Centering Racial Equity in Measurement and Evaluation

Emerging Lessons and Guidance from Human Service Nonprofits

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Many nonprofit organizations that provide direct human services are exploring how racial equity and inclusion (REI) and performance measurement collectively inform decisionmaking and strategies that affect their core mission (box 1). Human service nonprofits often hold an explicit charge to increase the well-being of people who have been disempowered, disadvantaged, and systematically oppressed. Starting from this mission orientation, organizations can benefit from guidance on operationalizing racial equity values within their measurement and evaluation work and acknowledging the systemic barriers that influence client outcomes.

BOX 1

Defining Racial Equity and Measurement and Evaluation

Broadly defined, racial equity is "the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares"—from employment, to health, to education, and far beyond. Performance measurement, also referred to as measurement and evaluation, relies on data-driven learning to help nonprofits understand program efficacy and facilitate a learning culture that engages staff not only in measuring success, but also in supporting innovation and improvement for the organization and the clients served.

Sources: "Racial Equity," Racial Equity Tools, accessed April 28, 2021,
https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals/core-concepts/racial-equity; and "Measure4Change," Urban Institute, accessed April 28, 2021, https://www.urban.org/measure4change.

Although many racial equity toolkits are focused on integrating a practice of racial equity into an organization, few resources outline how human service nonprofits can leverage and expand

measurement and evaluation capacity to support this goal (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2008; Boyarski 2018; Chow 2018; Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld 2018). This brief explores how racial equity and inclusion can strengthen nonprofits' measurement and evaluation work and how measurement and evaluation help nonprofits identify inequities and use data to improve the operationalization of REI practices.

Nonprofit practitioners can align their measurement and evaluation framework with REI through five broad steps.

1. Find your starting place: create internal processes.

2. Align your measurement framework: assess programs, revise logic models, and refine indicators.

3. Improve your tools: update data collection language and collection processes.

4. Check your assumptions: address bias in data analysis, and bring in secondary data.

5. Expand engagement and accountability: create staff and client feedback loops.

The five steps are not necessarily sequential. But because the topics are interdependent and overlapping, approaching them as a sequence can help with implementation. The sequence is predicated on an institutional commitment to use a racial equity lens throughout a nonprofit.

Some organizations might follow the steps by revising existing logic models or indicators to center REI within familiar measurement and evaluation tools, while other organizations that do not have an existing logic model can holistically approach the development of new measurement and evaluation tools created through an REI lens. Similarly, an organization may already have a robust feedback loop but may need to update the language used in surveys or focus on addressing bias in data analysis. For this reason, Steps 2 through 5 can build on each other but can also be taken as stand-alone topics that support different measurement and evaluation needs within each nonprofit's racial equity journey.

The five steps are informed by the insights of practitioners working at the nexus of REI and nonprofit measurement and evaluation. Specifically, we draw on lessons learned through recent literature and conferences on the topics, several convenings that were held as part of the Measure4Change initiative (box 2) and were focused on REI and performance measurement,[1] and eight interviews with measurement and evaluation staff at Measure4Change member organizations centering REI within their measurement and evaluation work. These member organizations offer services that span housing, food access, health care, employment, and youth and adult education.

BOX 2
About Measure4Change

Measure4Change was founded in Washington, DC, in 2014 in collaboration with the World Bank Group. Measure4Change recognizes that many nonprofits serve clients whose lives are shaped by racial and socioeconomic inequities. Taking a holistic approach to capacity building for nonprofit measurement and evaluation, Measure4Change encourages organizations to look inward and outward. For nonprofits, this means creating opportunities for clients' voices and engagement to shape decisions, cultivating an organizational culture that values accountability, and leveraging performance measurement principles to achieve equity and inclusion within organizations and for their clientele.

Measure4Change offers three supports for human service nonprofit organizations:

- **Community of practice.** Measure4Change hosts learning seminars that expose nonprofits to performance measurement tools and foster peer learning and networking among community of practice members.

- **One-on-one coaching, cohort-based trainings, and grant support.** Measure4Change provides grant support, coaching, and one-on-one, intensive technical assistance for local nonprofits. These resources help nonprofits build robust performance measurement systems. The technical assistance is guided by a curriculum that sets a foundation for measurement and evaluation and equips nonprofit professionals to pivot their organizational cultures toward learning.

