THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ROUNDTABLE ON COMMUNITY CHANGE

CONSTRUCTING A RACIAL EQUITY THEORY OF CHANGE

A Practical Guide for Designing Strategies to Close Chronic Racial Outcome Gaps

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Background

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (formerly the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives) is a forum in which leaders working on some of the country's most innovative and promising efforts to revitalize distressed inner city neighborhoods can meet, share lessons they are learning and identify and seek solutions to common challenges.

Since 1997, the Roundtable has been focusing on how the problems associated with race and racism in America affect initiatives aimed at poverty reduction in distressed urban neighborhoods. The Roundtable's work has had a theoretical dimension that has explored how race shapes the social, political, economic and cultural institutions of our society and how those dynamics produce significant ongoing racial disparities in the well being of children, families and communities. It has also has a more applied dimension that describes how to apply a racial equity "lens" to social and economic development work.

The premise behind all of the Roundtable's work on race is that adopting a more race-conscious approach to community building and social justice work will:

- Broaden our understanding of the causes and the problems of poverty, inequality and community distress in America
- Clarify our understanding of the forces that maintain the racial disparity status quo and limit the success of strategies for change
- Identify how and why an emphasis on racial equity might enhance the possibility of success in current and future social change efforts and
- Highlight new approaches that could complement and reinforce existing activities

This publication represents an effort to apply the Roundtable's perspective on race and the strategic challenges of making change.

This publication is the result of collective learning by staff of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. The authors are Keith Lawrence, Andrea A. Anderson, Gretchen Susi, Stacey Sutton, Anne Kubisch and Raymond Codrington.

Introduction
Race, Inequity and the Challenge of Making Change

As we begin the 21st century, the embeddedness of racism in our institutions and culture continue to exert great influence on how social benefits and burdens are distributed. Much has changed in the recent past, but the opportunity playing field still tilts away from many blacks, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans. The United States in 2009 is a far more just and equitable society than ever before. Its election of an African American president just two generations after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s equal rights March on Washington, signals a tremendous leap forward for racial equity. Yet social outcome patterns across many regions, cities and communities are vivid reminders that the nation still stands far from its colorblind ideal. A legacy of structural racism continues to generate racialized mass incarceration and racial disparities in poverty, economic vulnerability and education outcomes. This continuing racial incidence of disadvantage in our nation strongly calls for a community change approach firmly grounded in a structural race analysis.

A Structural Race Analysis

Structural racism is a shorthand term for the many systemic factors that produce and sustain racial inequities in America. These are aspects of U.S. history and culture that allow the privileges associated with "whiteness" and the disadvantages associated with "color" to remain deeply embedded within the institutions, systems and norms that shape our political economy, culture and residential patterns. When we look closely at each of these areas we see that race, privilege and disadvantage remain very clearly linked.

Structural racism is a very complex, dynamic system with interlinked social, political and economic components. Although each component can only be fully described in relation to others, we believe that three stand out as strategic levers for social change planners:

Public Policies: Laws that directly allocate public resources and indirectly influence the distribution of private resources in ways that have greater negative impact on communities of color *(e.g., in the criminal justice domain: increased public funding for prison construction, disparities in prison penalties for powder vs. crack cocaine possession and adult sentencing of juvenile offenders)*.

Social and Institutional Practices: Racialized and colorblind norms, regulations and standard operating procedures of public and private institutions that actually generate racially biased outcomes *(e.g., aggressive street crime and "quality of life" law enforcement in poor communities; preference for confinement over probation of troubled youth of color)*.

Cultural Representations: Language, images, narratives, frames and cognitive cues that form the public's conventional wisdom about race. Within the common perspective that these representations generate, white privilege and racial disparities are perceived as normal, disconnected from history and institutions and largely explainable by individual and racial group characteristics *(e.g., menacing media portrayals of inner city neighborhoods and young males within them; conventional wisdom, reinforced by adaptive behaviors of those who are isolated and disadvantaged, that these groups do not value parenting, educational excellence, work, etc)*. Cultural representations contribute to a common sense about race that most Americans share and so can powerfully influence public policies and social and institutional practices.

The structural racism system as a whole also manifests a self-sustaining dynamic that can be described as **"progress and retrenchment."** This dynamic continually works to restore a steady state of white privilege whenever there is progress toward racial equity (e.g., black and Latino gains in many substantive areas since the 1960s have been significantly reversed by crime policies and practices—particularly those associated with the "War on Drugs"—that over-incarcerate young men of color and by violent, predatory representations of black and brown males that mark them as unsuitable for full social inclusion).

Racial Equity

Racial equity is the substantive alternative to structural racism. It is a social outcomes "picture" in which race is not consistently associated with privilege and disadvantage. The goal of racial equity is to produce fairness and social justice—race would no longer be a factor in the assessment of merit, or in the distribution of opportunity.

Given our free-market system and strong bias towards individualism, wealth and class inequalities may be inevitable. But these are not necessarily consistent with racial inequalities. Indeed, as our constitutional tradition evolved to accommodate broader conceptions of civil rights, racial hierarchy was explicitly rejected as a legitimate basis for social organization. One implication of this post-civil rights order is that race ceased to be an acceptable characteristic of winners and losers. Social justice since the Civil Rights era has been built upon the expectation that our institutions and opportunity systems would generate socioeconomic strata and outcomes that were not distinguished by particular racial profiles.

However, we have not come close to this equity ideal and will not do so unless leaders adopt a problem-solving perspective that is historical, political, comparative and systemic. Leaders, at all levels, need to acknowledge the totality of social and political factors behind the outcomes experienced in communities of color. And, those outcomes need to be evaluated in relation to the experiences of neighboring white communities and regions and not in isolation.

A racial equity problem-solving perspective also recognizes that institutional interconnections often reinforce inequities and that the exercise of power and privilege greatly influences allocation of resources that all communities need to sustain themselves. So, serious change-making efforts must be race- and power-conscious whenever disadvantage and color clearly overlap. It is true that development strategies that disregard or minimize race garner public, political and philanthropic support more easily. But it is also undeniable that when race is truly the elephant in the room, interventions that underplay or ignore race and promise to "lift all boats" have rarely closed chronic racial outcomes gaps or changed underlying conditions that drive disparities.[1]

As a practical matter, race-consciousness must translate into more than attentiveness to diversity and cultural sensitivity. It must also mean concern about policies and practices at multiple levels that heavily determine racial winners and losers. Even further, dealing with race requires coming to grips with the cognitive, cultural and political environments that give inequitable policies and practices their public legitimacy. To be truly race conscious in the field of community change, we must make the principle of racial equity operational.

A Racial Equity Theory of Change

This booklet takes on this task of making racial equity operational by outlining a **Racial Equity Theory of Change (RETOC).** The RETOC is a five-step primer for tackling community problems that are marked by chronic racial inequities.

Unlike other community change toolkits, the RETOC blends two theoretical insights: firstly, the structural race analysis outlined earlier and secondly, a visioning methodology that encourages change leaders to investigate their explicit and implicit assumptions about the attributes of the community-level outcomes they seek.

The RETOC's visioning methodology draws from a significant literature on the evaluation of community-based change initiatives (CCIs). Responding a decade ago to the CCI evaluation challenge, the Roundtable on Community Change encouraged project leaders to be more deliberate in outlining assumptions about how desired changes might actually come about. Writing for a 1995 Roundtable publication, *New Approaches to Comprehensive Community Initiatives,* Carol Weiss recommended a *theory of change approach*[2] to planning and evaluation that

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[1] For example, "the achievement gap between white and minority students has not narrowed in recent years, despite the focus of the *No Child Left Behind* law on improving black and Hispanic scores," according to the *New York Times*, April 28, 2009. This universal federal program was never designed to grapple with the core of the achievement gap problem, which is racially and economically segregated communities and schools. This segregation translates into critical differences in school and teacher quality, school readiness, neighborhood quality and influence, parental involvement and local attitudes toward educational excellence.

[2] For more detail, see Anderson, Andrea A., Ph.D. 2004. Theory of Change as a Tool for Strategic Planning: A Report on Early Experiences. Washington D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

emphasized the importance of defining all necessary and sufficient preconditions for any desired community outcome. This has since been widely embraced across the field as a way to strengthen claims that particular program outcomes result from particular strategies and actions.

