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Introduction

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
– James Baldwin

Thank you for picking up Awareness to Action: A Guide for Boards and Chief Executives on a Racial Equity Journey. This guide is designed to meet boards where they are in their racial equity journey and provide action steps that boards can take to enhance their efforts. BoardSource envisions a future where the nonprofit community has the leadership to fulfill its purpose and create a just world where all can thrive. We believe a commitment to racial equity is essential to making this vision a reality.

BoardSource embarked on its own racial equity journey almost a decade ago. We believed that to serve our organization and sector better, we had to work towards greater diversity across BoardSource, internally with a diverse staff, and by engaging our board in racial equity work.

Today, 70% of our board is comprised of people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC), and our staff is more than 50% BIPOC. In 2022 we welcomed our first CEO of color and in 2023 our first Board Chair of color.

We continue to do internal racial equity work and plan activities and events through our staff-led diversity inclusion culture and equity task force (DICE). We come to this work with deep humility and know that there is no single path to centering racial equity on nonprofit boards. We know that our path has been and will continue to be messy. There is no end point – the work will continue as long as our organization exists, and we are steadfast in our commitment to racial equity work. Our journey towards racial equity enhances and influences our governance and operations, fostering innovation and it has been profoundly enriching.

Nonprofit organizations across this country hold a unique place in our society, addressing some of the most entrenched social injustices and enriching our lives in countless ways. We know the sector has a long journey to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. According to BoardSource’s 2023 Leading with Intent Report, 63% of nonprofit board members are white and 10% of nonprofit boards are all white.*

At BoardSource, we find these numbers unacceptable, and as an organization committed to supporting nonprofit leadership and boards, we are working to transform them.

The history of, and continuing daily manifestations, of racism in our country affect the work we do as a nonprofit sector. To close our eyes to it is to dishonor the reality of BIPOC communities in our country. To name it, grapple with it, lean into discomfort, and work to address it within our organizational structures can be healing for ourselves, our institutions, and our work. Those most affected by inequitable systems must be centered in the efforts to dismantle them. When our boardrooms include their experience and expertise, we can transform the structures that underlie the most challenging problems we seek to address. With diversity of thought and experience, we can imagine and work towards more equitable and just communities. That is our hope for this guide.

We look forward to supporting your journey and hearing how it unfolds.

Thank you for joining us!

Monika and Mark

*BoardSource obtained this data from Candid which is lower than other sources. At the time of this publication, the 2023 Leading with Intent report was being drafted and was not ready for public release. For the 2021 report and data visit www.leadingwithintent.org.
Nonprofits are embedded in communities across our country to address long-standing inequalities that manifest through poverty, lack of affordable housing, poor access to health care, and unequal civil rights, just to name a few. Nonprofits also help us imagine and work towards thriving communities, which, by definition, requires inclusion.

After the racial reckoning following the murder of George Floyd, many organizations, particularly at the staff level, embarked on deep learning journeys to understand structural racism in our country. Many boards joined them. If you are holding this guide, we suspect that you are a member of one of those boards, or you are drawn to exploring how to help your board begin this journey. We developed this guide for you.

Level-Setting
It is undeniable that racial discrimination exists and is levied against many people of color. In “The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future,” author Robert Jones expresses that America’s original sin is not, in fact, the enslavement of Africans but a continuing pattern of racial violence against people of color. However, the structural racism against Black Americans opens up space for broader forms of racism and discrimination faced by other groups.

As such, our guide primarily focuses on the Black experience while acknowledging that racial discrimination is also levied against other communities of color.

We also acknowledge that while much of this guide has relevance to boards globally, it is written from a U.S. centered cultural and historical context. As such, readers from countries outside of the U.S. will need to consider how their country’s history and cultural context around race, ethnicity, and other systems of social hierarchy and oppression may require different thinking and approaches.

In this guide, we utilize the term BIPOC, as it is the most widely accepted description of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. We acknowledge that, for many, the term is limiting and does not fully reflect the complexity of people’s identities. We encourage the sector to try to be as inclusive as possible. For guidance, Kristen Mack, at the MacArthur Foundation wrote a blog post entitled BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and the Power and Limitations of Umbrella Terms, which may be useful.

In addition, BoardSource intentionally uses the smaller case “w” when describing people of European descent and capital “B” when referring to Black racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Our guide seeks to illuminate the need for racial equity on boards, so we are sensitive to language that may have the effect of elevating or diminishing particular groups. Additionally, we recognize that capitalizing the “w” is increasingly viewed as affirming whiteness as the standard and the norm, which is the antithesis to achieving racial equity. There are arguments for different approaches, as seen in these two examples: Associated Press Definitive Source and the Diversity Style Guide.

Finally, racial equity work will often require external diversity experts who are well-versed in discussing race with boards and organizations that may not be racially diverse. We encourage readers to move through their racial equity journeys with humility and be open to engaging outside experts to assist in implementing the action steps we propose in the following sections to increase their level of success.
While we acknowledge the racial discrimination against other communities of color reflected in the shaded boxes below, our guide will primarily focus on the Black experience.

**Indigenous Community**

President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. For 20 years, 100,000 Native Americans were forcefully relocated by local and federal military. This resulted in the loss of Native American lives and ancestral land through exposure to the elements, diseases, and starvation. Source: Britannica.com

"In the 20th century, the U.S. government has repeatedly participated in and allowed the theft of Native land, resources, and identity. From the Manhattan Project through today, uranium is mined on or near tribal lands, often at the expense of the Navajo and Lakota peoples, leading to extensive uranium poisoning and land contamination." Source: Network Advocates.org

**Latino Community**

"Latinos represent 13.2% of all eligible voters in the United States but continue to face exclusion or discrimination through restrictive voter I.D. laws, roll purging, unnotified polling place closures, and early voting reduction, all of which weaken Latinos' ability to fully exercise their right to vote."

According to the 2020 Census, Hispanic average wealth was $58,490 versus $195,600 for Non Hispanics. Disparities in employment, education, and housing—all of which carry legacies of structural racism—continue to reinforce this racial wealth gap.

Source: Census.gov

**Asian Community**

During the attack on Pearl Harbor, about 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry lived on the U.S. mainland, and about two-thirds were U.S. born. Virtually all were forced into internment camps and their constitutional rights were violated. Source: Nationalww2museum.org

*Anti-Asian American/Pacific Islander violence has been rising since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic,* according to the FBI and advocacy groups. In 2021, anti-Asian hate crimes in San Francisco increased by 567% from the previous year... “Experts say the lack of data fosters stereotypes and false premises about Asian Americans being a ‘model minority’ and masks disparities and inequalities.”