- **Practice briefs and tools.** Nonprofit leaders need more resources about the early stages of performance measurement programs and how to overcome the practical challenges they will face as they build their programs. Complementing the community of practice, the Measure4Change team has published a performance measurement playbook,[a] practice briefs, and tools that explain key concepts and address relevant topics in performance measurement.

Sources: "Measure4Change," Urban Institute, https://www.urban.org/measure4change.
[a] Brett Theodos, Mary Winkler, Peter Tatian, Sara McTarnaghan, Leiha Edmonds, Somala Diby, Patrick Spauster, and Ananya Hariharan, "Measure4Change Performance Measurement Playbook," Urban Institute, May 2021, https://www.urban.org/measure4change-performance-measurement-playbook.

For nonprofit organizations committed to racial equity, the measurement and evaluation team will be among the many parts of the organization that adopt a racial equity lens and practice throughout their work. An REI practice can include how measurement and evaluation staff bring data to the larger organization to inform programming and support, as well as how they revise and improve data collection and analysis procedures to reflect racial equity goals. Whether a nonprofit is creating new program outcomes that focus on combating the structural racism that harms clients, or monitoring internal hiring practices to better understand inequities in staffing, or improving intake forms and surveys to better protect the privacy of clients of color who share their data, adopting an REI practice in coordination with performance measurement can support human service nonprofits' data-driven programming and client and staff success.

1. Find Your Starting Place: Create Internal Processes

Achieving racial equity requires intentionality, as demonstrated through adopting an REI lens or practice. As organizations determine their interest in making REI central to their work, they must also assess their ability to regularly apply the processes needed to achieve the desired result (Dudley et al. 2019; ProInspire 2018).

Measurement and evaluation staff frequently told us that organizations committed to performance measurement through an REI lens after broader internal work about organizational culture. This work sometimes included bringing in external consultants and experts on REI to work with a nonprofit over time. In other cases, shorter training on topics like unconscious bias spurred larger staff meeting discussions, internal surveying, brown bags, and book clubs led by staff and nonprofit leadership. From such starting places that establish organizational interest in REI, nonprofits' nascent processes can move to organizational commitment with clear and thorough support from leadership to imbue the practice of racial equity throughout the organization. As an interviewee described,

> We started our work around [REI] just over three years ago. It really started as a staff-focused initiative, and we didn't have any concrete goals or metrics coming out of that. With REI work, it's a lot of figuring things out as we go. A few milestones: focused on internal staff education and training, working with staff to see what they'd like to see. In the following year, we did an internal equity audit to help think big picture. Now [the audit findings] materialized to [help us] think about more concrete REI goals and measures throughout our strategic plan language and in strategic plan outcomes.

Measurement and evaluation professionals can support an organization and hold it accountable to the expansion of a racially equitable internal culture. Measurement and evaluation staff work closely with organizational staff at all levels to align a nonprofit's operations with expected inputs, interventions, outputs, and outcomes. As with the capture of client outcomes over time, performance measurement can be applied to internal racial equity work, with measurement and evaluation staff helping create staff performance expectations that center REI goals. This could include writing surveys that capture staff race and ethnicity composition and job satisfaction or collecting data on the number of staff engaged in REI training or offerings. These performance expectations would indicate whether staff operate in accordance with the organization's REI goals.

Management accountability groups (MAGs) are another approach to institutionalizing REI that can draw on the skills of measurement and evaluation staff. A MAG would build a set of action steps for itself and create metrics to measure how well the organization makes progress toward its REI goals. This approach concentrates responsibility and active oversight of measurement on REI goals within a few people and can be a timely way to begin the process. A MAG should not reinforce a power differential within the organization; rather, it should offer a way to ensure both organizational accountability and clear individual accountability within the organization. One interviewee using a MAG structure offered this reflection on the approach:

> As an organization, we are in the process of moving from awareness to advancement of equity...
> Our working group is pure energy, and the CEO is very open about this [group] being a priority.
> The working group has six to eight attendees at this point, so this makes it easier to fulfill
> different roles for moving the work forward. We each know where to push and pull on the work
> across the org to create a good momentum.

Communicating and sharing data on progress are essential for this approach. Despite the smaller group of staff guiding the work, the larger staff should be made aware of and exposed to emerging REI-related objectives with a consistent communication and data-sharing strategy. Through this process, the MAG can also identify areas within the organization in which racial equity practices are being applied and areas in which they are not. This identification of progress and challenges can help the organization course-correct in real time.

