



LOCAL AND REGIONAL  
GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON  
**RACE & EQUITY**

# PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

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# INTRODUCTION

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**Y**ears of organizing within the Civil Rights Movement led to the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with Title VII containing prohibitions of discrimination in the workplace on the basis of race and other protected classes. This accomplishment provided tools for the enforcement of illegal discrimination laws and has reduced many explicitly discriminatory behaviors over the past half a century. However, racial inequities continue to persist across all indicators for success in the United States. For local and regional government focused on achieving racial equity in our communities, “walking the talk” within one’s own institution and workforce is an important place to focus.

**OUR GOAL:** the workforce in local and regional government reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. This diversity should exist across the breadth (functions) and depth (hierarchy) of government.

This issue brief from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity provides a common approach to furthering the field of practice of workforce equity within government.

This brief begins by providing an overview of the status of workforce equity within the public sector and barriers to workforce equity. We then offer policy and practice strategies that are designed to advance greater workplace equity within the public sector. These strategies include:

1. **Analyze data** – Conduct rigorous data analysis to obtain a better understanding of data so that strategies can be developed to target specific challenges. Supplement the quantitative data analysis with qualitative analysis to fully understand any work place culture challenges.
2. **Support, engage and organize others** – Engage hiring managers and others who develop job descriptions, set minimum qualifications, review resumes, conduct interviews and make hiring decisions in developing and implementing strategies for equity. Workforce equity is not just a conceptual value, but is also a concrete goal that will only be achieved when operationalized via concrete strategies. Participation in workshops and creating infrastructure, such as a workforce equity team, can provide support for skill development and effective implementation of institutional changes to advance racial equity.
3. **Use racial equity tools** – Use a Racial Equity Tool to analyze personnel policies and practices for implicit bias and institutional racism. Based on the analysis, take proactive steps to eliminate implicit bias and institutional racism.
4. **Create a workplace culture where racial equity is a value and is operationalized** – Creating a culture where racial equity and inclusion are valued, operationalized and rewarded will influence the overall success of racial equity within an organization.
5. **Initiate and implement pipe-line development programs** – Support longer-term pipe-line development programs to advance entry and promotion into higher paying job classifications, including upward mobility programs and collaborating with local high schools and higher education institutions to develop career pathways.

- 6. Set goals, track progress and focus on accountability** – Set clear goals for improving workforce equity and track progress over time so that strategies can be modified, as needed, to effectively achieve meaningful results.

We offer a brief conclusion that highlights the importance of cities and counties from across the country making a commitment to achieving racial equity, focusing on the power and influence of their own institutions, and working in partnership across sectors and with the community. Government's proactive work on racial equity has the potential to leverage significant change, setting the stage for the achievement of racial equity in our communities and the transformation of government. How we advance racial equity within our own workplaces reflects our readiness to work with others to eliminate racial inequities and improve the success of all groups across all indicators for success.

Please note: one only has to look at the evolution of racial categorizations and titles over time to understand that race is a social construct. In this issue paper, we include some data from reports that focused on whites and African Americans, but otherwise, provide data for all racial groups analyzed in the research. For consistency, we use the categories African Americans and Latinos, although in some of the original research, these groups were referred to as Blacks and Hispanics.

## OVERVIEW OF WORKFORCE EQUITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

**A**s a result of the Civil Rights movement fifty years ago, the federal government prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race and other protected classes. Executive orders and key pieces of legislation such as Federal Executive Order 11246<sup>1</sup> and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have undergirded government's anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies. While the public sector has made some advances towards workforce equity, considerable challenges remain.

Unlike in the private sector, where managers have greater latitude afforded by the employment-at-will doctrine to differentially pay and terminate workers, public sector hiring and promotion processes operate with civil service and/or union protections. Civil service and union protections mean that workers in the same job classifications are paid at the same rate. Only a small portion of classifications are exempt from civil service rules.

Anti-discrimination laws and civil service protections have contributed to helping many communities of color in becoming employed at a higher rate in the public sector than in the private sector. In 2011, African-Americans accounted for 12.8% of state and local public sector jobs, compared to 10.3% of private sector jobs, and 10.9% of jobs overall. For African Americans and Latinos in public-sector jobs, there is a lower wage gap at some education levels and a wage premium at others as compared to private sector jobs<sup>2</sup>.