Source: Axios.com
Racial Inequality: The Current Reality of Nonprofit Boards

Data from BoardSource’s 2023 *Leading with Intent* report shows that boards are also facing challenges reflected in the broader communities we serve. We found that boards are:

- **Lacking in racial and ethnic diversity:**
  - According to data taken from Candid, 63% of board members are white and 10% of boards are all white.*
  - Boards that are lacking in racial/ethnic diversity self-report that their boards’ racial/ethnic makeup negatively impacts their ability to:
    - understand the organization’s operating environment and work,
    - attract and retain talent for both the board and staff,
    - enhance the organization’s standing with funders and donors and the general public,
    - understand how to best serve the community, and
    - cultivate trust and confidence with the community served.

- **Preoccupied with fundraising above all else:** 48% of chief executives rated fundraising as “very important”–above most other categories of board performance, including:
  - Knowledge of organizational programs, (37%) and
  - Understanding the context in which the organization is working, (39%)

- **Disconnected from the communities and people they serve:**
  - 43% of all chief executives said that they did not have the right board members to “establish trust with the communities they serve.”
  - Only a third of boards (33%) place a high priority on “knowledge of the community served.”
  - Even fewer (29%) place a high priority on “membership within the community served.”

- **Ill-informed about the ecosystems in which their organizations are operating:**
  - Only 28% of boards say that “knowledge of the organization’s work or field” is a high priority in board recruitment, and
  - Only 11% place a high priority on “prior or current experience with a similar organization/mission area.”

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*BoardSource obtained this data from Candid which is lower than other sources
At the time of this publication, the 2023 Leading with Intent report was being drafted and was not ready for public release. For the 2021 report and data visit [www.leadingwithintent.org](http://www.leadingwithintent.org).
Centering Racial Equity in the Boardroom

BoardSource believes that centering racial equity in the boardroom is a definitive way to ensure the sector is cognizant of these disparities and is trying to rectify them. This starts with the board intentionally making decisions through a racial equity lens. If your board has not discussed what racial equity means in the context of your organization’s work, your first discussion may bring up feelings of awkwardness and discomfort. As such, it is important to strategically think through how to prepare the board for this first conversation and clarify why it is imperative for your specific organization’s mission and collective purpose to do so.

A Framework for Centering Race Equity

Purpose-Driven Board Leadership is one framework to center race equity. When boards shift toward a purpose-driven approach, race equity is prioritized and integrated.

Historically, boards have recruited new members to fundraise for the organization’s sustainability and to provide access to networks of influence. That’s no longer enough, if it ever was. The people who meet that criterion and have historically done board work are only one subset of most communities, resulting in large portions of the community being left outside the boardroom.

When large portions of a community are absent, boards miss the opportunity to understand fully the intricacies our communities face.

What is missed when our boards reflect none of the people most impacted by the issue our organizations exist to serve?

Sensemaking. Discernment. A deep appreciation of the issue and the possible solutions. Community trust. Our communities demand more from our organizations. If our boards don’t include those knowledgeable about the issues they face, or are not connected to the communities they serve, they are likely focused on the wrong thing. Turn this challenge into an opportunity.

The input of those impacted by your organization must be included in your board’s decision-making power

Who you recruit and subsequently invite to serve on the board changes what the board understands its work to be and how that work gets prioritized. When boards are intentional about recruiting, they consider the intersectionality of those being recruited. A wider variety of voices around the boardroom table allows for different ideas to be introduced, different issues to be deliberated, different work to be accomplished, and different solutions to be advanced.

Purpose-Driven Board Leadership

A purpose-driven board believes it is responsible for engaging and sharing power with those impacted by the organization’s work, including at the board level. It is not enough to have good intentions or be well-informed; boards are responsible for engaging directly with those they seek to serve to make organizational decisions with a real understanding of community assets, needs, preferences, and aspirations.

And while this approach requires deep listening to program participants’ needs and experiences, it goes far beyond that. It’s about power.

Purpose-driven boards share power by ensuring that lived experiences are embedded into the composition of the board, with all the rights, responsibilities, and power that board membership brings. The individuals who comprise a nonprofit board reflect an organization’s values and beliefs about who should be empowered and entrusted with its most important decisions.

The following four principles are the framework for Purpose-Driven Board Leadership. It is not necessary to complete them in the order listed. Boards may start with the most comfortable principle and then move to others in their journey. As with much of this guide and this work, it’s messy, and there will be times when we are uncomfortable.
Principle 1: Purpose Before Organization

Purpose before organization means that the organization prioritizes its mission and collective purpose, sometimes over the organization itself. The organization, and all organizations exist to advance the work. A purpose-first framing puts the work and the collective purpose of the ecosystem ahead of, when necessary, the organization itself.

Example: The March of Dimes’ original mission was to eliminate polio. When a polio vaccine became available, they had three choices: 1. They could have fought the vaccine to sustain the organization, in conflict with the mission. 2. They could have gone out of business in alignment with the mission. 3. They could have expanded to include other birth defects, changed their mission, and advanced their purpose, which they did. Charities don’t exist to sustain themselves. Purpose over organization reframes the work, not the organization, as paramount.

Principle 2: Respect for the Ecosystem

An organization’s actions can positively or negatively impact its surrounding ecosystem. Considering the ecosystem in the decision-making process requires including options that benefit not just our organizations but the entire ecosystem and all of its players.

The ecosystem is the people and organizations that work together toward a collective purpose and includes organizations operating in a similar or complementary area or the same geographic area, including the public policy and funding environment. All organizations operate in an ecosystem, and if the largest institution only does what’s best for itself, it might be at the expense of the smaller institutions or the people in a community. Moreover, the smaller institutions sometimes do better in one form or fashion, and the larger institutions can learn from that. The work is advanced collectively.

Example: Consider the case of a housing development organization choosing to sell its apartment building that provides affordable housing. It could sell to the highest bidder, knowing that the developer wants to offer high-end condos. For a lower bid, it could sell it to another housing development organization that has promised to provide housing and services to the families currently there or others who met the same criteria. A traditional board might take the highest bid, likely as aligned with their financial policies. A purpose-driven board would sell to the other housing organization as aligned with their values and the collective purpose of their ecosystem.

Principle 3: Equity Mindset

When boards embrace an equity mindset, board members commit to advancing equitable outcomes and interrogate their own beliefs, organizational policies, and board decisions to avoid ways that the organization’s strategy and work could reinforce systemic inequities. They also work to dismantle any barriers that may have been created by organizational decisions in the past, because boards that don’t have an equity mindset can’t make equitable decisions.

Example: An organization had a very diverse staff in the aggregate, but when you looked at individual roles, the leadership is entirely white, and the direct service staff is primarily Black. The board interrogated the hiring practices to ensure a more diverse pool of candidates for all levels of leadership and created procedures, plans, and policies to avoid potential glass-cliff situations for senior leaders.

Principle 4: Authorized Voice and Power

This principle recognizes that power and voice must be informed and authorized by those impacted by the organization’s work. It is not reasonable nor acceptable to make decisions on behalf of communities without their input, permission, and representation.