The Roundtable has since refined Weiss's theory of change approach to emphasize "backward mapping." This involves thinking backwards from one's ultimate goal, carefully considering what needs to be in place to make each iterative step toward that goal possible. Working backwards in this way produces a logically consistent explanation of where one needs to start and what one needs to accomplish in order to achieve a desired outcome.

Backward mapping generates a clear picture of what change makers assume to be *the* critical factors that will lead to the changes they want. Social outcomes have complex causes. So a backwards map for any particular goal will inevitably reflect its designer's beliefs about what factors are most relevant in that particular context.

The RETOC is a backwards mapping model that reflects particular concern about the influence of structural racism on community level outcomes in contexts such as education, juvenile justice, employment and affordable housing. The RETOC assumes that racial outcome gaps cannot be eliminated unless one carefully identifies relevant structural factors and their sources and then intentionally targets for change those mechanisms and systems responsible for maintaining specific inequities.

Purpose of this Book

This book outlining the RETOC is intended to help those who want to take deliberate steps toward ending persistent racial outcome disparities in their particular context.

However, the RETOC is presented with a few important caveats. First, its methodology gives priority to the ways institutional and systemic forces contribute to negative community outcomes and racial inequities. Accordingly, the targets for intervention that emerge from the RETOC application are more likely to be institutional, systemic and cultural, than individual and/or family oriented. Individuals obviously bear significant responsibility for their own fates and the RETOC does not discount the importance of personal choices and behaviors. **But it deliberately draws more attention to the responsibilities of institutions and systems that allocate opportunity and to our collective responsibility for holding these institutions and systems accountable.**

Secondly, the RETOC points to *what* must be changed and offers a sense of the *capacities* needed to do so. But it does not automatically convey *how* any particular policy change in a region or area might be effected, institutional practice reformed, cultural representation altered, or political backlash prevented. **Circumstances differ from place to place, so such tactics must be tailored by stakeholders intimately familiar with their particular civic, institutional, leadership and racial contexts.**

Finally, the RETOC will likely uncover many potential areas for intervention, making it unlikely that any single organization could make a huge difference acting on its own. Much of what would need to be done would likely be beyond the capacities of a lone actor. Thus before change leaders embark on a course of action, the RETOC encourages them to conduct realistic appraisals of their individual, organizational and other capacities and to be prepared to enlist other stakeholders with the resources and capacities that they lack.

This book is organized as a five-step backward map that points the way towards concrete steps for making change. It is formatted to serve as an informational workbook suitable for a broad audience. For each step in the process, there is a corresponding Exercise in the accompanying Workbook. These Exercises are designed to help users tailor the RETOC principles to their specific initiatives.

The RETOC
Five Steps Towards Racial Equity

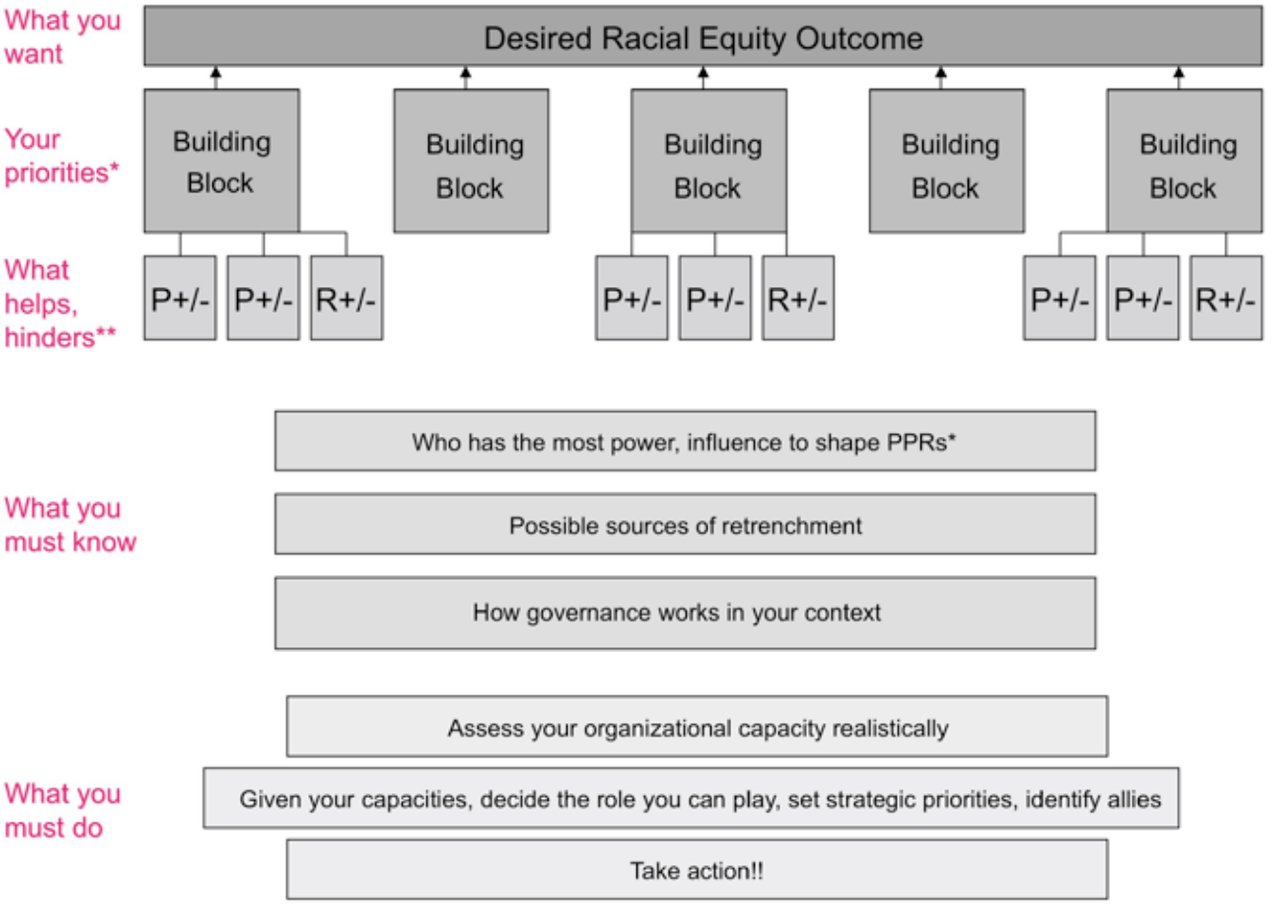
Outline of the RETOC

The RETOC consists of five steps, which progress from visioning about change to identification of early actions that can be taken in that direction. This book is designed to do the following:

- Assist community change leaders in unpacking the root causes and dynamics of problems and
- Help leaders begin thinking about action strategies likely to dismantle structural racism and promote racial equity.

To help facilitate group deliberation, we offer guidelines for working backwards from a desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO) to identify five stepping stones most likely to lead to that goal.

Here is an overall "backwards map" of these five steps, headed by the Desired Racial Equity Outcome. Each step is explained in detail in the following pages.



* These are the most essential components of your desired racial equity outcome.

** These are **policies**, **practices**, and cultural **representations** (PPRs) that may help or hinder efforts to create your building blocks

STEP #1: What You Want

Defining Your Desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO)

The first task is to produce an outcomes statement that specifies the racial disparities you would like to reduce or eliminate in a given place and timeframe. This means defining, as clearly as possible, the focus of your reform/change effort over the coming months and years.

Here are some examples of very *broad* anti-racism vision statements from other initiatives:[3]

> To undo institutional and structural racism—the structures, policies and behaviors that create segregation and inequality in every aspect of daily living.
>
> *–ERASE Racism Initiative, Long Island, New York. 2001*

> To end institutionalized racism in city government; and to create a community that is enriched by diverse cultures, with full participation of all residents.
>
> *–Race and Social Justice Initiative, Seattle, Washington. 2004*

> To provide a welcoming, nondiscriminatory environment with respect and opportunity for all.
>
> *–Mayor's Racial Harmony Initiative/Create community, St. Cloud, Minnesota. 2003*

Important Note

As you go through this visioning process, you may realize that your staff holds divergent views on issues of race, or that your organization has overlooked its own racial inequities. If so, it may be necessary to make internal organizational change, starting with building a consensus around an appropriate race analysis,[4] as a complement to the RETOC process.