A 2011 study by Stephen Pitts at the UC Berkeley Labor Center found<sup>3</sup>:

- The public sector is the single most important source of employment for African Americans. During 2008-2010, 21.2% of all African American workers were public employees, compared with 16.3% of non-black workers. Both

<sup>1</sup> Cooper, D., Gable, M., and Austin, A. (May 2, 2012). The Public Sector Job Crisis. Economic Policy Institute. Available at <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp339-public-sector-jobs-crisis/>.

<sup>2</sup> Id. p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Pitts, S. (April 4, 2011). Black Workers and the Public Sector. *UC Berkeley Labor Center*, <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/black-workers-and-the-public-sector/>

## OVERVIEW OF WORKFORCE EQUITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

before and after the onset of the Great Recession, African Americans were 30% more likely than other workers to be employed in the public sector.

- The public sector is also a critical source of decent-paying jobs for African Americans. For both men and women, the median wage earned by African American employees is significantly higher in the public sector than in other sectors. The wage differential between African American and white workers was lower in the public sector than in the overall economy.

As noted by Todd Gardner in an Urban Institute study, one route to upward social mobility has historically been employment in local government<sup>1</sup>. Gardner's study found even lower wage government jobs have provided decent wages with good benefits. The study divided local government employees into high- and low-wage occupations and into four racial groups: white, African American, Latino and other and compared data from 1960 to 2008. He found:

- High-wage jobs in local government have consistently been disproportionately white over the past 50 years. Where the general population in the 100 largest metro areas was 84.9 percent white in 1960, 92.7 percent of people working in high-wage occupations were white. While the general population of the 100 largest metro areas was only 57.8 percent white in 2008, high-wage local government employment remained at over two-thirds (69.7 percent) white.
- African Americans were underrepresented in high-wage local government employment and overrepresented in low-wage jobs through 1980, but have since become proportionally represented in high-wage jobs on a national level.
- Latinos and other races continue to be underrepresented in high-wage government jobs. In 2008, Latinos made up 19.4 percent of the population of the 100 largest metro areas but only 10.6 percent of high-wage local government employees. Latinos were also underrepresented in low-wage local government employment before 1980, but in recent years have become proportionally represented. "Other races" make up 9.0 percent of the general population but only 6.1 percent of local government employees.

These data indicate that local workforces have grown more diverse over time, though representation across different racial and ethnic groups and geographic areas remains inequitable.

Many studies on employment inequality focus solely on the gap between white employment and African American employment. Further studies exploring employment gaps for other communities of color are needed. By looking at the differences between communities of color, as well as disparities within a particular racial group, we may better comprehend the challenges faced among and within groups.

A challenge also exists in the way employment data is collected and reported. Employment data often lumps people with very different social obstacles and employment outlooks into a larger group. For example, there is a wide range of diversity amongst broad racial categories, even though their socioeconomic experiences [and levels of employment] vary widely<sup>2</sup>. For example, conditions of high unemployment faced by Vietnamese communities, among others, are often hidden by the high employment and incomes of other, larger Asian American subpopulations (e.g., Indians and Japanese)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Gardner, Todd. (2012). *The Racial and Ethnic Composition of Local Government Employees in Large Metro Areas, 1960-2010*. Urban Institute, available at <http://metrotrends.org/commentary/race-and-local-government.cfm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad, F.Z., and Weller, C.E. (Mar. 3, 2014). *Reading between the data*. *Center for American Progress*. Available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/report/2014/03/03/85055/reading-between-the-data/>

<sup>3</sup> Id.; see United States Dep't of Labor, *supra* ("Indian and Japanese men earn[] somewhat more than white males; Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Vietnamese men earn[] less than two-thirds as much.")

# BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE EQUITY

Despite progress towards workforce equity in the public sector, barriers persist. These barriers include job segregation and education, government job cutbacks, incarceration, discrimination, implicit biases, in-group favoritism and stereotype threat.

## *Job Segregation and Education*

People of color as a whole continue to face disproportionately high unemployment rates. Although the overall unemployment rate has dropped steadily since October 2009, the gap between African American, Latino and white workers has remained consistent. In 2012, the African American unemployment rate was “higher than the national average unemployment rate during the Great Depression<sup>1</sup>.”