Whether establishing a MAG or engaging all levels of staff in an organization-wide process, the journey will be long and multifaceted. Nonprofit staff focused on measurement and evaluation can play a pivotal role in embedding REI-informed practices into the organization. By bringing existing program data to the conversation, as well as secondary data and research that can contextualize and enrich explorations of racism and bias within the organization, measurement and evaluation staff are vital in efforts to adopt and embed an REI framework. In addition, measurement and evaluation staff can build from this internal work to assess more external features, such as programming and client experience.

The remaining sections highlight approaches to revising and improving programming, client engagement, and their associated performance measurement practices through a racial equity lens.

2. Align Your Measurement Framework: Assess Programs, Revise Logic Models, and Refine Indicators

Moving to a racially equitable organizational culture and practice requires critically assessing programming and practices across a nonprofit. Organizations with measurement and evaluation systems can still rely on outdated program practices that reinforce structural and institutional racism. For example, an organization may have consistent data on program completion, but client completion may be predicated on a punitive attendance system. Furthermore, biased program and training staff members may be assessing the success of a clientele that is largely people of color; in such cases, subjectivity and bias should be scrutinized. Developing or returning to program logic models and organizational metrics and indicators offers a starting point for nonprofits to reassess programs through a racial equity lens. This approach can also create avenues for staff to assess their internalized beliefs and biases when assessing program outcomes and support equitable decisionmaking that affects clients and outcomes.

A logic model is a tool that conveys a program's or project's operations in a brief visual format. A theory of change articulates the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide a program's or organization's strategic evolution. Both tools set the foundation for shared language, belief, and processes for program improvement and can be critically important to ensuring the organization is

centering racial equity in all its activities. Creating or revising a logic model enables a nonprofit to assess program activities and consider whether its outputs and outcomes center racial equity. Developing logic models can help staff better understand their roles in accomplishing outcomes, improve implementation and management, and succinctly inform outside audiences how the organization works and what equitable outcomes the program is working toward. Logic models should be living documents that evolve over time, as one interviewee explained about the process:

> We created logic models in the fall of 2019. So this is an example of evolution over time because we named the structural problems that create a lack of housing and poverty in DC in the logic model, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't named as structural racism. Now, as an organization, we have stronger language to talk about how that structural problem is related to race in specific ways. That's the difference in what we wrote in 2019 and what we wrote in 2020. That's the evolution of naming [structural racism] explicitly [that] you can see in our work.

A logic model can describe how a nonprofit drives positive social change through a program's activities and results, including outputs or immediate change (such as clients' completing training) and outcomes or sustained changes (such as clients' retaining employment for six months). Frequently, long-term outcomes are a helpful place for a nonprofit to start incorporating its vision for adopting and achieving racially equitable outcomes before working backward through the rest of the logic model. Long-term outcomes should help staff reflect on why a program's work matters, how the program addresses long-term systemic challenges, and how it works to close disparities within the nonprofit's area of focus.

For example, to fulfill an outcome related to clients' financial stability, a program may need to think critically about the minimum wage versus a living wage, clients' access to financial institutions, the role of the financial industry in driving inequity, or discriminatory hiring practices by employers. These larger racial equity issues can inform programmatic updates, such as a partnership with a local credit union or expanded programming that includes more intentional work with employer partners. As programs evolve to support clients and address larger issues related to inequity, a logic model can map long-term outcomes back to the associated activities and outputs needed to create more equitable outcomes. As one interviewee said,

> Our logic models, regardless of program, always have the common theme of addressing the root causes of housing instability, health, and racial equity. We're always moving from a place of knowing that improving those three factors will increase a family's ability to be housing secure, meet their health needs, or get a medical provider.

While a logic model helps organizations identify how a larger REI framework manifests in programming, it does not specify how to measure and track outputs and outcomes. Measurement and evaluation staff will need to develop indicators—usually expressed as a number, percentage, or rate—for all inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Output indicators track the program's progress on various services or activities. Outcome indicators track the program's successes or achievements, including whether it is producing racially equitable outcomes. These indicators should be developed with an understanding of the existing disparities and the target number, percentage, or rate needed to close the disparities. Indicators and target setting based on indicators should be created with an understanding of

the specific populations served so that targets are realistic for both clients and staff. One interviewee described how an organization achieved this accountability by incorporating a racial equity lens into its logic model and its indicators:

> The logic model and indicators hold us accountable and put our metrics down on paper. Our internal evaluation team is holding everyone else accountable for submitting data, but who is holding us accountable to those REI principles? How do we know? Now we look at the logic model, our grant outcomes, and our metrics data and it's written down. So now we can measure how equitable we are for student outcomes.