Initially, you may have visions of similar scope in mind. But you may need to "unpack" such broad visions by answering questions like these:

- Is there a specific area of racial disparity you'd like to eliminate?
- At what scale will you seek change? Institutions or organizations? Community? County? State? Region?
- What will "racial equity" look like in your outcome area? Are your racial goals measurable?
- When do you expect to see results? What is the timeframe? Two years? Ten years?

[3] See Potapchuk, Maggie. 2006. *Lessons Learned: How Communities are Addressing Racial Inequities*. A report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation by the National League of Cities, the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change and MP Associates.

[4] For an excellent review of analytical perspectives and training resources relating to race, see:
Shapiro, Ilana Ph.D. Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. 2002. "Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs" Washington D.C: The Aspen Institute.

Answering these questions will allow you to come up with a number of narrower, more specific racial equity outcome statements that will help you focus your efforts and resources.

Below are several examples:

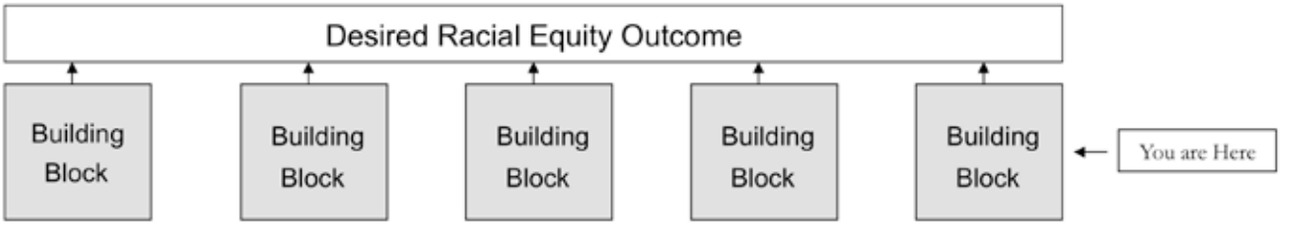
Example REO Statements:

- To eliminate racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in (my city/county/region) within two years.
- To reduce black and Latino high school dropout rates in (my city/county/region) by 50 percent within six years.
- To produce x units of affordable, multi-family housing in high performing school districts in (my city/county/region) within five years.

Now, use what you have read in Step #1 to complete Exercise # 1 on page 33. This exercise will help you compose a Racial Equity Outcome that is both focused and attainable.

STEP #2: Setting Your Priorities

Identifying the "Building Blocks" of Your Racial Equity Outcome



Here, you begin **Setting Your Priorities** for action later on. **By this we mean identifying what must be in place for your desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO) to become reality.**

Usually, you think of BIG racial equity outcomes like those offered as examples in Step # 1. These are the types of outcomes you ultimately want. But, you have to unpack those big outcomes into smaller **building blocks** so that you can be focused, realistic and consistent in your planning and action.

These building blocks will be your priorities, since they are the essential preconditions for the change you want to see. You should frame them as the policies, regulations, information, resources, or anything else that must be in place, at a minimum, to support the outcome you want.

Important Note

To identify the right building blocks, you might need the advice of experts and local stakeholders familiar with your chosen issue. It is important to take the time to ground your decision-making in research, expert knowledge and community experience.

Initially, you may come up with more building blocks than you can handle organizationally. Choose a manageable number that you consider critical and within your reach. For those beyond your capacity, collaborate with other organizations that can take the lead.

Hint:

One helpful way to identify building blocks is to "flip" the thinking process and ask:

"What barriers to this desired racial equity outcome must we cross or eliminate in order to be successful?"

Think comprehensively. Don't limit your imagination only to building blocks that seem to be within easy personal or organizational reach. Try to develop a realistic list that reflects the full complexity of your desired REO. You can narrow this list later.

And remember…use *nouns* here, not *verbs*. Frame the conditions that are absolutely necessary and must be in place. (Resist the temptation here to list prematurely actions that might be taken). Then, separate those building blocks that you feel are critical and within your reach as an organization from those that may not be.

So, for example, if "elimination of juvenile racialized sentencing disparities," is your desired REO, you might have building blocks like these:[5]

Examples of Building Blocks to Eliminate Juvenile Racialized Sentencing Disparities:

- Similar arrest rates for white, black and brown youth in the same community or region for any given offence.
- A wider menu of positive recreational options for local youth.
- Alternative sentencing options for local judges: options that are more proportionate to the crimes committed and that take the devastating community impacts of mass incarceration into account.
- Preventive rather than aggressive community policing, which does not, for example, emphasize stop-and-frisk tactics or quality-of-life sweeps in poor neighborhoods.
- Culturally competent police officers and juvenile justice officials.

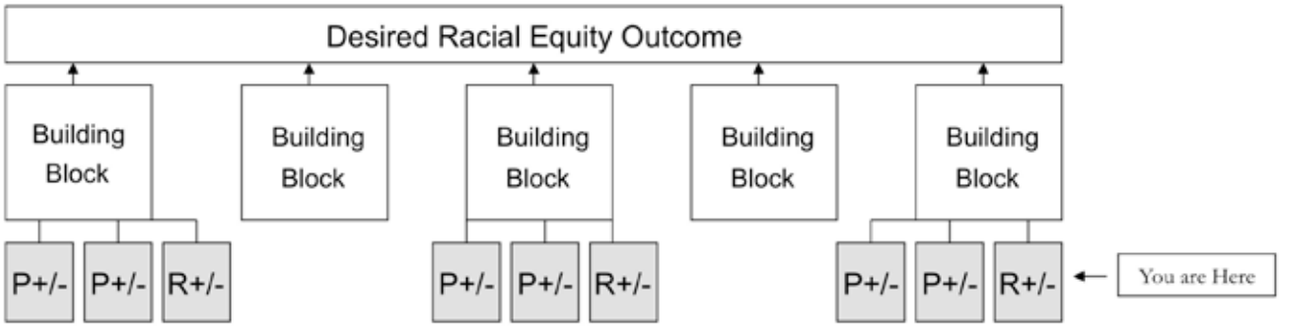
[5] This hypothetical example is developed throughout this book and synthesized in Appendix A.

It is important for you to be able to break down your own Racial Equity Outcome into narrower, more manageable goals as was done in Step # 2 above.

Exercise # 2 on pages 35-38 will help you the develop building blocks for your specific initiative.

STEP #3: What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks?

Identifying Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations (PPRs)



At this point, you will have already…

- Clearly defined the racial equity outcome that will anchor your planning effort
- Unpacked its key building blocks and
- Decided which ones will be your priorities, given your situation and capacities.

Now that you know where to concentrate your attention fruitfully, you must determine **what supports or impedes your building blocks.** This step is crucial for deciding the action agenda you will pursue to realize your ultimate goals.

As you set out to define that action agenda, the RETOC asks you to apply a structural racism "litmus test" to each building block. For each one (say, the "similar racial arrest rates" building block in our juvenile justice example) you must identify public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations (PPRs) likely to determine whether or not that building block materializes or stays in place.

Important Note

The "PPR" step cannot be completed properly in a single "brainstorming" session. It requires significant policy-related research and expert institutional analysis.

Remember to take a cross-sectoral approach. Policies and practices across multiple sectors (e.g., education, housing and employment) often cumulatively reinforce inequities.

You may come up with a sizeable list here. Narrow it down to those items that, in your judgment, represent the most significant barriers or supports to each building block.

Example

To create racial equity in juvenile arrest rates, you might look closely at the systems and procedures of public schools, child welfare agencies, police departments and other youth-serving institutions to identify key decision criteria that may be ostensibly neutral, but end up producing disproportionate outcomes—often due to the disproportionate contact of youth of color with social control institutions.

These PPRs are the specific things that community change stakeholders must promote or target for change.

Identifying relevant cultural representations can be challenging, but vital. Cultural representations are popular assumptions, images and "wisdoms" associated with different groups of color in particular social contexts.

Males of color, for instance, are widely perceived in our society as threats to safety and security—black men and boys are often portrayed as violent predators who threaten personal safety, while some categories of Latinos are assumed to be illegal immigrants and gang members. Media and entertainment producers often gratuitously exploit these and other stereotypes to boost ratings. Although overt discrimination grows rarer, damaging representations of all groups of color shape many political, business and other contexts in which social resource allocation decisions made. For instance, these cultural representations can make policy-makers less sympathetic or inclined

to support change initiatives. Common assumptions can also dictate or influence the creation of certain policies—whether it be in government, the workplace, or elsewhere.