Furthermore, employed people of color are consistently concentrated in low-wage occupations.<sup>2</sup> Into 2015, African Americans and Latinos lag behind whites for higher-paying jobs at the largest rates in about a decade<sup>3</sup>. African Americans and Latinos with four-year degrees fare relatively worse. African Americans with a Bachelor’s degree still earn only about 78 percent of the salary of similarly educated whites<sup>4</sup>. Latinos with a Bachelor’s degree earn roughly 75 percent of whites’ salary<sup>5</sup>. The wage earnings for African American and Latina women have dropped below 1998 averages when women earned only 65 and 55 percent, respectively, of the earnings of white men<sup>6</sup>. Today, African American women and Latinas earn only 62 cents and 54 cents, respectively, for every dollar earned by white men, compared to 77 cents for white women<sup>7</sup>.

A dominant driver of the wage differential is job segregation. Men and women of each racial group are clustered in the lowest paying job classifications, while white men are concentrated in the highest paying job classifications. A study of gender pay inequity within the city of Seattle government work force also examined wage differentials by race and found that white men were most likely to be in the highest paying jobs, followed by white women and men of color, with women of color clustered in the lowest paying classifications.<sup>8</sup>

Other inequities, such as those in the education and immigrations systems, also have a great impact on wages. For example, an educational system that fails to graduate a disproportionate percentage of African American, Latino, Native American and some Asian-Pacific Islander communities means entering the job market with fewer advantages. The lack of early work experience in turn undermines their access to employment and limits their wage growth potential over time.<sup>9</sup> For example, a wage gap between white communities and immigrant communities of color also exists.<sup>10</sup> Wage differences between whites and Latinos indicate an unwillingness to employ those with lower educational attainment, lower English language ability and who are less networked.<sup>11</sup>

1 Adamu at p.6.

2 Id. at 8 (“This rise in low-wage occupations was coupled with a 7.3 percent decrease in mid-wage occupations in 2012.”)

3 Yen, Hope (2009). Racial Disparities Remain in Higher Paying U.S. Jobs. *The Associated Press*, available at <http://www.memphisdailynews.com/news/2009/apr/28/racial-disparities-remain-in-higherpaying-us-jobs/print>.

4 Id.

5 Id.

6 U.S. Dept. of Labor, *supra*.

7 National Women’s Law Center. (2012). Calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2010—People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings 2010, Age Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex. Available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/perinc/toc.htm>.

8 The Equity in Pay Task Force. Gender Equity in Pay at The City of Seattle. Available at <http://murray.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gender-Equity-In-Pay-Task-Force-Report.pdf>

9 United States Dep’t. of Labor, *supra*..

10 Id.

11 Id.

### **Government Cutbacks**

The recent economic downturn and the trends of recovery have also had racial implications. According to Roderick Harrison, a demographer at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, “The lesson of most economic downturns is minorities are the last hired, first fired. They lose jobs more quickly, and they will be the last to recover.”<sup>1</sup>

In an economic downturn, government jobs in which people of color are most likely to be employed are often the first to be cut. During the recent recession, between 2007 and 2011, “state and local governments shed about 765,000 jobs.”<sup>2</sup> African-American employees comprised almost 20 percent of the overall decline.<sup>3</sup> In addition, although Latinos saw increases in public sector employment during the recession, they have continued to earn lower wages relative to other groups. Since the start of the recession, the real median wage of Latino employees in state and local public-sector jobs declined by 5.2 percent, compared with a decline of 1.9 percent for African Americans, 0.7 percent for whites, and 2.2 percent for all other races.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, economic recovery is often slow to reach the public sector. Job growth since the recession has been concentrated in the private sector, while the public sector has continued to lose jobs.<sup>5</sup> African-Americans are strongly represented in the public sector, lack of economic growth coupled with continued public sector job losses has meant that African American employment and wages have continued to decline.