After creating output and outcome indicators that align with the nonprofit's racial equity values and its agreed-upon actions, measurement and learning staff should review current literature and consider updating data collection tools to capture new metrics. Staff should use an REI lens to refine indicators (that is, ensure that indicators reflect the organization's understanding of the inequities it works to address), rather than adding a section of REI outcomes separate from regular program tracking. In other words, an organization should resist the temptation to separate racial equity goals from all other goals in the organization. Racial equity as a value and an operating practice means that racial equity is at the center or core of all the organization's work—no decision is made and no activity is implemented without conducting a racial equity impact analysis to understand the effect of that decision on the organization's racial equity goals. This explicit understanding and practice prevent an organization from making racial equity a "nice to do" rather than a "must do."

Revising programming and updating indicators can sometimes lead to concerns around funder reporting requirements. Bringing in funders early when possible, to explain how the organization plans to improve its programming by using an REI lens, is a way for organizations to educate funders on why adopting an REI lens is mission critical, shifting the funder-grantee dynamics to one that is more funder-partner oriented. Funders may be open to updating metrics if the organization clearly explains how centering racial equity within the program modification process will improve client outcomes. Traditional reporting requirements, such as those connected to public funding, may still exist but can be captured using program data. Such requirements should not be a barrier to a more expansive reimagining of program design or outcomes.

3. Improve Your Tools: Update Data Collection Language and Collection Processes

Updating data collection tools and procedures is the next step after establishing a logic model and indicators. Staff may wish to review their current material. Whether the organization relies on intake forms and case notes, evaluation tests, or exit interviews, it is important that the language used in these materials aligns with equity-informed outcomes.

When creating a data collection tool, measurement and evaluation staff should begin by defining what the organization needs to know and who the key respondents should be. One interviewee described the organization's process in data collection, saying,

We fashion our work around four equitable evaluation principles. First, evaluation work should be in service of equity. Evaluative work can and should answer critical questions about how historical racism should come into play and why there are outcome gaps, because if we aren't focused on those higher-level questions, it won't be equitable. Work should be designed or implemented with the underlying values of equity. We ask ourselves, is a [data collection tool or process] multiculturally valid? We are also oriented toward participant ownership. We need to have the participants in the room having a conversation about the tools we create to collect data or the findings and how findings are framed, then we are doing the work of equity.

Measurement and evaluation staff can workshop questions with program staff to ensure that the questions are relevant to programmatic implementation or client tracking; do not perpetuate harmful narratives or beliefs; and are rooted in racial equity. For example, questions that stigmatize substance use and misuse by using terms such as "drug addict" or minimize the personhood of clients who were formerly incarcerated by using terms such as "felon" or "ex con" should be removed from all evaluation forms and processes. Organizations may need to collect data on these topics for support service referrals and can pay special attention to language choice. In other cases, organizations that do not provide services and supports related to these issues should consider whether requesting such data from clients is necessary. This step also can help ensure that data collection inflicts the smallest possible burden on clients and can help eliminate redundancies in collection across forms or improve language on sensitive topics.

Different types of data—including surveys, interviews, focus groups or observations, and administrative data—can reinforce one another and paint a broad picture for measurement and evaluation insights. Interviews and open-response surveys can allow clients to describe their own lives and experiences, giving them more autonomy and reducing the prescriptiveness of measurement and evaluation protocols while still collecting high-quality data. Interviews can also give organizations an in-depth look at clients' experiences in programs. Observational data (such as case notes) from classes, workshops, and counseling sessions can capture details on program administration and the adequacy of program content for achieving client outputs and outcomes. Administrative data can help program staff find trends that surveys and interviews could explore with further depth. A data review can also help organizations identify the systemic barriers and challenges that prevent participants from achieving their goals. These additional data on systemic challenges can inform organizational strategies and the programmatic interventions needed to support clients and address inequities across systems.