Moreover, those most damaged by these racial representations often unintentionally reinforce them. Chronically underdeveloped communities inevitably evolve a culture that reflects their state of limited opportunity. Forced to live in these places, many individuals of color make choices that unintentionally reinforce these very stereotypes, impeding progress towards racial equity.

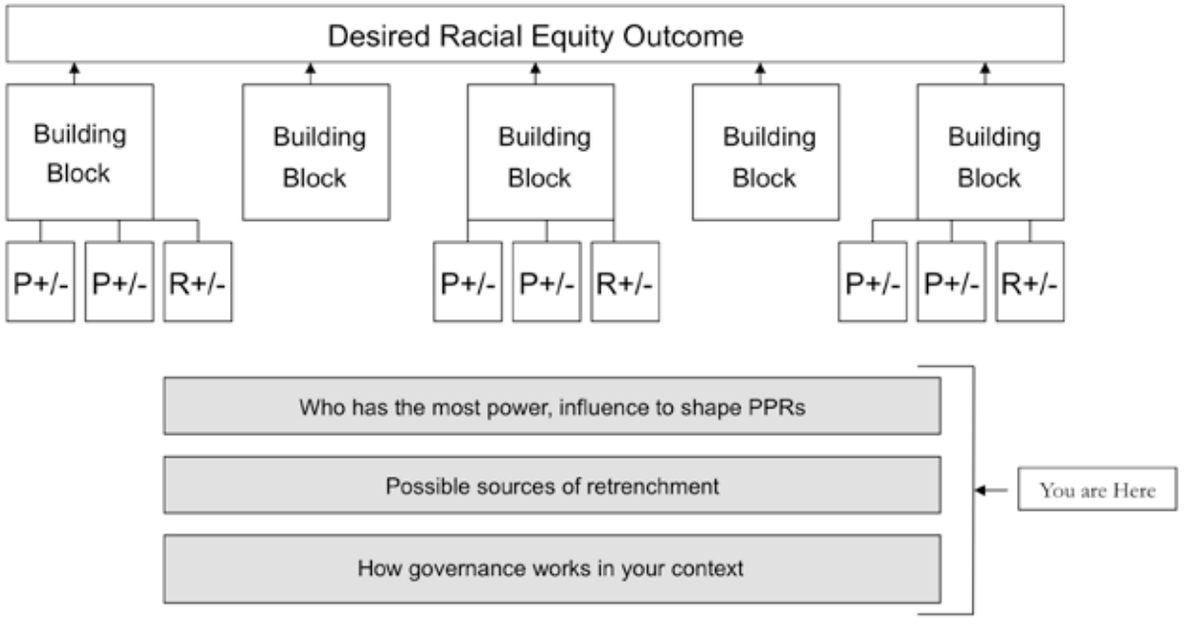
Example: An "alternatives to prison" building block might be opposed by a convergence of the following policies, practices and cultural representations:

- Mandatory sentencing laws (policy)
- Prison construction as a rural economic development strategy (policy)
- Public housing regulations requiring eviction of convicted felons (policy)
- Employer practices against hiring individuals with criminal records (practice) and
- Pervasive images of inner cities, crime and violence, so that mass incarceration seems the only rational option (representation).

Using Step # 3 as a guide, Exercise # 3 on pages 39-44 will help you identify any policies, practices and cultural representations that may impede or further your goals. This part of the process will hopefully limit the number of unforeseen challenges you will face while trying to create change.

STEP #4: What You Must Know

Mapping the Local Change Landscape



Now that you know what you want to accomplish and your strategic priorities, you must become familiar with the terrain that you and your colleagues will have to negotiate as change agents. You must understand the politics of change in your community—the "nuts and bolts" of local power and governance.

Racial equity work is as much political as it is technical and programmatic. Much of it involves building alliances for action, developing public will to support change and productively countering the resistance you will encounter.

So, in mapping the local change landscape, three areas of knowledge are essential:

- Who are the key "players" in your local context
- How the governance process works at the level you want to engage
- Possible sources of retrenchment: who and what are likely to undermine or undo progress toward creating your building blocks

First, you need to develop a picture of the key public, private and civic powerbrokers and stakeholders associated with your PPRs. This should reveal who are critical "gatekeepers" and "authorizers" on particular policy issues, media postures and so on.

These "players" will be elected officials, interest groups, government bureaucrats, business executives, media and entertainment organizations, unions, opinion leaders and other important local/state actors who must be (a) engaged or challenged to bring about change and (b) monitored, either because they have opposed such change historically or can be expected to oppose change, or because they tend to fall short when it comes to implementation.

A historical understanding of this landscape is vital not only for making progress, but also for *limiting retrenchment:* for anticipating the type, sources and timing of local resistance to the establishment of these racial equity building blocks.

To be comprehensive, remember to look closely at the organizations and individuals within the **government, business** and **civic** sectors as you do your power analysis.

Identify the key power brokers and alliances associated with a particular policy, practice, or representation. Then, identify the processes and dynamics that actually produce or maintain them.

Learn how governance works in your particular context. Find out where the critical decisions are made and what current and past alliances influence specific issue-areas. Without this knowledge, it will be hard to know where and how to intervene to make change. Be prepared for a challenge here, since much of the bargaining and influencing that takes place among power elites can be informal.*

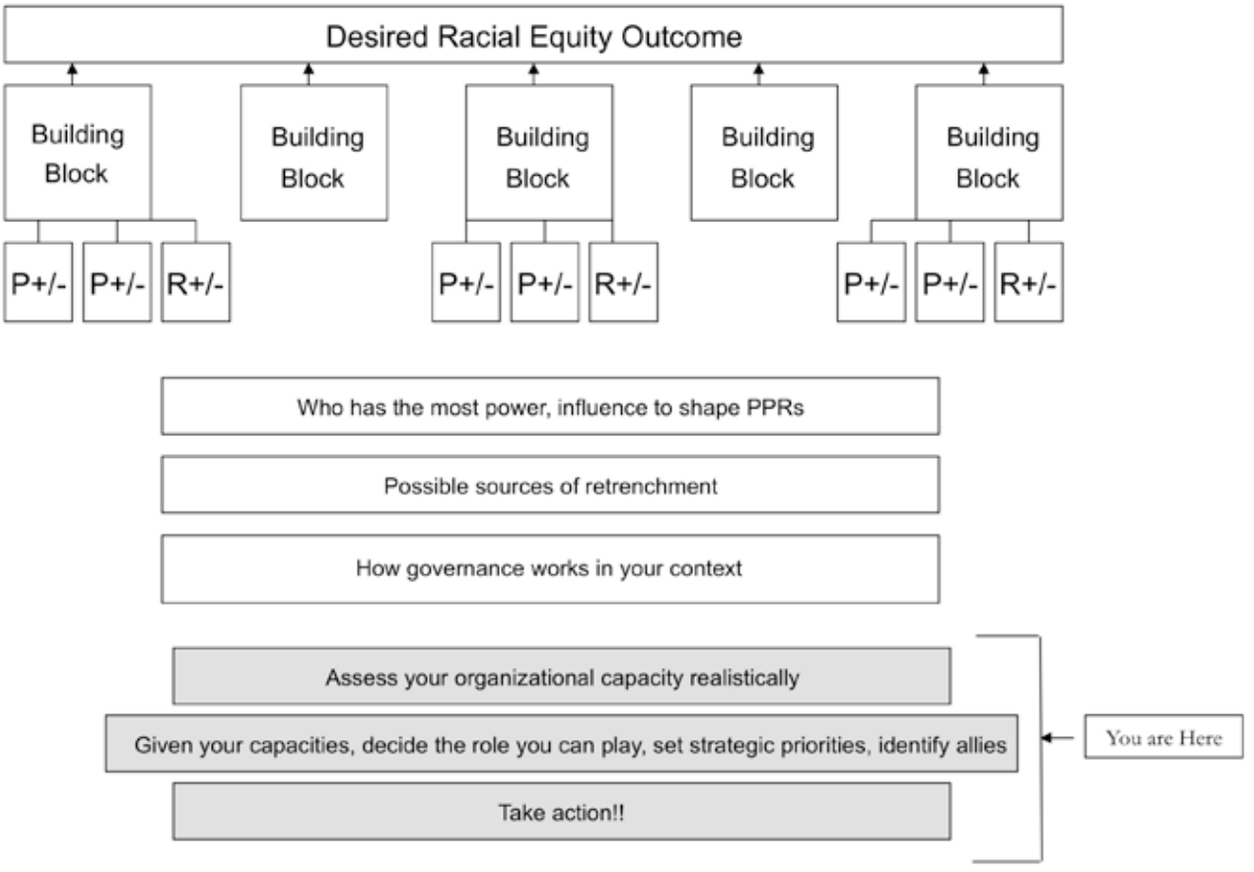
You also may need to master unfamiliar "policy knowledge" to engage power elites effectively. This is often the crucial advantage they hold over the general public. For example, remedial education resources for high-school dropouts may be allocated according to funding formulas known only to a few budget insiders. They and a few legislators, also may be the only ones familiar with the timetables and processes for changing those formulas.