### **Incarceration**

A system of mass incarceration that disproportionately targets African Americans and Latinos also contributes to the unequal employment rate and wage disparities. Most job applications still require that individuals provide their criminal background information, dramatically reducing the likelihood that they are considered for jobs if they have a criminal record.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, “[t]o the extent that incarceration undermines social networks, ex-inmates will have limited access to apprenticeships and careers in [ ] the public sector.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, formerly incarcerated people have little wage growth potential. Analyses and survey data find that youth detained in correctional facilities before age 20 have higher unemployment rates and receive lower wages a decade or more after incarceration.<sup>8</sup>

### **Discrimination**

Although race-based discrimination has been illegal for half a century, workers have continued to file job discrimination complaints, with allegations of race discrimination making up the greatest portion.<sup>9</sup> Discrimination limits access to employment and advancement for people of color.

The persistence of conscious racial stereotypes and discrimination plays a role in the exclusion and underrepresentation of people of color from desirable jobs. Discrimination includes two components: 1) disparate treatment, or an intentional decision to treat people differently based on their race or other protected characteristics, and 2) disparate impact, or practices that have a disproportionate adverse impact on persons in a protected class. Extensive information on the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws is available from the Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission and local civil rights enforcement

1 Yen, *supra*.

2 Cooper, D. et al., *supra* p.2..

3 Id. p.13.

4 Id. p.14-15.

5 Id. p.15.

6 Adamu p.11.

7 Western, Bruce (Aug. 2002). Impact of Incarceration on Wage Mobility and Equality. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, ap.526-546,528.

8 Id. at p.527.

9 Yen, *supra*.

agencies. For local jurisdictions working to advance workforce equity, a rigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination law within one's own workplace is a necessity.

### **Implicit Bias**

In addition to explicit discrimination, implicit bias operates at the unconscious level, and plays out in the workforce. Implicit bias refers to the automatic association of stereotypes or attitudes about particular groups. A large body of research suggests that by virtue of living in a racialized society, implicit bias impacts both individual judgment and institutionalized policies and practices<sup>1</sup>. Field studies demonstrate that African American and Latino job applicants are significantly less likely to receive callbacks than are equally qualified white applicants<sup>2</sup>. In one study, Harvard researchers found that resumes with “white sounding” names were 50 percent more likely to elicit interviews than equivalent resumes with “black-sounding” names<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, stereotypes associating African Americans, and to some degree Latinos, with violence and criminality also make many employers unwilling to hire applicants from these communities<sup>4</sup>.

Implicit bias also impacts overall workplace culture and operations, including personnel and hiring processes. Focusing on implicit biases, both as individuals and as institutions, can provide the opportunity to implement tools and strategies for reducing their impact. As described in “Addressing Implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety and Stereotype Threat in Education and Health Care,” research has shown that institutions can establish practices to reduce the impact of implicit bias in decision-making. Jerry Kang and a group of researchers developed the following list of interventions that have been found to be constructive<sup>5</sup>:

- **Doubt objectivity** – Presuming objectivity actually tends to increase the role of implicit bias. Educating people about unconscious thought processes can lead people to be skeptical of their own objectivity and better able to guard against biased evaluations.
- **Increase motivation to be fair** – Internal motivations that are based on a shared value of fairness, rather than fear of external judgments, tends to decrease biased actions.
- **Improve conditions of decision-making** – Implicit biases are a function of automaticity (what Daniel Kahneman refers to as “thinking fast”<sup>6</sup>). “Thinking slow” by engaging in mindful, deliberate processing decreased activation of implicit biases and influencing behaviors.
- **Count** – Implicitly biased behavior is best detected by using data to determine whether patterns of behavior are leading to racially disparate outcomes. Based on analysis of data, it is possible to consider whether the outcomes are linked to bias.

### **In-Group Favoritism**

In-group favoritism is the propensity to automatically favor others like us – to trust them, prefer them, give them the benefit of the doubt, etc. In-group favoritism results in greater access to jobs and promotions for people similar to those of the in-group. Jobs are often filled through the recommendations of current workers, and current workers are less likely

1 Staats, Cheryl and Patton, Charles. (2013). State of the Science, Implicit Bias Review 2013. Kirwani Institute. Available at [http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/SOTS-Implicit\\_Bias.pdf](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/SOTS-Implicit_Bias.pdf).

2 Pager, D., Western, B, & Bonokowski, B. (2009). Discrimination in a low-wage labor market: A field experiment. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 74, 777-779.