Example: A primarily white, exclusively upper-and middle-class board led an organization serving Hispanic/Latinx children in a neighborhood in which none of them lived. Board meetings were held in the law firm of the treasurer. The chair began to question what their deliberations were missing and if their lack of community knowledge impacted the choices they saw and the ones they selected. He began to consider if different conversations would be held if the board included members of the community served. He put together a committee to find out. That committee later recommended changes to their board recruitment process to ensure a more diverse pool of candidates, including former service recipients and neighborhood leaders, and a policy for the board to ensure board members of color are included and embraced in committee leadership and as officers.
How to Incorporate This Guide Into Your Racial Equity Journey

As your board and organization embark upon a racial equity journey, it is important to acknowledge the following:

**Racial equity work is non-linear.** Although this guide is presented sequentially, the reality of the work often requires that boards circle back or revisit conversations from earlier in their journey. Given the dynamic nature of board composition and culture, that is normal, positive, and it should be embraced by the board instead of resisted.

**Racial equity work is messy, unpredictable, and uncomfortable.** No matter how well-considered the advice offered in this guide is, and how steadfastly you follow it, there is no escaping the fact that racial equity work can be messy, fraught, and organizationally disruptive. There will undoubtedly be things that come up that catch you by surprise or feel like a setback. That is part of learning and growth. Try to embrace these twists and turns as part of the journey.

**Racial equity work requires sustained commitment.** Advancing racial equity within an organization and its board is not something to “get done” or “check off the list.” It requires deep commitment and fortitude from a core group of governing-level leaders, who are willing to put time, energy, and reputational capital behind the movement for change. This core group should include the chief executive or executive director and at least one board member – ideally the board chair or another influential board leader. This guide is designed to be used by a member of that core group as they work with others to navigate through and towards a stronger, more deeply embedded commitment to racial equity.

*Awareness to Action: A Guide for Boards and Chief Executives on a Racial Equity Journey* is organized around three “Starting Points” that serve as prompts guiding leaders to identify 1.) where the board is in their racial equity journey; 2.) action steps to move them along in that journey; 3.) and interactive activities and resources to guide and ensure a successful journey. This process offers much more in the way of “considerations” and “possibilities” since an organization’s racial equity journey is not “one size fits all.” The guide also suggests ways to incorporate racial equity into the mission, vision, governance, and structure of the organization, so that no matter who the leader is, the racial equity commitment of the organization is enduring.
If you can engage into one of the three starting points, you are well on your way. However, if you are Board President, a new leader, or have new board members, it may be difficult to discern where individual board members are in their racial equity journey.

It will be important to shift your focus to more personal and interpersonal dimensions of race and racial bias.

Here are a few activities to guide you:

**Begin** a conversation about personal history and experience at a board gathering or retreat. A basic starting point is the [Greater Good Bridging Differences Quiz](https://www.greatergood.org/article/bridging-differences-quiz). You can also engage with questions from the [Invisible Knapsack](https://www.invisibleknapsack.com/) by Peggy McIntosh.

**Invite** each board member to share a time that an aspect of their identity changed the way they experienced a situation. To explain what this could look like, check out [Owning My Whiteness](https://www.boardsource.org/blog/owning-my-whiteness) blog post, by Kevin Walker, BoardSource board member and president of the Northwest Area Foundation. Board members can also write and share the “Where I’m From” poem, that explores snapshots of an individual's life.

**Show** several short videos that allow board members to absorb critical facts about structural, institutional, and systemic forms of racism

- [Act.tv](https://www.act.tv)
- [Vubiz eLearning](https://vubizlearning.com)
- [ABC7 - “What are Structural, Institutional and Systemic Racism?”](https://abc7.com)

After viewing films, invite board members to share insights via prompts.

- I was surprised to learn...
- I am curious to learn more about...
- I am reflecting on...

**Participate** in a full-group session or training on cross-racial conversations about race and racial identities. Possible resources include:

- [Crossroads](https://www.crossroadsisters.org)
- [PISAB (The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond)](https://www.pisab.org)
- [Courageous Conversations](https://www.courageousconversations.com)
- [Race Forward](https://raceforward.org)
Racial equity is on your board’s radar screen, and board members demonstrate readiness and commitment to deeper engagement in racial equity.

**Promising Signs**

- The board is asking race-aware questions about the community in which the organization works, its program participants, its programmatic impact and efficacy across racial demographics, and outreach to potential program participants.
- The board is focused on its demographic composition, has prioritized having racial diversity within the board, and can clearly articulate why it matters to the organization’s work.
- Conversations about race, racial inequity, and the organization’s work related to racial equity have taken place within the boardroom.
- Board members comfortably discuss issues of race across racial identities.
- Board members of color express openness to engaging in racial conversations with white board members.
- Board members of all races demonstrate — through words and actions — that they care about racial equity.
- When discussing race (directly or indirectly), board members acknowledge that racial inequities exist due to intentional societal actions throughout history.

*Given the work you have done to build a board ready to engage deeply, you are well on your way to ensuring that the board continues its commitment, and you have more flexibility in engaging the board further to address racial equity issues. BoardSource encourages these additional actions to continue your journey.*
Racial equity is on your board’s radar screen, and board members demonstrate readiness and commitment to deeper engagement in racial equity.

HOST A FULL-BOARD SEMINAR OR TRAINING
Emphasize the origins and impact of racism, such as those provided by the Racial Equity Institute

TAKE A FIELD TRIP
Visit a museum that provides valuable insights into the history and impact of racism in your community, and/or a context relevant to your organization’s mission and purpose. Follow up with a facilitated conversation as a full board to discuss what board members took away from the experience

CONVENE
Organize a full- or small-group discussion after a shared individual learning experience such as a film, book, or online course

START A BOOK CLUB
“Caste,” by Isabel Wilkerson
“The Color of Law,” by Richard Rothstein
“The Sum of Us,” by Heather McGhee
“The White Bonus” by Tracie McMillan

Recommended Resources:

Movies & Short Films:
- RaceForward’s series on Systemic Racism
- Netflix’s “Explained” episode – The Racial Wealth Gap
- Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America (trailer)

Online Courses/Series:
- PBS’ “Race: The Power of an Illusion” (episode three is especially relevant)
- Master Class’s “Black History, Freedom, & Love”
Adverse Signs

- The board pushes back against conversations that include a race-based analysis of programmatic impact, perhaps pushing for a “color-blind” approach instead.
- The board has not intentionally prioritized racial diversity within the board and cannot articulate a clear case for board diversity.
- The board has never had a conversation about race or racial inequity as a part of a board meeting, or conversations have been awkwardly dropped by the group when raised by an individual board member or the chief executive.
- You hear or sense confusion (or even frustration) from individual board members about why there is so much focus on race, racism, and racial inequity in society.
- Individual board members demonstrate an “us/them” orientation in the way that they talk about program participants or community members that feels racialized in a way that assumes that “us” is white.
- Board members talk about race or diversity in a superficial or tokenistic way.
Action Steps

- **Conduct** a full board self-assessment utilizing the following tools:

  BoardSource recommends a biannual board assessment utilizing the [BoardSource Board Self-Assessment](https://www.boardsource.org), which invites reflection on the board’s culture and dynamics.