To help you navigate the politics in your area or community, Exercise # 4 on pages 45-52 helps you apply the ideas in this step to your initiative.

* Some aspects of a public contracting process, for example, can be formal, transparent and accessible, while others can be very obscure. Public agencies may have a standard process for soliciting and evaluating responses to requests for proposals (RFPs) for, say, at-risk youth services. But at the same time, it can be hard to know when such RFPs are issued if elites informally agree to limit public notification. Informal deals are also routinely made to craft RFPs in ways that favor particular applicants–whether intentionally or not.

STEP #5: What You Must Do

Assessing Your Capacity, Planning, & Gearing Up for Action



Now you can see that the work of racial equity involves taking **actions to change or support a specific set of PPRs,** either on your own, but most often in collaboration with others. These actions must target those who most influence the characteristics of those PPRs in your local context.

Exercise # 5 on pages 53-57 will help you make your own detailed and focused plan of action, putting you on your way to achieving your Racial Equity Outcome.

Special Note As You Gear Up To Take Action:

Working Across Color Lines and Generations
Through the Haze of Behavior & Emotion

To create racial equity in juvenile arrest rates, you might look closely at the systems and procedures of public schools, child welfare agencies, police departments and other youth-serving institutions to identify key decision criteria that may be ostensibly neutral, but end up producing disproportionate outcomes—often due to the disproportionate contact of youth of color with social control institutions.

In addition to the policies, practices and cultural representations that may support or impede your work to dismantle structural racism, in this or any other sector, **it is essential that you consider the social psychological and emotional dynamics that surround race.** Many Americans do not want to accept that living in a racialized society can affect the way we all think and feel in ways that are real, negative and cumulative. But if we do not face these realities head-on we risk not only being ineffective in our work to bring about racial equity, but actually doing harm.

A colleague once described the inability to see structural racism as similar to the way in which fish do not see the water in which they swim. Inextricable from the dominant narratives about race that have framed people of color as inferior, less intelligent, less willing to adopt the mainstream culture and so on, are the psychology and emotion that accompany them. Humans unconsciously use a variety of mental shortcuts, or "frames" to interpret the world around them. Strong emotions such as fear, anger and insecurity activate these frames very easily and race elicits all of these strong emotions. **Far too often, the emotion stirred up by race can blind us from seeing how, in certain contexts, historical, institutional and other factors outside the control of individuals of color, contribute far more to their disadvantages than their personal failings.**

All Races Are Affected

Manifestations for Whites

The social psychological effects of living in a racialized society are different for whites and people of color. The defensiveness often displayed by whites when race comes up provides some evidence of this difference. We have all heard whites say things like, "Why can't they just get over it?" or "My family wasn't even here when slavery was in place." Some whites feel a great deal of guilt, accompanied by a sense that there is nothing that they can do. Besides defensiveness, this guilt can also lead to apathy and to shutting down or blaming people of color themselves when they complain about racial injustices.

Cumulative Effects for Youth of Color

For people of color these cumulative social psychological and emotional effects can manifest themselves as stress-related physical and mental health outcomes and as adaptive behaviors that can reinforce negative stereotypes. For instance, the latter can influence youth culture in ways that stigmatize black and Latino males especially. We are all familiar with the defiant "cool pose" adopted by some youth of color (wearing pants slung low on the hip, listening to violent rap music, dropping out of school, using drugs). **If we fail to understand things like these as responses, in some measure, to the cumulative pressures and stresses of living in our divided society and if we fail to account for the role that such cultural and behavioral adaptations play in maintaining this divide, then we miss a key component of the work of promoting racial equity.** We must be both supportive and creative in helping young people see how they may contribute to their marginalization by adapting to social pressures and stresses in ways that lessen their prospects for success in school and the job market, and that increase their chances of entanglement in the criminal justice system. We also must be patient and firm in helping those who view such youth as undeserving, recognize that they are often struggling to make sense of a very challenging and often unfair society.

Mistrust

Another of these social-psychological and emotional elements that racial equity workers must take into consideration is the role of mistrust that has accumulated within communities of color. While younger people may express their alienation in the visible ways described above, older generations who lived through the civil rights struggles may harbor deep mistrust in public institutions and cross-racial alliances. Older people of color often have vivid memories of degrading treatment and conditions and of shocking brutality. These memories, although increasingly distant, are not easy to put aside. They often hinder efforts to work together across color lines. This sense of mistrust can be as real for many who grew up in the '70s and '80s as it is for those who came of age in the 1960s. Seeing communities deteriorate, schools flounder and prisons overflow, some men and women of these later generations may not believe that their involvement will be worthwhile. Others simply may no longer have the energy to participate socially or politically in the ways that we know can make a difference in all communities.

People of Color Who Have 'Made It'

Despite their greater capacity to contribute to the work of dismantling structural racism, some people of color who have "beaten the odds" and achieved success can also be reluctant to engage on matters of racial equity. In some cases these individuals may want to distance themselves emotionally and psychologically from what may be a painful past. Despite outside appearances, many may actually lack the financial resources to play the roles we might assume they could play. **We know, for example, that high-earning blacks and Latinos may have salaries or incomes on par with their white counterparts, but almost always have much less wealth.** And it is wealth, rather than income, that provides the capacity to make substantial financial contributions to worthy organizations and institutions.

Accounting for the Social Psychological and Emotional in Order to Improve the Effort

We bring these points to the RETOC discussion not to make excuses or to present what may seem insurmountable barriers. We elaborate these aspects of the "software" that drives to the "hardware" of public policies and institutional practices particularly because they can present significant hidden barriers to the formation of alliances across color, class and generational lines. **Recognizing the role of how we all process social information that is laden with race will increase the likelihood of success in your work for racial equity.**

We do not suggest that psychology and emotion need to be leading features of your work, only that you recognize that they can be underlying barriers to brokering strategic relationships and alliances. If these issues do arise as major obstacles, you may consider consulting with experts who can help you overcome them early in your racial equity initiative.

Concluding Thoughts

The RETOC is an effort by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change to translate a particular vision of racial equity into a practical tool for change. Our hope is that it adds value to race-conscious strategizing about community change in at least four respects:

- By suggesting goals and directions for action that may not come out of planning approaches that are less meticulous about interrogating planners' assumptions at every level and less disciplined by a structural race analysis.
- By encouraging "systems" rather than "siloed" thinking: That is, exploration of the webs of mutually reinforcing policies and practices across multiple institutions that are behind all chronic racial disparities.
- By challenging change leaders to give equal attention to cognitive sources of racial disparities—to pervasive racially biased images, stereotypes, frames and policy knowledge that are shaped and legitimized by history, tradition and political power.
- By reminding planners to take the likelihood of sociopolitical resistance and retrenchment into account whenever they design and implement racial equity action strategies.

We do not present this tool as a panacea, nor as a blueprint for success in all circumstances and contexts. Local planners and practitioners must ultimately make strategic and tactical judgments based on their intimate knowledge of local problems and opportunities to make change. But we believe that the RETOC process can help those who want eliminate racial disparities ask many of the right questions at the critical early stages of equity-oriented community change initiatives

Appendix: Pulling the RETOC Juvenile Justice Scenario Together

This hypothetical scenario was developed from the perspective of a small community-focused organization concerned about chronic racial disparities in youth outcomes.

Their desired long-term racial equity outcome is the elimination of racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in the region they serve within two years.

Applying the early RETOC steps, the organization concludes that any prospect for change in this status quo depends on at least five building blocks:

- Similar racial arrest rates
- A wider menu of positive youth recreational options
- Alternative sentencing
- Preventive community policing
- Culturally competent officers and juvenile justice officials

They realize that all five are important, but know that they lack the resources and expertise to tackle them all. So, they spend some time doing policy research, reaching out to experts and talking to local residents and other stakeholders in order to make informed choices about what the organization can handle. Eventually, they decide to take on only the first three.