3 Bertrand, M & Mullainathan, S. (July 2003). Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination. The National Bureau of Economic Research; Available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9873>. See also: Cotton, J., O'Neill, B., & Griffin, A. (2008). The “name game”: affective and hiring reactions to first names. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(1). And: Keene, Douglas (May 22, 2013). “Ethnic-Sounding First Names” and Getting the Job. Available at: <http://keenetrials.com/blog/2013/05/22/ethnic-sounding-first-names-and-getting-the-job/>.

4 United States Dep't of Labor, *supra*.

5 Godsil, R., Tropp, L., Goff, P., and Powell, J. (2014). Addressing Implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety and Stereotype Threat in Education and Health Care. Available at <http://perception.org/app/uploads/2014/11/Science-of-Equality.pdf>.

6 Kahneman, Daniel, “Thinking, Fast and Slow” (2013); Farrar, Straus and Giroux



to recommend members of out-groups. When current work places or job classifications are disproportionately white, this can lead to the continued exclusion and/or underrepresentation of people of color in the workplace.

According to a theoretical review published in *American Psychologist* by University of Washington psychologist Tony Greenwald and Thomas Pettigrew of the University of California, Santa Cruz, most discrimination in the U.S. is not caused by intention to harm people different from us, but by favoritism directed at helping people similar to us.<sup>1</sup>

Greenwald and Pettigrew reviewed experiments and survey methods from published scientific research on discrimination over the last five decades. They found that the type of discrimination observed in those studies generally included helping someone rather than harming someone. One common example was distribution of information about jobs and job references to people in one's own network. While these behaviors are not typically associated with causing direct disadvantage to anyone, they are nevertheless likely to be significant and result in hiring of more employees that replicate the current workforce's in-group characteristics.

### *Stereotype Threat*

Stereotype threat occurs when a person is concerned about confirming a negative stereotype about a certain identity group to which they belong.<sup>2</sup> Stereotype threat affects all of us and depends upon the prevailing stereotypes in a given context. Even whites can experience stereotype threat when concerned that they may be perceived as racist. Stereotype threat can have harmful impacts in the workplace. Negative stereotypes can cause an employee's attention to be split between the activity at hand and concerns about being seen stereotypically. Stereotype threat diverts cognitive resources that could otherwise be used to maximize job performance.

Much of the research about stereotype threat has been focused in the context of academic capacity and performance, but is relevant to workplace cultures as well<sup>3</sup>:

- *Social belonging* – Whether one feels as if they belong or included, has a dramatic influence on their success.
- *Wise criticism* – Giving feedback that communicates both high expectations and confidence that an individual can meet those expectations minimizes uncertainty about whether criticism is a result of racial bias or favor. If the feedback is merely critical, it may be the product of bias. If feedback is merely positive, it may be the product of racial condescension.
- *Behavioral scripts* – Setting forth clear norms of behavior can prevent stereotype threat from being triggered.
- *Growth mindset* – Abilities, including the ability to be racially sensitive, are learnable rather than fixed. Commitment to a growth mindset is useful in the stereotype threat context because it can prevent any particular performance from serving as “stereotype confirming evidence.”
- *Value-affirmation* – Encouragement of values and reasons for engaging in a task helps maintain or increase resilience in the face of threat.
- *Remove triggers of stereotype threat on standardized tests* – Removing questions about race or gender before a test, and moving them to after a test, has been shown to decrease threat and increase test scores for members of groups who are stereotyped as performing poorly.

1 Greenwald, Anthony G. and Pettigrew, Thomas. (Oct. 2014). With malice toward none and charity for some: Ingroup favoritism enables discrimination. *American Psychologist*, Vol 69(7), pp. 669-684. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036056>.

2 Godsil. at p.14.

3 Id



# STEPS TO ADVANCING WORKFORCE EQUITY IN PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS:

**G**overnment jurisdictions have made progress over the past five decades when it comes to racial equity in the workforce. However, significant work remains. To achieve our goal of a public sector workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve, a comprehensive strategy with rigorous focus on implementation and accountability for results is critical. The following steps provide strategic opportunities to advance racial equity in the workplace:

- 1. Analyze data** – Conduct rigorous analysis to obtain a better understanding of data so that strategies can be developed to target specific challenges. Supplement the quantitative data analysis with qualitative analysis to more fully understand work place culture challenges.