  The Building Movement Project’s (BMP) [Building Blocks for Change](https://www.buildingblocksforchange.org) race equity assessment tool to foster workplace equity.

- **Facilitation**: Engage a facilitator well versed in diversity, equity, and inclusion and whom is adept at group dynamics, cultural competence, and navigating conflict. Depending on the organization, an external facilitator may encourage greater participation than an internal one. Be sure to discuss this with the board chair to align the two of you on plans. Ensure that you work with the board chair on the agenda so the conversation about race and racial inequity does not catch board members by surprise.

- **Provide advance materials**: Determine what materials will help board members feel prepared and supported as they enter this conversation. Anticipate that questions or points of confusion may emerge. Coordinate with the facilitator on what to provide to help the conversation avoid derailment.

- **Follow-up**: It will be important to have a plan for post-meeting follow-up so that board members have a sense of where things will be going. This could take many forms, but some general guidance include:

  - **Expressing gratitude**: For many board members, engagement in this conversation was likely taxing and may have left them feeling vulnerable and unresolved. Make sure to thank them (again) for their openness to the conversation.

  - **Inviting feedback**: If you have a practice of doing board meeting evaluations, include a question or two that invites feedback about the conversation. Keep it focused on the sense they are making of the conversation and what—if anything—they want you to know about where they hope things will go next. If you don’t conduct surveys, you can still invite more informal feedback. Just remember that this is about understanding where the board is, not a referendum on whether or not the conversation will continue.

  - **Encouraging further reflection**: Consider additional readings, resources, or outlets for discussion that might be useful to individual board members based on the shape of your conversation. Resist the urge to send an exhaustive list and instead, offer a few choice items to support or spark additional reflection.

  - **Sharing next steps**: Even if you’re not clear on what the next steps will be, you can share that there will be a discussion about the next steps and that you look forward to sharing more soon. The important thing here is to signal that this conversation was a beginning rather than an end. This will be important for all to hear, particularly those that are the most ardent supporters of work to advance racial equity and those who are most opposed to it.
Starting Point #2

Racial equity is seen as core to your organization’s mission and collective purpose.

Promising Signs

- When engaging in conversations of strategic importance, racial equity is consistently discussed as a lens through which to consider different options and prioritized in final decision-making.

- When discussing programmatic impact and results, there is regular reflection on whether programming is reaching and serving communities of color in a way that advances equity within the organization’s area of work.

- When reflecting on board composition and board recruitment, the board demonstrates that it sees ensuring racial and ethnic diversity as mission-critical.

- When planning for board leadership positions (officers, committee chairs, etc.), racial diversity is discussed and prioritized.

You and the board recognize the fundamental purpose and necessity of having structures in place to ensure racial equity is important organizationally and on the board level. BoardSource encourages these additional actions to continue your journey.
**Actions**

Racial equity is seen as core to your organization’s mission and collective purpose.

- **Make space in meetings to reflect on what committing to advancing racial equity means for your organization, both philosophically, practically and tactically.**
- **Develop a plan to communicate what internal and external stakeholders should expect of you considering this newly formalized commitment.**
- **Incorporate in a strategic plan how the board and organization will be accountable to the community you serve and the mission, vision, etc.**
- **Reinforce commitment from current Board members to continue racial equity work.**
- **Leverage board attrition and recruitment to bring on board members who are fully committed to your organization’s racial equity commitment.**

**Adverse Signs**

- Discussion of race and racial inequity are absent (or dismissed) as a part of conversations of strategic significance.
- There is resistance to looking at — or addressing — indications that programming might be inadequately meeting the needs of communities of color, and a drive to focus only on aggregated indicators of impact and feedback and “the majority.”
- Discussions of board composition and leadership are “color blind” or actively dismissive of the importance of racial and ethnic diversity.
- There is an implicit assumption that the organization is doing good work and couldn’t possibly be creating harm within the communities it seeks to serve.

**Action Steps**

- Organizations often review mission statements, so encourage board members to review 50+ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Mission Statement Examples. This list provides examples of how for-profit companies have incorporated DEI in their mission statements. Utilize these examples to have the board create their own diversity statement.
- Explore racial biases through Harvard’s Project Implicit. The mission of Project Implicit is to educate the public about bias and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the internet.
- Encourage board members to challenge and question “color-blind” narratives that overlook or downplay racial disparities.
- Be open and willing to engage in conversations about race, even when they may be uncomfortable or challenging. Encourage board members to listen with empathy, and learn from different perspectives.
Your board is taking action to embed racial equity throughout your organization.

Promising Signs

- Discussions of the actions the organization is taking to align with its racial equity commitment are a regular part of board discussions.
- The board has had focused conversations about board-level change that is necessary to ensure that it is well-positioned to lead and support the organization’s racial equity journey, including a particular focus on board composition and decision-making structures and practices to ensure that its work is grounded in — and trusted by — the community the organization seeks to serve.
- The board has formalized plans of action for its own change and is holding itself accountable for putting those plans into action.
- Each board committee has reflected on how its work does — or will — advance racial equity within the organization, including the ways in which it could inadvertently uphold racial inequity — and what it’s willing to do to avoid that.

All board members do not have to be completely comfortable or well-versed on these subjects, but they need to have enough confidence that they are willing to engage productively versus shutting down due to fear or discomfort. BoardSource encourages these additional actions to continue your journey.
Adverse Signs

- The organization’s commitment and actions to advance racial equity are largely informal or programmatic and have not been incorporated into core institutional documents.
- The organization’s commitment and action to advance racial equity relies on a small subset of board or staff leaders and there is uncertainty about its permanence beyond their tenures.
- The board is invested in the idea of having reached a plateau or pinnacle in its racial equity ideas, and actively resists or discounts evidence of inequities in its work.

Action

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies, procedures, and institutional documents and identify where racial equity reflections are lacking.
- Offer training programs and resources to educate employees about racial equity issues, unconscious bias, and cultural competency. This training should be mandatory for all staff and supplemented with ongoing support and development opportunities.
- Collaborate with communities affected by the organization’s work, advocacy groups, and racial equity experts to share best practices.
- Take steps to diversify the board, committees, and staff leadership and include them in discussions about race equity.
- Engage the entire board, executive leadership, and staff at all levels in discussions about racial equity. Provide education and training to build awareness, understanding, and buy-in for racial equity initiatives across the organization. Encourage active participation and ownership of racial equity goals and strategies.
- Facilitate open and honest discussions within the board about the evidence of inequities in the organization’s work. Create a safe space for board members to share their perspectives, concerns, and experiences related to racial equity.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of the board and staff and address setbacks and challenges as part of the journey.
Going Deeper to Institutionalize Racial Equity

A critical component of achieving racial equity is to institutionalize and operationalize it at every level of the organization. For the board, that means owning the policies and practices that are squarely within the board’s core roles and responsibilities. This section focuses on five areas of ownership for the board that can be barriers to – or avenues for – racial equity:

- **Statements of Organizational Identity and Purpose**
- **Developing a Racially Diverse Board**
- **Success at Succession: Policies & Practices to Avoid the Glass Cliff**
- **Fostering a Racially Equitable Staff Culture**
- **Deployment of Organizational Resources**

**Statements of Organizational Identity & Purpose**

Incorporating racial equity into its vision, mission, or purpose statement is a signal that an organization sees advancing racial equity as central to its work. At a minimum, organizations working to institutionalize their commitment to racial equity should incorporate that commitment into their statement of values, which creates an opportunity for them to articulate why and how it matters to their organization and how it guides both the board and staff in organizational decision-making and planning.