Measurement and evaluation staff can begin improving tools that use basic demographic data. Staff may consider how intake forms or surveys ask questions about race, ethnicity, and gender and then make sure these data can be disaggregated so the team can assess client outcomes and understand inequities or gaps. For example, do program outcomes differ between white and Black clients? Going deeper, do Black clients in different zip codes experience different program outcomes? Staff may begin by assessing basic data quality—how complete and accurate are the data? What share of the clients in the organization's database are missing information on their race, gender, or zip code? Do the data allow for disaggregation and comparison across categories?

If possible, measurement and evaluation staff should keep track of how many people opt out of data collection and whether people opt out for reasons the organization can address. For example, if people who speak languages other than English refrain from taking written surveys in English, an organization can offer versions of the survey in the languages clients prefer. Organizations may also recognize opportunities to broaden accessibility for clients with different learning and communication needs, such as ensuring online surveys are compatible with screen readers. Such examples demonstrate how organizations can operationalize racial equity to ensure full access for and inclusion of all people, which is a key component of racial equity. Access and inclusion are especially important when designing data analysis procedures that incorporate racial equity, because unequal participation in data collection can mask differences in program administration and outcomes along racial, ethnic, and other lines. One interviewee described both the importance and the challenge of data disaggregation:

> In bringing an REI lens to our work, one of the things we're trying to incorporate more of is being able to disaggregate data and look at those trends. That was our first step within measurement and evaluation. We had a series of challenges with that. One is that some of our programs are pretty small. It's already hard to have whole-group comparisons, let alone divide them up. Sample size has been an issue. We have this belief that we don't want to be erasing racial inequity within [the] organization by lumping data together, but we also feel like there's a danger in disaggregating data in ways that it can be too individually identifying.

It can be helpful to recognize the limitations of small sample sizes in disaggregated data that may lead measurement and evaluation staff to develop multiyear assessments of disaggregated client data, rather than immediately perform analysis. Small samples make it even more important to develop clear data security plans that anonymize and protect client data ahead of disaggregation. Additionally, data collection tools should provide clear explanations about how data will and will not be used so clients understand the purpose of the information they are asked to provide and how it will be protected.

Findings on demographic disparities can guide internal assessment, such as reallocation of resources to clients with the greatest barriers or challenges to meeting their goals or development of new tools to collect more complex information about differences in clients' outcomes and experiences. Reallocation of resources is a key equity practice, recognizing the impact of structural racism on the individual client and making programmatic shifts to address each client's needs.

4. Check Your Assumptions: Address Bias in Data Analysis, and Bring in Secondary Data

Measurement and evaluation staff are uniquely positioned to disrupt harmful systems and help service providers close racialized gaps in client outcomes. To build more equitable organizations and ensure programming is effective, nonprofits need consistent and accurate data analysis. As organizations bring REI insights to measurement and evaluation, they can improve data analysis and mitigate bias by examining existing literature to validate measures, especially literature by researchers of color rooted in centering racial equity; expanding sources of data; and disaggregating data (Nelson and Greenberg 2017).

Bias can show up in data analysis in many ways. For example, confirmation bias arises when people who analyze data expect some relationship between variables to exist and take any indication that weakly supports the trend as definitive (King et al. 2018). Program staff may believe, for example, that clients' savings increase when they receive a cash grant because of the inflow of money. In reality, however, savings also increase because debt decreases. Confirmation bias may thus erroneously reaffirm the former explanation while ruling out the latter. One way that confirmation bias frequently arises in analyses is through the existence of confounding variables. Such variables cause a specious correlation between two or more other variables. To detect confounding variables, data analysts should verify the strength of their findings via robustness checks and supplement quantitative data analysis with interviews and focus groups when possible. One interviewee noted how an organization can go a step further in eliminating bias:

> We're already in a good position in that we have internal evaluators—not all nonprofits have that capacity. But even though we have our team inside the organization, we wanted to remove bias as much as possible, and that meant reaching out to a third-party entity [to assess our measurement and evaluation process]. They did that work for us, and we've gone deeper into their findings. It's been essential to establish the groundwork from a third-party source to make sure we weren't baking in our biases.