Careful research, including detailed data analysis and qualitative research, leads to an accurate understanding of the barriers to workforce equity. Solely examining overall gross numbers using large groupings of job classifications and racial groups will be of limited use.

Jurisdictions have historically used federally required EEO reports to assess workforce equity. Unfortunately, because these reports group together a wide range of different job titles, they often obscure areas where actions are warranted. In addition, these reports use an “availability” number based on the number of employees with similar wages, job duties and responsibilities to assess gaps as opposed to the actual racial representation of the working age population. Because the availability of the labor pool reflects current inequities and intergenerational systemic biases, it usually does not afford sufficient detail for development of meaningful strategies and goals. Conducting a focused analysis will allow development of more fine-tuned and specific strategies.

Governmental jurisdictions should analyze work force data to answer these questions:

- Are there some classifications where employees do not represent the community at large? Many jurisdictions have found that while overall public sector numbers have improved, there is a lack of racial representation in certain classifications, such as police officers, fire fighters, engineers, information technology and management. Having one-size-fits-all strategies for recruitment are less useful than developing specific strategies designed to address the unique barriers of a given job classification.
- Are people of color clustered in lower-wage classifications, having successfully entered the public sector but held back from upward mobility? Creating pathways for existing employees to move up will help retain talent and enable a work place culture where equity is operationalized.
- For civil service exempt classifications, are there wage differentials by race and gender? If so, analyze data and policies to determine why and to make sure bias is not a driver.

In addition, it is important to identify any work place culture challenges that cannot be identified by simple data analysis. A positive work place culture that clearly conveys the importance of workplace equity is vital for ensuring employee retention. Conducting focus groups and/or employee surveys<sup>1</sup> will help to identify any challenges to address.

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<sup>1</sup> See the City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Employee Survey as an example.

- 2. Support, engage and organize others** – Engage hiring managers and others who develop job descriptions, set minimum qualifications, review resumes, conduct interviews and make hiring decisions in developing and implementing workforce equity strategies. Workforce equity is not just a conceptual value, but is also a concrete goal that will only be achieved when operationalized via concrete strategies. Participation in workshops and creating infrastructure, such as a workforce equity team, can provide support for skill development and effective implementation of institutional changes to advance racial equity.

In a review of various approaches to increasing workforce diversity, Kim et al grouped diversity training in the category of “progressive programs that have failed to increase workforce diversity”. The diversity trainings reviewed by Kim et al were noted as ineffective because they resulted in resistance from participants rather than encouraging buy-in to the goal of workplace diversity<sup>1</sup>. Kim et al went on to describe programs that were effective at increasing workforce diversity, and included diversity task forces that “engage managers from across the firm in seeking solutions to stubborn problems of recruitment, retention, and promotion.”

Workforce equity teams should ensure a shared understanding of racial equity terminology. They should start from a place of shared values, then provide operational skills and strategies such as the following:

- Workshops – Building a common understanding of the collective benefits of racial equity, along with an understanding of illegal discrimination, implicit bias and explicit bias, and individual, institutional and structural racism will allow all staff, in particular hiring managers and human resources, to develop effective workforce equity strategies. Simple awareness of implicit bias can sometimes exacerbate it, so training must include the clear expectation that employees actively counter implicit bias in order to eliminate institutionalized racism.
- Human resource staff and hiring managers can work together on development and implementation of strategies such as:
  1. Focus job descriptions on the traits and skills required for a job.<sup>2</sup> Resume review and interviews should hone in on those traits and skills. Job descriptions can also include specific skills that will help to promote racial equity, such as “Experience using a Racial Equity Tool in the development of policy,” “Experience conducting outreach and engagement with racially diverse groups” or “Ability to speak a second language.”
  2. Integrate racial equity into job descriptions and use interview questions to help assess a candidate’s understanding of the opportunities to advance racial equity. Sample questions that jurisdictions have found helpful include:<sup>3</sup>
    - How do you see yourself contributing to our work on advancing racial equity? (Listen to see if the candidate has past experiences that will add to or enhance the jurisdiction’s efforts.)

<sup>1</sup> S.Kim,, A Kalev, and F Dobbin. 2012. “Progressive Corporations at Work: The Case of Diversity Programs”. *Review of Law and Social Change*. 36(2):171-213.