*Vision, Mission, Purpose, and Values*

**Strategic Plan or Framework**

Strategic plans are not permanent, but they are a longer-term blueprint for understanding the organization's programming priorities. When their racial equity commitment has been institutionalized, that should be obvious and clear as a part of every articulation of organizational strategy.

**Bylaws**

Generally, bylaws should be written in a way that gives the organization a reasonable degree of flexibility and avoids being so specific and precise that it sets the organization up to be out of compliance with the bylaws on a regular basis. For example, BoardSource recommends that bylaws state the board’s size as a range rather than a fixed number or target and that what constitutes a quorum is designated. This helps point the board to the general target, but does not require precision across the variability of things like board resignations, recruitment delays, etc.

The same principle holds true when it comes to institutionalizing an organizational commitment to racial equity as a part of the bylaws. Boards may consider articulating generalized goals or expectations for the board in terms of its composition and commitment to equitable practices, but it should avoid stating that in a way that creates specific targets or quotas, both to ensure operating flexibility and to avoid legal risk.
Developing a Racially Diverse Board

*Elevating the Leadership of Board Members of Color*
Representation in leadership matters, so it's important to think about the racial diversity not just of the board overall, but within the formalized leadership positions on the board – officers, committee chairs, and other key leadership posts. Consider a review of the demographics of the board officers from the past 10 years as an input to a conversation with the Governance Committee about how the organization is doing in terms of its track record. Use this as a starting point for a discussion about what the board will do to prioritize a new – or continued – commitment to diverse leadership within key board leadership positions.

*Designing an Intentional Recruitment Strategy & Identifying Potential Candidates*
Developing a comprehensive board recruitment strategy begins with a discussion of the skills, experiences, perspectives, and access to networks that are needed collectively across the board. Once you have a good sense of what is needed overall, you can start to think about ways to identify BIPOC candidates that can bring those perspectives, connections, and skills. Counterintuitively, sometimes the more specific you are about what is needed, the easier it is to identify potential candidates. This is because the specificity allows individuals to think beyond their closest friends and confidantes, and instead, go deeper into their network.
Reach out to key stakeholders to invite their suggestions, as well as tapping less traditional methods for board recruitment. This includes:

- **Current board members.** Do not limit your candidate brainstorming to members of the governance committee. Ask each board member who they know within their network that would be aligned with the board’s recruiting priorities and increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the board. Be explicit that recruitment efforts will be focused on increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the board until the board is in a stronger place in terms of diversity, but keep a list of other strong candidates for the board in the future. Organizations must also be careful not to tokenize current or potential board members. See “A Tale of Tokenism” on page 23.

- **Former board members.** Former board members know the organization well and can be a great source of potential candidates. Keep in mind, however, that if the organization’s commitment to racial equity is less familiar to these former board members, they may not be in the best place to take the lead on a recruitment conversation. That doesn’t preclude them from helping to identify potential candidates, however.

- **Engaging staff members of the organization.** Staff members are often closest to the work of the organization and to the communities they serve. They may be well-positioned to identify potential board candidates through their interactions with other stakeholder organizations and community members, as well as through their personal and professional networks.

- **Connecting with local chapters of professional and civic associations organized for leaders of color.** Leveraging new or existing relationships with organizations that reach and serve leaders of color can be a wonderful way to identify potential board candidates. Some of these organizations may have job or volunteer boards that can be helpful or create opportunities to build networks more informally. It is critical, however, not to expect another organization or group to do your organization’s work in terms of building more racially diverse candidate pipelines, so make sure you are being respectful as you build relationships and connections.

- **Posting board member job descriptions on board search sites.** There are several local and national sites that list board positions which can be a terrific way to identify potential board candidates not already known to the organization. BoardSource has an extensive list of local and national programs on its website.
Side Note: A Tale of Tokenism

Unfortunately, many leaders of color have experienced awkward or disrespectful conversations about board service opportunities that dismissed their expertise and skill sets instead of focusing on their racial identity. Consider adding this powerful blog entry by Jim Taylor, BoardSource’s former vice president of leadership initiatives, to your toolbox.

A white board member requested a meeting with me to discuss his organization (a nonprofit that was unfamiliar to me) and to gauge my potential interest in joining the board. When we met, he gave me more background on the organization, with a particular emphasis on the board’s desire to become more diverse. After listening to the board member’s ‘pitch,’ I asked him to share the ways he thought I could add value to the board; I wanted to know what prompted him to reach out to me, specifically. The board member seemed surprised and unprepared to answer the question, and just re-stated his board’s focus on becoming more diverse. His visible discomfort in directly answering my question revealed the real answer to me: I was being recruited because — and seemingly only because — I was Black, and my board membership would support the organization’s board diversity goals. The board member didn’t appear to know much about my work or my skills and experiences (or else he considered them to be far less important than my race, from the board’s perspective), so based on his response I believed that I was being ‘tokenized’ — being recruited not for my capability (in combination with my race), but so that the board could use my membership to portray to the public a misleading impression of its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity."

“The board member’s approach to recruiting me was indicative of a board that has adopted (whether due to lack of awareness or a conscious decision) a ‘check the box’ mentality rather than a thoughtful, strategic, respectful approach to becoming more diverse. It was as though they understood that they should be diverse but had no idea why that mattered or how it connected to a broader recruitment strategy focused on bringing in the expertise, perspectives, and reputational capital needed to lead and govern effectively. At the time that these conversations took place, I brought a wide range of skill sets and expertise — I was an expert in affordable housing policy and financing, I had significant leadership experience in both nonprofit and for-profit contexts, I had been a grant maker and understood fundraising, and I had a network of influence in my community. I am also Black, and bring the lived experience of being Black in America that could have helped both of these organizations bring new insight to their thinking about diversity, inclusion, and equity. But they did not see any of these things. Or, if they did, they did not know how to communicate that to me.”
Once they’ve been on the board for a year or so, it’s wise to engage newer board members in a conversation about their areas of interest in terms of future board leadership so that the governance committee and/or board chair has a strong sense of their interest and openness to leadership positions in the future and the board member has an opportunity to speak about their interests proactively and openly.