Thoughtful analysis is key to the work of a measurement and evaluation team. REI relies heavily on critical analysis and examination of systems, policies, and practices, with the understanding of the impact of race and ethnicity on outcomes and our societal norms. The lens nonprofit measurement and evaluation staff use to see and understand the world heavily influences how staff understand and contextualize data and the challenges associated with those data. Adoption of an REI lens requires a more comprehensive understanding of the US societal context, specifically the impact of race and ethnicity on people and outcomes. This context is extremely important in data analysis. Without this new lens, measurement and evaluation staff cannot effectively analyze the data they are reviewing and sharing. But nonprofit measurement and evaluation teams have strong analysis practices and can build on best practices to ground analysis in an REI framework.

To begin, analysis staff can develop hypotheses based on recent literature and program evaluations and test these findings using program data. This approach alleviates confirmation bias by testing the relationships between variables rather than relying on anecdotal evidence or assumptions. "Fishing for relationships" may lead staff to mistake correlative relationships for causal ones, while testing against a hypothesis invites systematic robustness checks.

Another important step is checking and reinforcing data analysis with information from other analytical techniques, such as coding interviews and focus groups. Such qualitative data analysis spotlights clients' lived experiences to motivate programmatic and operational change, which can be valuable when describing differences in clients' outcomes along racial and ethnic lines. Recognizing and honoring clients' lived experiences is a key practice of racial equity. The ability to incorporate this practice further enhances an organization's commitment to racial equity through all aspects of its work.

Staff can also contextualize issues with secondary data. Secondary data, or data from sources other than an organization's data collection efforts, can describe how a nonprofit's client base relates to the rest of the population based on a particular metric (Bernabei 2017).[2] For example, a nonprofit can use secondary data to determine whether most of its client base really comes from the city's poorest decile or if it actually serves more clients who are living above rather than below the city's poverty line. Secondary data can also allow organizations to drill down to neighborhood-level statistics and map community trends that may affect clients. These data and analysis can support partnerships focused on systems-level advocacy around pressing equity issues. In some cases, nonprofits can partner with research organizations to access external data and explore bigger research questions about racial equity. One interviewee said,

> We're intentional around the partnerships we have around evaluation. With each partner, there's a specific focus on racial equity. We have an agreement with a partner with a huge research component that also includes assessing equity and bias with their data. Another research partnership will look at the effects of racism and microaggressions on the client experience…We are very strategic in the types of projects we sign ourselves up for, and we're able to pull from these great research teams to help build evidence that our programs have an equity lens and help us publish our findings.

Despite the benefits, secondary data are not a cure-all, and all sources of data should be scrutinized for bias and accuracy. Measurement and evaluation staff should assess the quality of secondary data just as they assess the quality of primary data. Staff should make sure that the data look complete and that each variable's data format matches what the variable should contain. Question wording and answer categories may affect the responses elicited, so it is important to compare secondary data with primary data and to ensure that the questions and answer choices align. A racial equity lens can help nonprofits critically evaluate and contextualize questions, develop culturally appropriate questions, and reduce bias in both data collection and analysis.

5. Expand Engagement and Accountability: Create Staff and Client Feedback Loops

Another avenue for equitable practices is how organizations share data with clients and how clients can become partners in designing their own service solutions. Client feedback loops and community-engaged methods include the input, participation, and reflections of the people and communities a nonprofit serves, providing organizations a clear account of clients' experiences. Feedback and engagement can look different at each organization, but every loop should involve four steps: (1) listening to clients, (2) reflecting on feedback data with clients, (3) acting on that feedback by making changes, and (4) communicating to clients that those changes were made. This process is critical for racial equity, disrupting the traditional human service model that assumes practitioners hold the knowledge of what is needed for those they serve. By incorporating client feedback loops, a nonprofit is recognizing, honoring, and valuing participants' experiences and creating the space for these individuals to design and codesign their own solutions (Murray, Falkenburger, and Saxena 2015).[3]

Client feedback loops can take many forms, including feedback surveys, data walks, and client advisory boards. Clients' engagement in measurement and evaluation can expand learning culture; redistribute power between clients and providers; and lead to action, change, and improvement. As one interviewee highlighted,

> The big opportunity for us is in more resident engagement and involvement [in measurement and evaluation], and that will mean that instead of me as a white outsider being the one who determines what racial equity looks like, we have a board of our residents that would be coequals in our measurement work. At the end of the day, I only bring my own perspective, so no matter how much training I do, the problem is partly that I'm the one making the choices. That shared decisionmaking with our residents is what I hope to expand.