<sup>2</sup> Multnomah County produced an excellent resource guide for hiring managers, “Minimum Qualifications: Best Practices in Recruitment and Selection” that includes useful approaches to removing barriers.

<sup>3</sup> Modified from [http://www.saintpaulfoundation.org/\\_asset/rbvqgv/hiring\\_guide.pdf](http://www.saintpaulfoundation.org/_asset/rbvqgv/hiring_guide.pdf)

- Please describe a situation in which you worked on a project with people who were from backgrounds other than your own. What was challenging for you in this work? What did you do to make your work together successful? (Listen to see if the candidate has reflected on the opportunities and challenges of creating inclusive workplace cultures.)
  - Please provide examples of ways in which you have worked to eliminate institutional racism in previous jobs. (Listen to see if the candidate has a clear understanding of institutionalized racism and has relevant experience combating institutionalized racism.)
3. Have a deliberative hiring process. Hiring processes that do not thoughtfully integrate racial equity throughout the process can lead to decisions that are more prone to correlate with stereotypes.
  4. Analyze hiring processes and data to determine if there are particular points in processes where there is a greater attrition rate for people of color. If there are, analyze the causes and develop appropriate strategies for retention.
- 3. Use racial equity tools** – Use a Racial Equity Tool<sup>1</sup> to analyze personnel policies and practices for implicit bias and institutional racism. Based on the analysis, take proactive steps to eliminate implicit bias and institutional racism.

Personnel policies and practices are largely facially race-neutral, but often inadvertently perpetuate racial inequities. For example:

- Minimum qualifications that emphasize educational requirements over experience will inadvertently perpetuate racial inequities since a larger percent of white people have more education. A careful analysis of job requirements to ensure the educational requirements are appropriate for the job, and for some classifications, allowing experience to substitute for formal education, will prevent the perpetuation of that inequity. Multnomah County has developed a helpful tool for conducting this type of analysis – “Minimum Qualifications: Best Practices in Recruitment and Selection.”
- Use of criminal background checks can also inadvertently perpetuate racial inequities due to disproportionality in the criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> Many jurisdictions have changed their own policies around use of criminal background checks in hiring processes to ensure that they are only used in situations where there is a connection between the specific criminal charge and the employment position. The National Employment Law Project has identified Best Practices for Fair Chance Policies that are helpful to use.
- Exclusively on-line application processes are complicated, as they offer both ways to advance and hinder equitable hiring.
  - Hiring processes with at least the initial stages conducted electronically can be advantageous in that decision makers are less likely to be influenced by race early in the process. African

<sup>1</sup> For example, the City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit has been used to analyze and revise personnel policies and practices.

<sup>2</sup> National Employment Law Project (2012). “Top Ten Best Practices for Fair Chance Policies. Available at: [http://nelp.3cdn.net/6596c5821da18f7\\_4qm6vg52s.pdf](http://nelp.3cdn.net/6596c5821da18f7_4qm6vg52s.pdf)

American employment in the federal government began climbing in the early 1940s after the Civil Service Commission stopped requiring applicants to attach pictures to their applications. In the private sector, a consent decree in a race and sex discrimination case against Home Depot allowed people to apply for jobs in kiosks in the stores so that decisions makers would not be influenced by applicants' race, at least in the early part of the process.

- On the other hand, on-line application processes can also limit the accessibility of jobs for potential applicants who do not have ready access to a computer, a higher percent of whom are people of color. Offering multiple means by which applicants can apply for jobs can help increase access. Some jurisdictions that use an exclusively on-line system due to administrative efficiencies have trained local unemployment offices and library staff on the recruitment system, which helps the process be more accessible.

Jurisdictions that have conducted systemic reviews of their human resource policies and practices have effectively addressed these and other policies and practices that perpetuate inequities.

- 4. Create a workplace culture where racial equity is both a value and is operationalized** – Creating a culture where racial equity and inclusion are valued, operationalized and rewarded will influence the overall success of racial equity within an organization.

An overall culture that values the benefits of racially diverse inclusion can increase innovation, retention and performance.<sup>1</sup> Racial equity as a value should be communicated routinely, and must also have “legs.” That is, racial equity work should not just “talk the talk”, but also “walk the talk.”