- **Board orientation.** A well-organized, formal orientation introduces board members to the work of the organization and the work of the board. Ideally, it should be held before new board members attend their first board meeting and should include current members of the board. Typically focused on covering foundational information about the organization and board, orientation is a suitable time to restate and reinforce the board’s values related to racial equity.

- **Identifying a partner/mentor for new board members.** It can be helpful to new board members to have someone they can contact for questions, feedback, and other issues that they may not immediately feel comfortable raising with the full board. Often, this board mentor will sit with the new board member at their first board meeting (if in person) and follow up with them after the meeting to invite questions or feedback.

- **Engaging board members in committees and other leadership opportunities.** New board members should be invited and encouraged to join one (or more if that is the general expectation) of the board’s committees soon after or even before they begin their board service. This ensures that they have immediate opportunities to learn more about the board’s work and begin actively engaging in it.

Once they’ve been on the board for a year or so, it’s wise to engage newer board members in a conversation about their areas of interest in terms of future board leadership so that the governance committee and/or board chair has a strong sense of their interest and openness to leadership positions in the future and the board member has an opportunity to speak about their interests proactively and openly.

- **Asking for feedback on the recruitment and onboarding experience.** After serving on the board for a few months, new members should be asked for feedback. Do they feel their skills are being used to the best advantage? Do they have opportunities to discuss important issues? What have they found most rewarding about their board experience so far? What would they change? Do they have any feedback about the recruitment or onboarding experience that might help the board improve in the future when possible? Solicit comments about specific activities that they have found useful and why or what they would have liked to understand more. This might be done by the board chair, a member of the governance committee, or even the chief executive, and creates an opportunity to surface any challenging experiences or dynamics, which is particularly important to understand if racialized. By requesting and obtaining candid feedback from new board members, the board will be able to fine-tune its recruitment processes and become increasingly effective in recruiting and retaining board leaders of color.
Success at Succession: Policies & Practices to Avoid the Glass Cliff

**Chief Executive Succession**

It’s critical that the board is prepared to lead an equitable search process when the time for chief executive transition comes. BoardSource’s resource, “Avoiding the Glass Cliff – Advice to Boards on Preparing for and Supporting a New Leader of Color,” which was developed in partnership with Building Movement Project, offers the following guidance (which reinforces some of the recommended actions throughout this action guide).

**Before Transition**

Too many boards and organizations have not done the work of building an organizational culture that centers racial equity prior to hiring a new leader and — as a result — are leaving the work of advancing racial equity within their organization to a new leader of color. This places an incredible burden on new leaders and may make it difficult for the new leader to succeed in their new role. For all these reasons, boards that seek to set a potential future leader of color up for success should work to advance a race equity culture before a new leader joins the organization. The following steps will help set up your leader for success:

- **Define what a commitment to racial equity means for your organization.** Why is it important? What does it mean to your organization’s work? What does it mean for your board and staff team? What will be different as a result of your commitment? Go deep into a sensemaking conversation about what it really means for your organization to be committed to racial equity beyond simply saying that you are.

- **Invest in your racial equity journey.** Building an organizational culture that centers racial equity takes time and money. At the board level, it is important to ask questions about how the organization is working to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable working environment for its team members and supporting the investment of time and financial resources to make change. Equity in the Center’s Awake to Woke to Work is a helpful framework to guide board- and staff-level work. While the board must avoid engaging in operations at a level that crosses over into micromanagement, it is appropriate (and necessary) for the board to pay attention to how the chief executive is supporting and strengthening racial equity at the staff level. The board should ask the chief executive to:
  - Track and share organizational demographics. BoardSource encourages all organizations to track and share information about board and staff demographics via Candid (formerly GuideStar). The board should periodically review these metrics and pay particular attention if the organization has a revolving door of employees of color, and directly engage the chief executive in a conversation about that if there is evidence of that dynamic — particularly at the senior leadership level.
  - Share updates on work being done to advance racial equity at a staff level. The board should invite the chief executive to share how they are working to support and sustain a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace for their employees. This includes understanding — at a prominent level — what is being prioritized in terms of organizational policies, learning, and change.

- **Bring racial equity into conversations about succession planning.** All organizations should have a policy on succession, both for an emergency and a planned succession. As a part of the work to create those policies and plans, boards should engage with the chief executive around how they are supporting and strengthening the team in a way that may create opportunities to support internal leaders of color. Succession planning is also an opportunity for the board to consider what organizational change might be necessary to attract and retain a new leader, including a leader of color.

- **Develop a board action plan — and begin working it.** There will be work to do at both the board and staff level, but some of the things that the board can do on its own include:
  - **Address board dysfunction.** If you have a board operating in dysfunctional ways — micromanagement, lack of engagement, lack of role understanding, or other critical board challenges — work to mitigate those issues now. These challenges will be exacerbated by any work you are doing to advance racial equity and warrant attention before onboarding a new CEO. A board self-assessment can be a helpful way to identify and begin addressing those issues.
  - **Increase board knowledge and understanding of racial inequity.** If you have not built the board’s knowledge and understanding of the impact of racial inequity on your organization, the people and communities you serve, and society at large — the time is now. There is work to do at both the individual and collective levels.
  - **Diversify board composition.** Representation matters, so if your board is not yet racially diverse, now is the time to get serious about becoming more diverse.
During Search & Transition

It can be difficult for an organization to adjust to a new leader and leadership style, particularly after the transition of a founder or long-tenured chief executive. If possible, the board chair or transition committee chair should work with the current CEO or ED to help prepare the organization for a new leader and leadership style.

Once an organization is in a moment of transition, meaning they know that their current leader will be stepping down or leaving at a specific time, the board has an opportunity to ensure that the search and entire transition are managed in a way that prioritizes racial equity. The following priorities should be considered in your transition plan:

- **Select a search firm that prioritizes racial equity in its search practices.** An equitable search isn’t just about identifying a diverse pool of potential candidates (though that is essential!). It’s also about ensuring that all aspects of the search process prioritize equity. If the organization plans to use a search firm, boards are wise to carefully interview potential search firms and seek out those that have a demonstrated track record of leading searches in a way that prioritizes equity, including successfully placing leaders of color and demonstrating competence and commitment in identifying and interrupting bias within the selection process. This includes making clear to your search partner that the board will not move forward in the search if the pool of applicants is not racially diverse.

- **Encourage diversity and equity within the interviewing and selection process.** Interviewing is inherently relational and can therefore be highly influenced by the personal preferences and styles of the interviewing team. Your board can work to understand and mitigate risks of bias by: educating the board and participating staff about implicit bias in search and how to avoid it; ensuring that the search committee and interviewing team are racially diverse; and ensuring that board members and staff members do not have conversations with candidates outside of the structured interviewing process so that candidates with existing relationships don’t have an advantage in the search process.

- **Adopt equitable compensation practices.** To ensure that every successful candidate is compensated fairly, adopt these practices:
  - Conduct a rigorous external benchmarking process to ensure that compensation ranges are fair and appropriate based on the position’s responsibilities.
  - Post the salary range publicly when announcing the search.
  - Avoid asking for or using salary history as a guide for future compensation.