Discussion and Emerging Lessons

We offer several areas of measurement and evaluation that are enhanced and strengthened by prioritizing racial equity. An REI lens can help nonprofits identify inequities and use data to improve the operationalization of racial equity practices. The daily choices that nonprofit staff make in data collection, analysis, opportunities for client feedback, and inclusion can build toward long-term organizational equity. This shift to incorporate a racial equity lens does not happen overnight and may not follow a linear pattern but can evolve over time.

Here, we offer only a few examples and topics organizations can use to catalyze larger conversations, strategic planning, and program redesign tailored to their unique needs. Many organizations we interviewed reflected that they were still learning and piloting incorporation of a racial equity lens into their work. Insights from these interviews should thus be taken as examples informed by both lived experience and literature that centers racial equity.

Although every organization is at a different stage in its racial equity work, a few themes emerged across our interviews to inspire future research and discussion:

1. **Leadership buy-in is key.** Nonprofits described their executive directors as champions or cheerleaders who made incorporating a racial equity lens into every element of the organization a priority. With prioritization comes reallocating funds, meeting time, and staff support to start building an equitable organization. As an interviewee said, "Our president/CEO has been one of the primary leaders on our REI work. He's really the person who is spearheading this at our organization...He's been the one who has been most active on asking big questions in terms of performance measurement and what we're collecting."

2. **Bringing a racial equity lens to nonprofits takes time and organizational capacity. It should not be left to one staff member or be assigned exclusively to the measurement and evaluation team.** Many of the organizations interviewed were in an early phase of adopting an REI framework and were smaller, with limited staff and capacity. These limitations often led interviewees to express that incorporating a racial equity lens into their work is long-term work and that as measurement and evaluation staff, they have particular skills to support the work

but must also be realistic in their capacity to sit on additional working groups. A measurement and evaluation staff member at a nonprofit that recently began this work and established a racial equity and inclusion working group last year said: "I will say that it's hard as a one-person department, but I can jump in [to support REI work] when I think my expertise can be of help for the data and measurement piece."

3. **Staff should learn to name the impact of race and racism on their work.** Reapproaching measurement and evaluation practices by applying a critical lens starts by acknowledging the existence of structural racism and the different ways it affects clients, staff, and the organization overall. If the long-term goal is to reimagine systems and think beyond past organizational practices, a first step can be naming the elephant in the room. As an interviewee explained, "Before this past year, the focus on REI was unspoken—the work we are doing is economic equity. That work in and of itself should be diverse, inclusive, and equitable because that's the nature of the work. The work and how we go about doing the work are two different things. When we look at our doing the work, our relationship with students and partners, and our staff internally, we had to look at how do we codify racial equity in the work and acknowledge that structural racism exists."

4. **Partnerships can deepen the racial equity lens and practices that an organization brings to its work.** Racial equity is a societal goal; therefore, no one organization can by itself dismantle systemic racism or address the root causes that disproportionately harm clients of color. Working with partners within and across nonprofit sectors, connecting with advocacy organizations, and broadening coalitions create opportunities to strengthen and expand how nonprofits can address inequities. As one interviewee described, "We exist because we know inequities exist. So what's the next step? Working with our partners who are committed [to REI], we believe that [clients who are] moms of color who are postpartum will have improved physiological factors from their services. With [another partner], they will give implicit bias trainings to our staff, and this will improve patient outcomes."

We recognize that this brief is not an exhaustive list of steps that measurement and evaluation staff can take to operationalize racial equity practices within their work. However, it does offer some concrete action steps and revisions that measurement and evaluation practitioners can adopt to start or deepen their racial equity work. It is critically important for all members of an organization's staff to commit to doing their work through a racial equity lens and framework. This "all hands on deck" approach can ensure that the organization is truly living its values and that all departments of the organization are moving in the same direction, toward equity.

Notes

1   The "Connecting Racial Equity and Inclusion with Performance Measurement in Nonprofits" conference, held at the Urban Institute on December 6, 2019, was one of those convenings. More information is available at https://www.urban.org/events/connecting-racial-equity-and-inclusion-performance-measurement-nonprofits.

2 Some examples of secondary data sources are the American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau and the American Time Use Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

3 Lauren Farrell, Melanie Langness, and Elsa Falkenburger, "Community Voice is Expertise," *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, February 19, 2021, https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/community-voice-expertise.

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