



# RACIAL EQUITY & INCLUSION

AT LIVING CITIES

FREQUENTLY  
ASKED  
QUESTIONS



# What does it mean for my work?

## WHY IS RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION RELEVANT TO ALL OUR PROJECTS?

We are an organization that is working to close the racial income and wealth gaps in America's cities. Racism is at the root of so many of the problems we are trying to solve, so addressing racism must be squarely at the center of how we work and of all our efforts.

## WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

You can commit to interrogating your own biases, privilege, and complicity, and to adjusting your behavior and actions accordingly. You can use a [racial equity assessment tool](#) for decision-making to limit how your biases affect your relationships and work. You can embrace learning about the history and ongoing legacy of racism as a lifelong journey. You can break out of your comfort zone and engage in productive conflict and debate about racial equity and inclusion. You can hold yourself accountable to Living Cities' racial equity and inclusion value and associated norms at work. You can integrate anti-racist principles into how you live and work.

*"We have to ask how we are maintaining inequity. Even when the city comes up with great initiatives, one of the first questions has to be 'how are we contributing to the problem in the first place?'"*

- Racial Equity Here City Leader

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION AS A VALUE AND INITIATIVES LIKE REH?

Racial equity and inclusion as a value means committing to incorporating racial equity and inclusion at every stage of work and at all levels: personal, team, and institutional. It means embracing racial equity and inclusion as daily practice.

While, certainly, initiatives and programs like Racial Equity Here that are explicitly and entirely aimed at addressing racism are important and necessary, they are not sufficient because racism and bias can show up in all programs, policies, and practices.

## WHY ARE WE DOING INTERNAL WORK INSTEAD OF BREAKING DOWN RACISM IN THE WORLD?

This question presents a false dichotomy. The creation and perpetuation of racial inequities have been baked into the fabric of all institutions. Philanthropy and the non-profit sector are no exception. As an organization that is working to close the racial income and wealth gaps in America's cities, we must start at home, including by reckoning with our own history, dismantling structures of inequity in our own organization and work, and building our individual and institutional racial equity and inclusion competencies so that we can better tackle systemic racism in the world.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO APPLY AN REI LENS?

Tactically, applying a racial equity and inclusion lens can be as simple as doing the following on a daily basis across all of the work we do:

- Pausing to reflect on the racial equity and inclusion implications as we make decisions, and,
- Engaging in candid and authentic conversations about race so we can surface blind spots and hold each other accountable to our values and norms.

There are specific tools that can help with applying a REI lens, such as the Racial Equity Impact Analysis tool. However, it is important to understand that applying a REI lens is a daily practice and constant interrogation of power and privilege.

## WHAT DOES REI COMPETENCY MEAN?

Achieving racial equity and inclusion requires a set of informed policies and practices intentionally designed to rectify disparities and promote opportunity equitably. The implementation of these practices and policies and the ability to identify instances of interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism require skills and competencies including but not limited to the following:

- Comfort and fluency around speaking about what REI means at Living Cities and in the world, including ability to identify, discuss, and confront interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism.
- Understanding the role that racial equity plays within your projects and Living Cities' broader portfolio.
- Ability to interrogate your own personal biases and worldview, and to modify your own behavior on a daily basis based on that interrogation.
- Deep understanding of the history of racial inequity in America, including around the idea of race as a social construct and the ways that, throughout our history, systems were designed that isolate and separate us, and that empower a select few—based on the invention of race—with the privilege of innovation, creativity, and power.
- Comfort with making oneself vulnerable at work internally and externally with partners based on the understanding that racial equity work is personal and that we are all learners.
- Understanding of how to apply a racial equity and inclusion impact assessment tool in decision-making.
- Ability to effectively facilitate difficult conversations about race toward achieving impact.
- Ability to set racial equity outcomes, goals, and performance measures.
- Engagement in community organizing and community-led efforts.
- Ability to write with nuance, clarity, and humility about racial justice topics.
- Ability to extend empathy and compassion and willingness to build authentic relationships, acknowledging the fullness of colleagues' humanity—from their professional accomplishments to their lived experiences—and remembering that a truth is not the truth.

We are all learners when it comes to these competencies and we must all continually work to build and grow them.

*"You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it. and responsible for changing it."*

- Grace Lee Boggs

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GROUND OUR WORK IN ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACKNESS?

We will not achieve economic equity for all people without addressing anti-Black racism. In other words, in America, anti-Black racism is the foundational architecture for the strategies, tactics, tools, and cultural worldviews that created and maintain racial oppression, repression, and exclusion. It is also true that these same strategies, tactics, tools, and cultural worldviews are being used against other communities of color, LGBTQ communities, people with disabilities, and women. So, it is important to start with an understanding of anti-Blackness, and to then apply an intersectional analysis to ensure that the unique experiences of other communities, and of individuals, are not being erased.

*"[Intersectionality is] the idea that multiple oppressions reinforce each other to create new categories of suffering."*

-Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor

*But I who am bound by my mirror as well as my bed see causes in colour as well as sex*

*and sit here wondering which me will survive all these liberations.*

- Audre Lorde

### HOW AM I COMPLICIT?

We all live in a society that is built on the spoils of racism. We all receive white supremacist messages, whether we are aware of this or not. And, current research in implicit bias demonstrates that all people have racial bias, that most of it is unconscious, and that it manifests in our actions. **Because white people control most institutions**, their racial bias is embedded and infused across society and works to the advantage of all white people, regardless of intentions, awareness, or self-image. This is because the system of white supremacy was designed to benefit, prioritize, and protect white people over anyone of any other race. Within this system, white people have internalized their superiority and people of color have internalized their oppression. In such a society, it is virtually impossible not to be complicit.

Complicity can mean advocating for policies that are harmful to people of color, but it can also mean benefiting from white privilege without questioning it. People of color can also benefit from white privilege. Complicity can mean being silent in the face of oppression or claiming to be "color-blind."

It is important to note that being complicit is not a matter of "good people" versus "bad people." It is a matter of unquestioning and often casual power, control, and dominance by a racial group with a particular self-image, worldview, and set of interests in the position to disseminate that image and worldview and protect those interests across the entire society.

### WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

The term "intersectionality" was coined by a Black woman, **Kimberlé Crenshaw**, to describe how different forms of oppression can interact and overlap, and why it is necessary for feminists to take into account the needs of Black women when considering social questions and issues to advocate for. Black women are frequently absent from analyses of either gender oppression or racism, since the former focuses primarily on the experiences of white women and the latter on Black men.

Intersectionality is not about the multiplicity of identities that someone holds. Rather, it is an analysis of the intersection of power structures and the identities one holds. It surfaces the cumulative burdens placed on a person, which then creates new categories of suffering.

It is important in our work because it serves to help us see flaws in systems and interventions in terms of who is being served well and who isn't, acknowledging more complexity than is possible through, for example, a race-only or gender-only lens.