Guided by their insights about how racism "works," they then set out to determine the key policies, practices and representations (PPRs) shaping each of those three building blocks.

The organization identifies specific youth sentencing guidelines, policing practices and local media biases that must change to equalize arrests, generate more recreational programs and institutionalize "community justice" sentencing alternatives.

Here, they are also careful to think of what can undermine these positive changes, or slow momentum toward achieving them.

Next, the organization develops a picture of the local political, business and civic actors most instrumental in promoting or opposing these PPRs.

However, they are not really familiar with how the local governance process works in relation to many of these issues. They have a general sense of the "key players" at City Hall, on Main Street and at the local community foundation, but little else regarding the crafting and introduction of policy proposals and the bargaining, negotiating and pressuring required to see them through. So they seek out organizational partners with this expertise who share their broad social vision and join coalitions already engaged in the governance process. (These include coalitions of local tenant organizers, criminal justice experts, youth development advocates, concerned parents and business leaders working to improve youth opportunities). The organization's contribution to these coalitions is their extensive peer network, their convening power and their credibility with local leaders.

They see that although these coalitions are race conscious, most have not systematically applied a structural analysis or planning tool similar to the RETOC. So the organization takes the opportunity to introduce them to this process and works with the coalitions to build consensus around a range of goals and priorities that include the organization's juvenile justice outcomes.

Together, they develop a citywide campaign with these initial foci:

Focus #1:

(a) Ending the disproportionate contact between law enforcement and youth of color due to the targeted, aggressive community policing that leads to disproportionate arrests for minor infractions, (e.g., marijuana possession, traffic violations);

(b) Taking the first steps to address institutional factors other than law enforcement and juvenile justice practices that perpetuate local conditions that heighten risks for youth (e.g., low rates of job creation, underachieving schools, housing blight, proliferation of liquor stores, etc.)

Four action priorities might be:

- To publicize disparities between high levels of surveillance, patrolling and arrests versus low rates of serious crime in targeted neighborhoods.
- To gather data on and publicize, contrasts between the disposition of such arrests for inner city youth compared with white youth in neighboring suburban communities.
- To strengthen "probable cause" and "informed consent" criteria that allow officers to stop and frisk youth of color.
- To begin mobilizing local leaders around "justice reinvestment:" identification of local areas of highest per capita public expenditure on prisons; development of alternative public spending priorities likely to address failures in institutions critical in maintenance of local environments that provide opportunities for youth.

Focus #2:

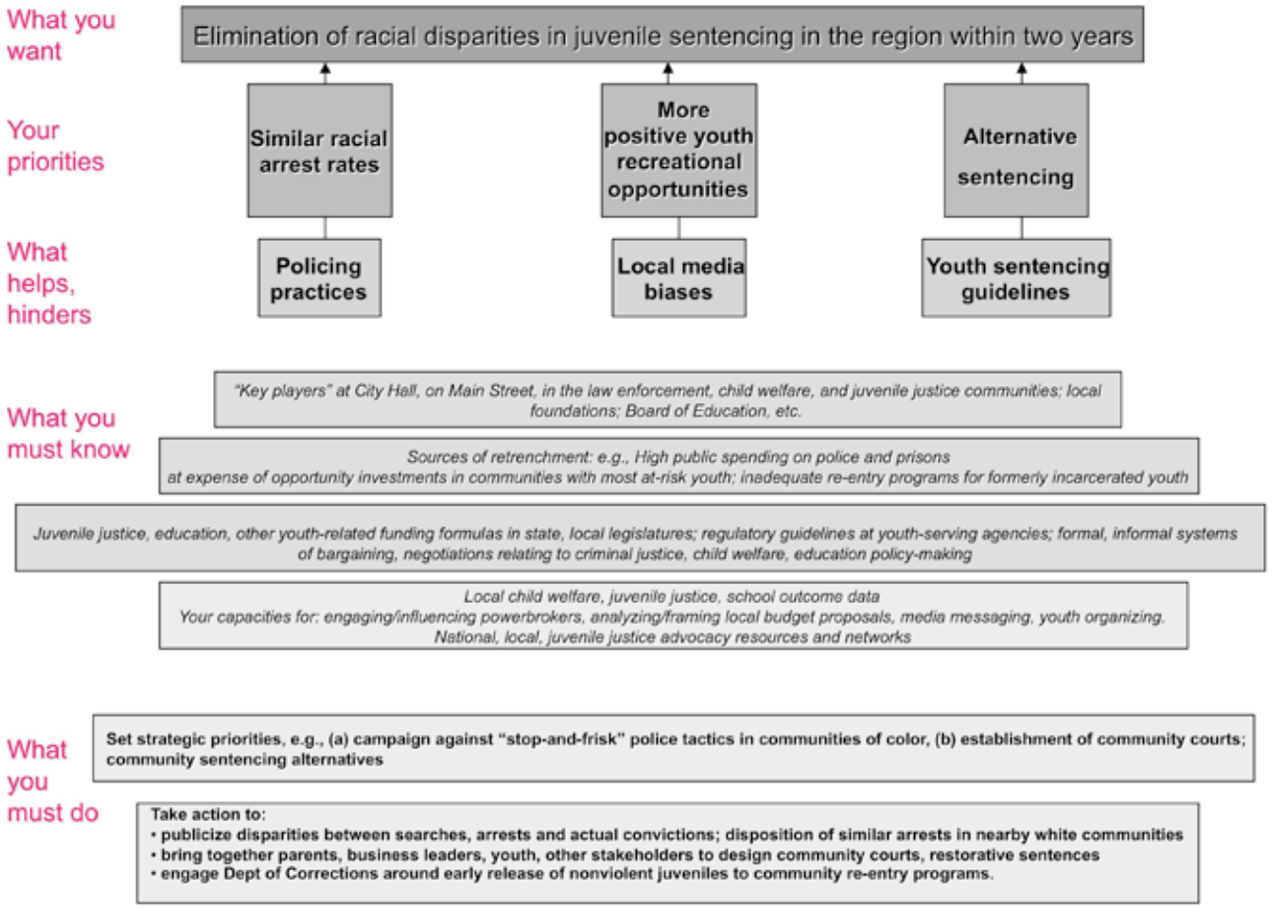
(a) The creation of more community courts for nonviolent youth offenders, with sentencing structures based on restorative principles rather than the incarceration punishment model;

(b) The advancement of a broader institutional change agenda that promotes youth opportunity and limits retrenchment.

Three action priorities might be:

- Community forums that engage residents in setting up courts, determining where restorative remedies are appropriate, designing sentences and supervision and accountability structures.
- Working with Department of Corrections to secure early release of nonviolent juveniles to community re-entry programs.
- Broad coalition-building around justice reinvestment agenda.

See the next page for a full diagram of this scenario.


What you want
Elimination of racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in the region within two years
Your priorities
Similar racial arrest rates
More positive youth recreational opportunities
Alternative sentencing
What helps, hinders
Policing practices
Local media biases
Youth sentencing guidelines
What you must know
"Key players" at City Hall, on Main Street, in the law enforcement, child welfare, and juvenile justice communities; local foundations; Board of Education, etc.
Sources of retrenchment: e.g., High public spending on police and prisons at expense of opportunity investments in communities with most at-risk youth; inadequate re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated youth
Juvenile justice, education, other youth-related funding formulas in state, local legislatures; regulatory guidelines at youth-serving agencies; formal, informal systems of bargaining, negotiations relating to criminal justice, child welfare, education policy-making
Local child welfare, juvenile justice, school outcome data
Your capacities for: engaging/influencing powerbrokers, analyzing/framing local budget proposals, media messaging, youth organizing.
National, local, juvenile justice advocacy resources and networks
What you must do
Set strategic priorities, e.g., (a) campaign against "stop-and-frisk" police tactics in communities of color, (b) establishment of community courts; community sentencing alternatives
Take action to:
• publicize disparities between searches, arrests and actual convictions; disposition of similar arrests in nearby white communities
• bring together parents, business leaders, youth, other stakeholders to design community courts, restorative sentences
• engage Dept of Corrections around early release of nonviolent juveniles to community re-entry programs.

CONSTRUCTING A RACIAL EQUITY THEORY OF CHANGE

A Practical Guide for Designing Strategies to Close Chronic Racial Outcome Gaps

WORKBOOK

EXERCISE #1

Use the guiding questions below to compose your own Racial Equity Outcome (REO). *(See pages 13-14)*

Is there a specific area of racial disparity you'd like to eliminate?