- **Consider investments of time.** Prepare the organization for a new leader. It can be difficult for an organization to adjust to a new leader and leadership style, particularly after a founder or long-tenured chief executive. If possible, the board chair or transition committee chair should work with the current CEO or ED to help prepare the organization for a new leader and leadership style. Consider investments of time and dollars that can help prepare the organization for this meaningful change. The board itself will also need to prepare for change. Boards should prepare themselves for changes in communication patterns, meeting materials and engagement, and expectations for the board-staff partnership. Boards should be vigilant in challenging assumptions about what “must be” versus what “has been.”

- **Be honest with candidates about your organization’s “current state.”** To be successful in their new role, candidates for the CEO or ED position need to have a clear and accurate sense of the role. Boards must communicate openly and transparently with finalists about the state of the organization, its funding and business model, and where it is on its racial equity journey. Be transparent with candidates about your organization's commitment to racial equity—what it is and what it is not—so they are clear about what they would be signing up for. And if you do not have a shared sense of the answers to these questions at the board level, take the time to find out before beginning the interview process.

- **If possible and feasible for the organization, consider providing an employment contract.** An employment contract can provide confidence to a chief executive candidate that they will be treated well by the organization, even if things do not work out. This can help mitigate the risk differential for candidates who may be less capable of absorbing a period of unemployment.

**Note:** Acknowledge the ever-changing legal landscape and consult with a lawyer before putting policies in place.
After a New Leader is Hired

It is easy for a board to think that their job is done once a new leader is hired and they can step back. But — with any new leader, including a new leader of color — the board must support the new CEO/ED in a way that sets them up for success. Keep in mind the following actions once a new leader is hired:

- **Celebrate your new leader respectfully:** While boards may feel a sense of pride in announcing a leader of color as their new chief executive, they should be respectful in how that news is shared and avoid framing that inadvertently tokenizes or undermines their new leader. Boards should consult with the new leader about if and how to talk about the new leader’s racial/ethnic identity in the announcement, other early-tenure communications to ensure that the new leader is comfortable with how it is framed. As is true with the announcement of any new leader, it can be valuable to highlight the rigor of the search process and the experience and credentials of the new leader in these early communications. It is also important that a new leader of color not be positioned as the “answer” or the “end” to past or ongoing challenges the organization has faced on its racial equity journey, whether formally or informally.

- **Provide objectives and key results (OKRs) for the new CEO’s first three months, six months, and twelve months.** The new CEO or ED must have clarity about the board’s expectations for their first year. These should come from a formalized discussion about goals and priorities at the board level versus informal or individual board member-driven goals that risk creating confusion or moving targets for the new leader. This allows the board to hold the executive accountable.

- **Anticipate discovery of “legacy issues.”** It is common for a new leader to discover challenging organizational issues that the board itself may not be aware of. Boards must avoid faulting the new leader for legacy issues they did not create and support them as they navigate through issues that may need to be addressed and faced as an organization. Boards also need to understand that leaders of color may incur more considerable damage to their reputations when there are organizational challenges or issues under their tenure, which may mean that conversations and plans of action around how to address or communicate about legacy issues are weightier and more fraught.

- **Give them space.** Often during transition, the board becomes much more operationally engaged and it can be difficult for some boards (or board members) to let go of that level of engagement. The board needs to be disciplined about moving back into its governance role once the new ED/CEO starts. Boards must avoid the inclination to micromanage a new leader and instead, give them space to establish themselves as the organization’s leader. This is especially important in the context of a first-ever leader of color for the organization, as micromanagement could be (or be perceived to be) racialized in a way that penalizes a new leader of color. It may be helpful for a board that anticipates potential challenges to do a refresher on the board’s governance role. BoardSource’s Certificate of Nonprofit Board Education is a useful resource. Similarly, the board must give the new leader space to establish themselves with the staff team. The board should create some formalized feedback loops for staff to share feedback about the CEO early in their tenure (perhaps at the six-month mark) that will be shared with the CEO as an input, but discourage informal feedback from staff to the board.

- **Offer support.** Adjusting to a new executive leadership position is a big challenge, especially for leaders in their first CEO or ED role (which is the majority of CEOs/EDs, according to BoardSource’s Leading with Intent study). So, while it’s important to give them space, that’s not the same as leaving them isolated without the board’s support. Boards — via the board chair — should invite the new chief executive to share how the board can be most supportive of them as a leader and work to make themselves available in those ways. Boards should also consider providing flexible financial support that enables the new CEO/ED to invest in a leadership coach or other self-identified supports that provide a safe space to work through early-tenure challenges.
Fostering a Racially Equitable Staff Culture

While oversight of the staff beyond the chief executive is not the board's role, the board does play an important role in fostering a racially equitable staff culture in several ways:

- Building a supportive, equitable, and constructive partnership with the chief executive that encourages and enables the chief executive to lead equitably with the staff.
- Supporting and/or recommending board-approved policies that advance racial equity within the staff, which includes supporting the deployment of organizational resources against plans that would advance racial equity within the staff.
- Interacting with staff members in a way that prioritizes racial equity and equity more broadly.

In practice, much of the board's role in fostering a racially equitable staff culture falls under the banner of chief executive oversight. This includes:

- Building racial equity goals into expectations for chief executive performance and evaluating on an annual basis.
- Holding the chief executive accountable if there is evidence of discrimination or bias on their part, or evidence that the chief executive is not holding other senior leaders accountable for the same.
- Ensuring that the chief executive is compensated appropriately.
- Reviewing key staff metrics and discussing with the chief executive. This might include:
  - Staff demographics (by seniority, if possible). BoardSource encourages organizations to share this information transparently via their Candid (formerly GuideStar) profile, which makes it publicly available to all and provides a significant internal and external accountability mechanism.
  - Staff retention rates (disaggregated by race, if possible)
- Inviting periodic conversations with the chief executive about how strategies and policies are supporting an internal culture of racial equity. While it is essential that the board focus at a policy level versus questions about specific employees or staffing decisions, this might include asking questions about:
  - Efforts to enact practices that eliminate bias and barriers in hiring, retention, and promotion decisions.
  - Efforts to attract a diverse and qualified candidate pool for all employment searches and to increase the diversity of the staff team.
  - Learning and growth strategies to support and deepen the team’s knowledge and understanding as it relates to racial equity.
  - Staff cohesion and morale, ideally via summary data from staff engagement surveys.

