attempt survivors, etc.)

### Narrative:

The MCSP General Membership meets every other month, with an average attendance of about 30 members, although there is fairly significant variation depending on a number of factors.

Our membership consists of providers, representatives from state agencies, members of our 10 Regional Coalitions, loss and attempt survivors, and concerned community members (among others.) We wanted to create an approach that, from the outset, was able to speak to and engage all of these stakeholders around issues of social justice and racial equity and suicide prevention, as well as provide some benefit to them in their own lives and work.

We began with two simple exercises which are included in this toolkit—the window of tolerance and the wheel of oppression. Our initial effort was met with mostly positive, although mixed response. It was clear that not all activities or exercises were going to be relevant or impactful with everyone at the table, however, we listened to the questions people continued to ask—the most common being “but WHY are social justice and racial equity so important in suicide prevention?”

Noting that this question came up at several meetings from several stakeholders, the MCSP Alliance for Equity worked to create a handout (included in the first section of this toolkit) examining why social justice and racial equity were integral to suicide prevention efforts.

Some talking points included:

- » While suicide impacts every demographic, approaches to suicide prevention often do not.
- » Oppression and oppressive systems create additional barriers for people of color to find support and resources during a suicidal crisis, and existing resources may not be culturally responsive or appropriate.
- » In communities of color, addressing racism is a form suicide prevention.
- » Attending to racial equity does not mean shifting the entire focus of our work, but rather expanding the perspectives on, frameworks for, and approaches to suicide prevention.
- » Addressing issues of social justice and racial equity positively impacts the lives of individuals and communities of color as well as white communities and individuals.
- » When we talk about social justice, we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color, but for other oppressed groups as well.
- » Additionally, we can address multiple demographics (not just race, but also gender, religion, etc.) better when we examine systemic issues and work toward systemic change.

We presented the first iteration of the above information to our stakeholders at a General Membership meeting and took their questions and feedback into account when refining the document. We also received feedback from members of the MCSP Alliance for Equity and the MCSP Executive Committee.

Some of the additional materials and handouts in this Toolkit have been created in direct response to conversations that originated in General Membership meetings. In this way, the inclusion of social justice and racial equity in our agendas has been as instructive for the social justice and racial equity work of the Alliance and the MCSP in general as it has been for our membership.

Although we have not measured MCSP members' knowledge gains around social justice and racial equity in any quantitative way, there has been a qualitative shift and evolution in the conversations that take place around these exercises. When questions arise, it is now not uncommon for another MCSP member or EC member to respond, instead of waiting for the facilitators of the exercise to provide a response. This furthers our goal of centering this work in many individuals within the organization and has also created the opportunity for some extremely productive conversations.

We are still learning the most effective way to implement this work within the General Membership and anticipate points of resistance or areas where clarification might be needed. For some exercises, we have been able to anticipate and speak to these areas ahead of time; for others, the facilitators encountered completely unanticipated questions.

Our work is a dialogue; questions can be asked and, if not answered, at least brought to the group for meaningful discussion. In addition to providing tools, resources, knowledge, and language to our membership, it is equally significant that we are able to engage more stakeholders and perspectives to widen the lens and deepen the conversations around social justice, racial equity, and suicide prevention.

# 6 appendices

Definitions

## Definitions<sup>17</sup>

*Note: These concepts are very complex. There is disagreement amongst scholars about the meanings of these terms, especially the finer points or things that vary in different contexts. The definitions offered here are very basic. Our purpose is to have a shared understanding of these concepts as a foundation, not to fully explore them or suggest that these definitions fully capture the concepts' complexity.*

### **Culture**

a learned and variable (changing) system of meanings that is shared and transmitted by an identifiable group of people and represent a way of living.

Culture is fluid and dynamic. Systems of meanings encompass include social norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as more concrete things like food, art, architecture and buildings, music, etc. Culture has modal practices (what “most” people do within a culture that characterizes that culture) as well as individual manifestation (how a particular individual engages with or reflects a culture).

### **Ethnicity or ethnocultural experience**

the distinctive cultural patterns shared by a group of people that are often unified by a common geographic origin, history, and ancestral heritage.

### **Race**

a social category to which individuals are assigned by themselves and others, usually on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color. Although related to physical characteristics such as skin color, racial categories and their distinctions are not biological, genetic, or inherent. Racial categories were historically created and are currently maintained to differentiate those who are “entitled” to power and resources and those who are not. See American Anthropological Association statement on race.

### **Sex**

a social construction related to biological differences in chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs and secondary sexual characteristics. The expectation is that these will all be congruent with a single category, but this is not always the case.

### **Gender**

a socially constructed, often categorical distinction, related to how different groups of people are expected to act and the characteristics they are expected to have, based in socially created ideas about the meaning and behavioral implications of sex.

### **Sexual Orientation**

the sex or gender one chooses in romantic, sexual, or affectional relationships. Includes aspects of identity, behavior, emotional attraction, sexual attraction. The language of “sexuality” is often being used currently, rather than “sexual orientation.”

---

1. References: Suyemoto appendix

### **Class**

a status related to different kinds of resources, access, or capital, including financial capital (money), educational capital, social capital (relationships), and social status (determined by cultural hierarchies)

### **Minority**

any group of people having less power and privilege in society.

### **Bias**

the tendency to think, feel or behave in a certain way, which arises alongside the natural processes of generalization and categorization influenced by social categories and distinctions related to power.

### **Stereotype**

an overgeneralization about a group of people. Stereotypes tend to arise from assumptions based on biases that become rigid and then spread more widely amongst a culture or group.

### **Power**

the ability to exert influence over an outcome, or a person's actions, feelings or thoughts.

### **Privilege**

the power and advantages one holds as a result of belonging to a dominant group or a group that is of higher social status. It is a social phenomenon and not a property of individuals. Here, we are referencing unearned privilege, rather than merit (power earned through effort).

### **Racism**

a system of judgments, beliefs, actions, norms, and social/institutional practices based on race that protect privilege. Racism can be interpersonal, cultural, institutional, or internalized. Racism can be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. The system of racism is most harmful to those who are in the minority (lacking the privilege and power) but is also damaging to the dominant group.

The core components of this definition can be generalized to all of the "isms", such as sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, etc. All of the isms are systems of privilege that are formed from the interaction of power with stereotypes, prejudice, and bias.