At what scale will you seek change? Institutions or organizations? Community? County? State? Region?

What will "racial equity" look like in your outcome area? Are your racial goals measurable?

When do you expect to see results? What is the timeframe? Two years? Ten years?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Notes

EXERCISE #2

2a) As an exercise, develop an initial list of five or more building blocks for your REO (try to come up only with those you believe are necessary and sufficient). *(See pages 15-16).*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2b) Narrow your list down to a number that you think might be reasonably within your reach as an individual or organization.

Again, in the juvenile justice example the REO is:

"To eliminate racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in my city/county/region within two years."

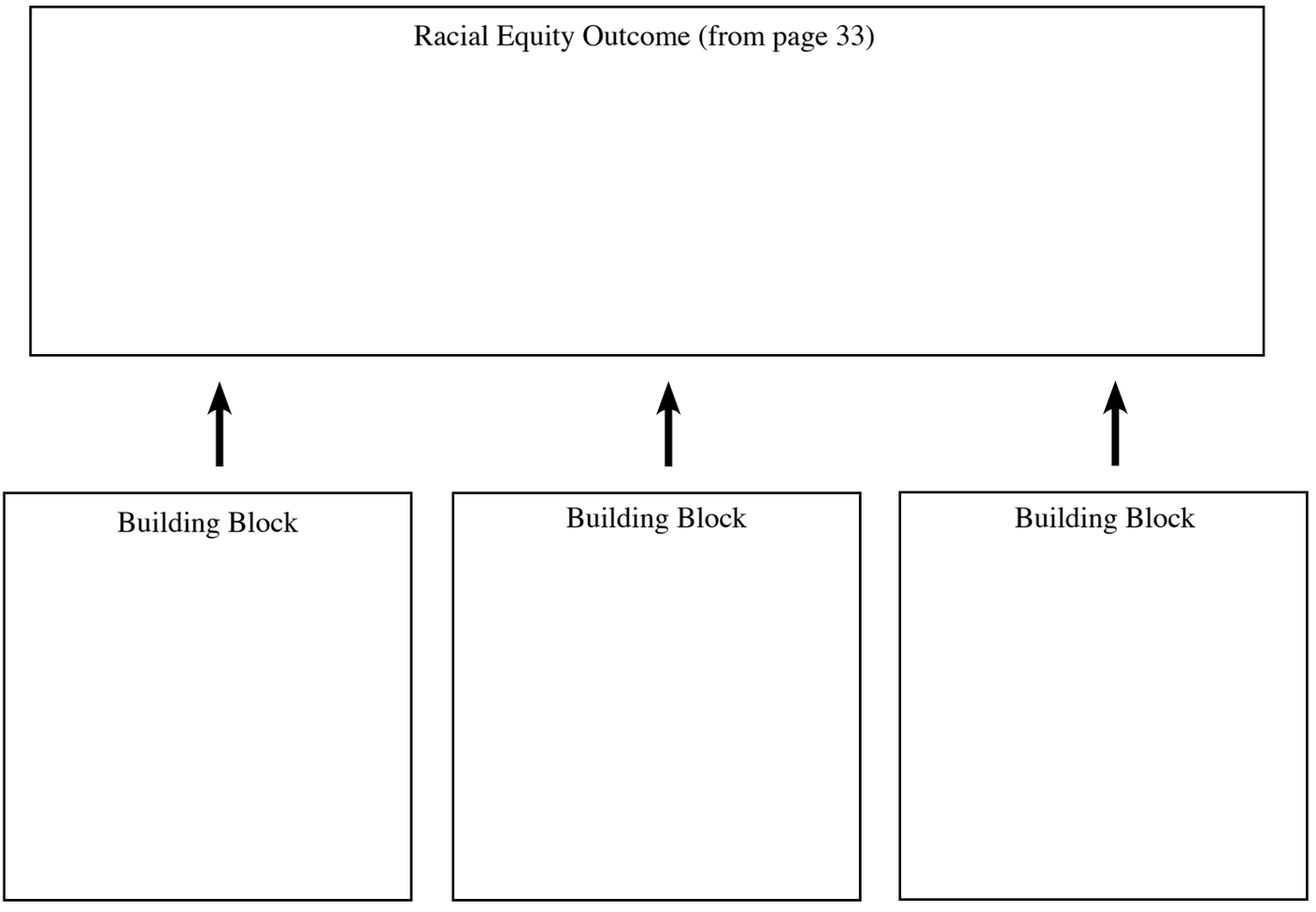
Assuming, for example, that you decide on three "reachable" building blocks, they might be:

- Similar arrest rates for white, black and brown youth in the same community or region for any given offence
- A wider menu of positive recreational options for local youth
- Alternative sentencing options for local judges: options that are more proportionate to the crimes committed and that take the devastating community impacts of mass incarceration into account.

Notes

EXERCISE #2 (contd.)

2c) Use the template on the following page to write down your Racial Equity Outcome and your three reachable building blocks.



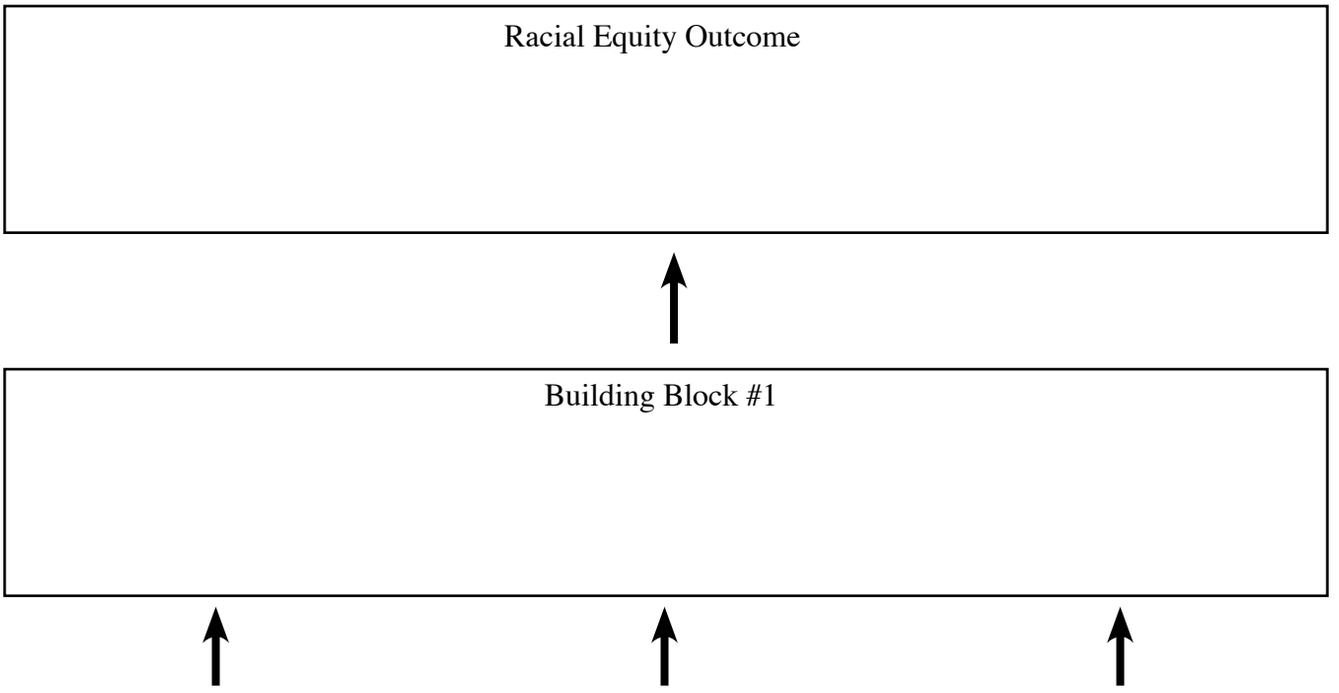
Identify the other building blocks that are important but <u>not</u> directly in your control:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Notes

EXERCISE #3

3a) Identify the policies, practices and cultural representations that will determine whether each building block in your map is reached. *(See pages 17-18)*



Public Policies	Social & Institutional Practices	Cultural Representations/ Stereotypes/Frames

Notes

EXERCISE #3 (contd.)