*Employment Policies*

While the board does not typically involve itself in the implementation of employment policies, there are ways in which boards can help ensure that policies and practices that prioritize racial equity have been embedded into the organization. Some priority areas for consideration include:

- Collaborating with the chief executive to formalize and adopt a compensation philosophy that is aligned with organizational values and guides the way that the board sets compensation for the chief executive and the chief executive sets compensation for the rest of the staff. This may include:
  - Setting expectations for periodic benchmarking of staff salaries to ensure that they are both competitive and equitable.
  - Establishing a maximum multiplying factor between the highest- and lowest-paid employee of the organization.
  - Articulating a desired approach to performance-based and/or standardized salary increases.
- Ensure that the appropriate parties are able to articulate how the organization is incorporating racial equity into its employee handbook and all employment-related policies.
- Employment-related budget decisions that are aligned with racial equity goals. This may include:
  - Increases to the overall staffing budget to align compensation packages with salary benchmarks.
  - Increasing the benefits budget to support equity-driven decisions about benefit expansion.
  - Investing in learning and growth programming for the board and staff to support racial equity goals.

* There should be some cautions about doing this in compliance with state and federal employment applicable laws. Consulting with an employment lawyer is recommended. When speaking with an attorney, think about how much you can implement and prioritize legally.
Deployment of Organizational Resources

**Annual Budget Priorities**

Budgets as moral documents have been attributed to several thought leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President Jimmy Carter, and economist Amartya Sen, to name a few. The sentiment demonstrates what the organization is putting resources into. On a year-over-year basis, the board is responsible for ensuring that the organization puts the necessary resources behind its racial equity commitment internally with the staff and externally through its programming efforts. If your organization has a policy that outlines the board's role in approving the annual budget, consider adding language that articulates the board's role in ensuring that it is resourcing its commitment to racial equity throughout the organization's work and responsible governance.

**Vendor Selection & Procurement**

Organizational resources can also be leveraged to advance racial equity by supporting vendors that are aligned with their racial equity values. To ensure a diverse pool of vendors and/or contractors and recruiting potential applicants from specific groups that might otherwise be underrepresented would be appropriate. This might include:

- Eliminating operational barriers that may have made it less feasible for POC-led vendors and small businesses to have worked with your organization to date (minimum size requirements, extensive RFPs, etc.)
- Quantifying how much the organization is willing to pay to support POC-led vendor relationships so that small price differentials don't eliminate otherwise well-qualified and well-aligned proposals.
- Establishing a competitive bid policy for all new and long-standing contracts so that there is an opportunity to prioritize establishing relationships with POC-led vendors.
- Tracking the number and dollar value of vendor relationships with POC-led vendors.

Note: Please review anti-discrimination laws specifically Title VII, and other federal and state laws.
We are so pleased you took the steps to read and hopefully implement many of this guide’s ideas and action items. As we mentioned, this work is never completed and is often messy, but it is necessary for a board that understands and is committed to racial equity.

To realize an organizational commitment to racial equity, the board must view it as deeply connected to its purpose and mission. That does not mean your mission statement must name racial equity explicitly, although it could. Instead, it means that your board has reflected on how racial inequity impacts the people and communities you serve and – as a result – understands how racial inequity is present within the ecosystem in which your organization does its work.

As a result of that understanding, the board should seek to undo and mitigate the impacts of inequity throughout the organization’s work. Purpose-Driven Board Leadership serves as a framework for which boards can address these inequities. There is a point at which a commitment has become so deeply rooted in the organization’s culture that it becomes a natural part of how the organization and its board does its work, and its actions are authentically aligned with those commitments.

As stated in the three starting points, boards need to determine where they are putting race – and racial inequity – on the table, and start a conversation about how racial equity is related to the organization’s work and place in the world. Boards must be brave and bold to bring these ideas to fruition.

In, “Can we talk about…?” a podcast about leading for racial equity in philanthropy, former BoardSource Chair Julia Wilson, in conversation with BoardSource President and CEO Monika Kalra Varma, stated, “What do we need to do in the sector to normalize and advance race equity work at the board level … when we can just talk about the real stuff out loud with love, when we name the systems that are always present in this country, in society, and in the boardroom. When we point [to] the systems and the impact that they might be having, we kind of carve out a space that feels sacred that allows us to see and feel how we can do this work together differently.”

BoardSource is proud to help support your efforts to do this work purposefully and differently. We hope you will continue this journey with us, and we thank you again for engaging with the racial equity guide.
Recommended Resources

How to Build a Racial Equity Action Plan for Your Organization
- Equity in the Center’s Awake to Woke to Work
- Government Alliance on Race & Equity
- Five Barriers to Advancing Diversity, Inclusion and Equity within Boards
- Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Race Matters Toolkit

Cultivating Equity
- BoardSource Blog Posts on DEI
- Avoiding the Glass Cliff: Advice to Boards on Preparing for and Supporting a New Leader of Color
- Five Classic Leadership Transition Types
- What is Racial Equity? Understanding Key Concepts Related to Race

Team Building
- Board-Staff Interaction: What’s Acceptable, What’s Not? You Ask, We Answer
- Lessons From a Cross-Racial Team About Building Belonging
- Lessons Learned for Why a Teams-Based Approach Can Advance Equity

Understanding the Origin & Impact of Systemic Racism
- Race Forward’s "What is Systemic Racism?" 8 part video series
- Othering & Belonging Institute
- Demos Racial Equity Transformation
- 158 Resources to Understand Racism in America (Smithsonian Magazine)
- Resources to understand America’s long history of injustice and inequality (The Washington Post)
- What is Racial Equity? Understanding Key Concepts Related to Race

Individual Engagement
- The 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge (America & Moore)
- 20 Books for 2020: A Reading List on Race in America (Forbes)
- Harvard’s Kennedy School Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism Reading List
- National Museum of African American History & Culture’s Talking About Race

Equity in the Environment
- The Black Eco List: Black Women Making Environmental History Now
- 15 Black Environmental Leaders to Follow
- Green Leadership Trust

Podcasts on History and Race Equity
- History is US
- Crash
- The Latin American History Podcast
- Asian American History 101
- Buried Truths
- Into America
- 1619
- The Soul of the Nation with Jim Wallis
- Driving the Green Book
- Code Switch
- Black History Year
- Draperetomaniax: Unshackled History
Resources for White Board Members

As you work to build the board’s confidence in discussing issues of race and racism in the boardroom, it may become important to offer focused resources for members of the board who identify as white. BIPOC board members are often in conversations around race and equity, but it should not just be those in the BIPOC community acknowledging and addressing issues of equity. As the board moves forward in their journey it is important that white members make intentional efforts to conduct their due diligence in seeking allyship. (Note: These resources are also encouraged for staff to engage in). The following are some possible resources and tools:

Dr. Jazmine’s “How to Be a White Ally: How White Shame is Getting In the Way.”

Sue Borrego | TEDx PasadenaWomen, “Understanding My Privilege.”

Tiffany Jana, TEDx RVAWomen, “The power of privilege.”

Michael Welp, White Men: TEDxBend “Time to Discover Your Cultural Blind Spots.”

Jay Smooth’s TEDx Talk, “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race.”

Verna Myers’ TED Talk, “How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them.”
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An important note: The views and opinions expressed in this guide do not reflect those of the individuals or organizations acknowledged here.