Operationalizing racial equity means addressing implicit bias, ingroup preferences and stereotype threat via institutional policies and practices. Examples include:

- *Normalizing conversations about race:* When jurisdictions have provided racial equity training for all employees, with a focus on operationalizing new strategies, discussions about race become routine along with clear norms of behavior. This can reduce racial anxiety and prevent stereotype threat from being triggered. It also makes changes to institutional policies and practices more likely.
- *Performance evaluation:* Develop performance evaluation systems that support supervisors in providing feedback that communicates both high expectations and confidence that an individual can meet those expectations. As in academic settings, this has been shown to minimize uncertainty about whether criticism is a result of racial bias or favor. If the feedback is merely critical, it may be perceived as the product of bias; if feedback is merely positive, it may be perceived as the product of racial condescension.
- *Remove triggers of stereotype threat on employment tests:* Remove any questions about an applicant's race or gender from before a test to after a test.

- 5. Initiate and implement pipe-line development programs** – Support longer-term pipe-line development

<sup>1</sup> Kerby, S and Burns, C. (July 2012). A Diverse Workforce is Integral to a Strong Economy. Center for American Progress, Available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/news/2012/07/12/11900/the-top-10-economic-facts-of-diversity-in-the-workplace/>

programs to advance entry and promotion into higher paying job classifications, including upward mobility programs and collaborating with local high schools and higher education institutions to develop career pathways.

Longer-term strategies may be required in some areas where there is currently a large under-representation of people of color.

- Analyze upward mobility opportunities. Although the opportunity to enter into the public sector has increased for people of color, many times people of color remain clustered in lower paying entry-level positions. Having clear upward mobility tracks can help to ensure progression into higher paying jobs.
- Use youth employment programs, like Minneapolis's Urban Scholars program, to provide government career-focused experience for students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Analyze the reasons for lack of representation in order to understand its root causes. If the underlying drivers are not addressed, there is likelihood that even if recruitment is successful, retention may be a challenge. For instance, to recruit police officers of color, many jurisdictions will need to address the history of often-tense and hostile relationships between the police and communities of color. In addition to having an intentional recruitment program, such as the one developed by the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services program<sup>1</sup>, it is critical that police departments also work to fundamentally shift their relationships with communities of color.

**6. Set goals, track progress and focus on accountability** – Set clear goals for improving workforce equity and track progress over time so that strategies can be modified, as needed, to effectively achieve meaningful results.

When it comes to workforce equity, governmental jurisdictions need to make sure that goals are laser-focused on achieving results and that operations are aligned with values.

Goals and measurement should take place on three levels:

- Quantitative measures that assess whether the work force reflects the diversity of the communities across the breadth (functions) and depth (hierarchy) of government.
- Qualitative measures that assess employee understanding of racial equity and actions to advance racial equity (see example City of Seattle Race and Social Justice employee survey conducted every two years).
- Process measures to track the use of a Racial Equity Tool in changing institutional policies and practices.

A clear plan of action must include specific goals, implementation strategies, and measures that will track progress towards achieving racial equity within the work force. Accountability for implementation of strategies and achieving results must be built into the plan.

<sup>1</sup> Tangel, W.A. & Morabito, A. (Mar. 2004). Minority Recruitment: A Working Model. *The Police Chief*, Vol. 71, No. 3. Available at [http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display\\_arch&article\\_id=254&issue\\_id=32004](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=254&issue_id=32004).

# CONCLUSION

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**D**emocracy, freedom, equality and justice are often purported to be fundamental values in the United States. However, critical reflection reveals a strong contradiction between these aspirations and our outcomes. While the civil rights movement successfully pressured government to be more inclusive, and substantial improvements have been made, racial inequities still exist. Fifty years after the Civil Rights Act, governments are examining policies and practices that perpetuate inequities without being explicit, including within our own workforces.

A movement is growing within government. More and more cities and counties from across the country are making a commitment to achieving racial equity, focusing on the power and influence of their own institutions, and working in partnership across sectors as well as with the community. We cannot limit ourselves to treating symptoms, we must address the underlying causes. Government's proactive work on racial equity has the potential to leverage significant change, setting the stage for the achievement of racial equity in our communities and the transformation of government. How we advance racial equity within our own workplaces reflects our readiness to work with others to eliminate racial inequities and improve the success of all groups across all indicators for success.