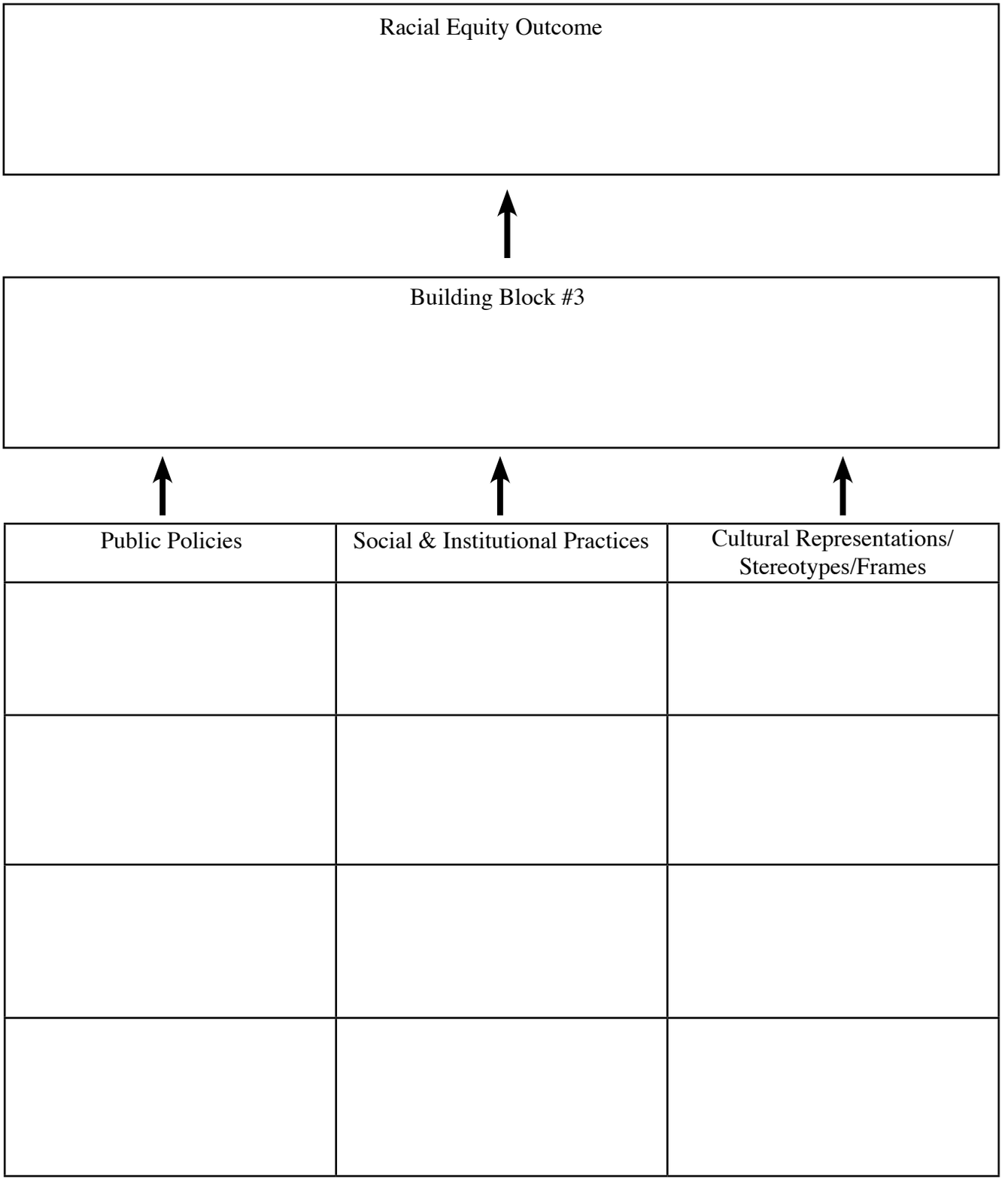
Racial Equity Outcome

Building Block #2

Public Policies	Social & Institutional Practices	Cultural Representations/ Stereotypes/Frames

Notes

EXERCISE #3 (contd.)



Notes

EXERCISE #4

Considering the PPRs you want to target for either change or support, you should, at a minimum, answer the following question:

4a) Which individuals or institutions have the power relevant to the PPRs in your community, city, county, or state? Which ones are likely to be allies or obstacles with regard to your interests?

Those with the Most Power to Effect Change	
Potential Allies	Potential Obstacles

Notes

EXERCISE #4 (Contd.)

If you need to explore this landscape more thoroughly, here are four additional sets of questions you might ask:

4b) What are the key decision-making bodies relevant to your issue at the state, local, regional, or federal levels?

- Who sits on these bodies?
- What are their mandates, timetables and activities?
- What mechanisms exist for public access and holding them accountable?

Key Decision-Making Body	Who Has Influence & Control	Mandates, Timetables, Activities	Mechanisms Available for Public Access & Accountability

Notes

EXERCISE #4 (Contd.)

4c) What is the legislative or institutional history relating to the policy or practice under consideration?

- Are there important changes or developments in the legislative, regulatory, or administrative "pipeline" with respect to this issue?
- Who are the main promoters or opponents of those changes or developments?
- Has this been a contested area historically? If so, why?

Particular Legislative or Institutional History?	
Important Changes or Developments?	
Main Promoters or Opponents?	
Historically Contested Area?	

Notes

EXERCISE #4 (Contd.)

4d) Are there complicated budgetary or technical aspects to the issue that require specialized knowledge?

- If so, who provides that analysis?
- Is this information publicly available? If so, where?

Budgetary or Technical Aspects?	
Who Provides Analysis?	
Who Provides Analysis? Publicly Available? If Not, How to Access?	

4e) Which organizations in your community or region traditionally take leadership in this particular issue-area?

- How do they exercise leadership?
- What is their stake in the issue?
- Are they likely to be an ally or obstacle with regard to your interests?

Who Currently Takes Leadership	How Leadership is Exercised	Stake in the Issue	Likely Ally or Obstacle

Notes

EXERCISE #5 *(See page 21)*

5a) Does your organization have the will to take on this type of work for a sustained period?

- Do the board, staff and other leaders within your organization share a race analysis that will prioritize this work?
- Does the leadership have the courage and commitment to take this on?

If "No," what concrete steps will you take to increase organizational awareness and understanding of structural racism?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5b) Does your organization have the capacity to do what's necessary to change or promote PPRs? What specific capacities do you have that will allow you to take specific action?

Besides staff and financial resources, at least four additional types of capacities may be required:

Analytical – deep knowledge of specific policy, legislative and regulatory environments; familiarity with racial dynamics and outcomes of specific institutions; capacity to identify and assess power of narratives, images and other representations linked to race; strategic thinking capacity.

Our capacities in this area: _____

_____

_____

Notes

EXERCISE #5 (Contd.)

Convening – capacity to bring together disparate stakeholder groups; provide "safe space" for honest discussion with agenda that moves process forward; support ongoing learning community.

Our capacities in this area: _____

_____

_____

Communicative – ability to frame information for and reach, critical audiences in local government, business and civic sectors.

Our capacities in this area: _____

_____

_____

Networking – ability to develop, participate in and actual membership of, formal and informal networks and coalitions; ability to acquire resources through those relationships.

Our capacities in this area: _____

_____

_____

5c) What will your organization do as a first step?

With this clearer sense of what your organization can actually invest in an effort to achieve the desired racial equity outcome, you can develop a detailed action plan that is both realistic and in line with your social change vision.

- What will be your initial focus?
- What do you think you will have accomplished by the end of year one?

_____

_____

_____

Notes

EXERCISE #5 (Contd.)

5d) How will you communicate your plan?

- Who will be your messenger?
- What media, communication format and messaging language will you use?
- Who will be your audience

Messengers:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Language:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Audience:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Notes

When you have completed your RETOC, evaluate it according to these criteria:

- Clarity of racial equity outcome; clarity of the racial analysis that underlies your desired outcome
- Clarity in the description of and rationale for, your top three building blocks
- Recognition of building blocks that are not directly in your control and what, if anything, you are going to do about them
- Informed selection and analysis of the policies, practices and representations that you must affect in order to get to your building blocks in place
- Realistic mapping of the individual/institutional supports and obstacles
- Honest analysis of your institutional capacities for conducting the work
- Rationale for the first step you and your colleagues will take
- Likely reach and effectiveness communication and messaging strategy