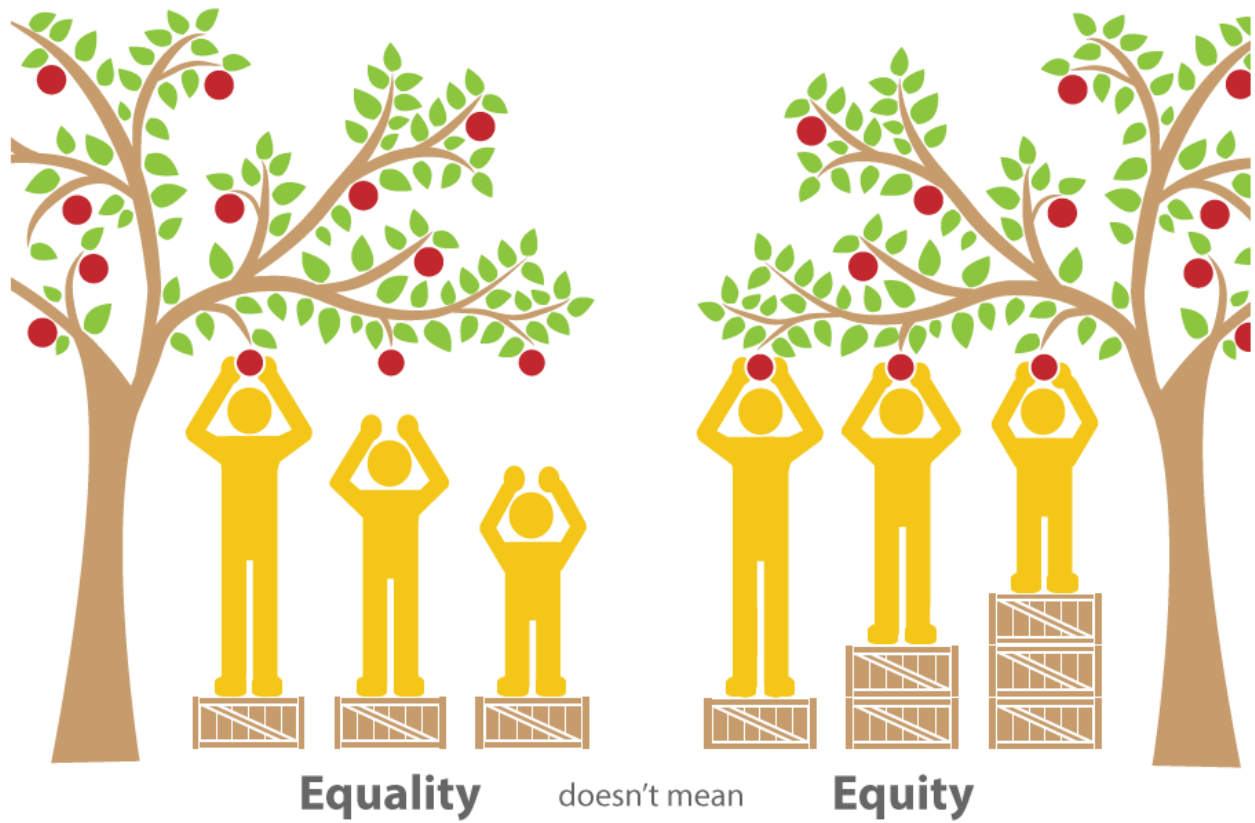


Racial Equity Tools for Food Systems Planning



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Contents

Figures.....	2
Executive Summary.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Racism in built environments	4
Equity in food systems planning.....	5
Racial Equity Assessment Tools.....	7
A Racial Equity Tool for Food Systems Planning.....	8
Research: Tool Development.....	10
Piloting the FSREA.....	10
Discussion and Conclusions.....	12
References.....	13

Figures

Figure 1. Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool.....	9
Appendix A: Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool: A Facilitation Guide.....	16

Executive Summary

The legacies of racist land-based policies are built into the urban and exurban landscapes of the United States. The area of food systems planning provides a special opportunity within planning practice to recognize these histories and work to ameliorate contemporary inequities. Racial equity assessment tools offer one strategy for prioritizing principles of racial equity into food systems planning processes. The Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool and process is one such strategy for considering how people, place, process, and power are interrelated in a particular plan, policy, or proposal. Pilot sessions with local food-centered organizations informed the development of this tool and provided valuable insight into its relevance in planning practice. By using food system-specific racial equity tools, planners can normalize conversations about racial difference, ask critical questions about who is or is not served by plans, and prioritize deliberate consideration of who is involved in visioning, framing, and proposing solutions to planning problems.

Acknowledgments

The development of the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool and facilitation guide has been a years-long process that would not have been possible without support and critical feedback. Many thanks to Sonali Balajee, who's Equity and Empowerment Lens inspired this process. Thanks also to Alfonso Morales, who provided careful feedback on this paper, and to Carrie Edgar, Erin Peot, Lilliann Paine, Sharon Lezberg for serving as peer-reviewers for the impending Food System Racial Equity Tool and Facilitation Guide publication. Funding for the research pilots were provided by the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, and enabled me to honor my pilot partners for their time and thoughtful feedback.

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Introduction

Taking steps to advance racial equity in food systems planning efforts must begin with a thorough understanding of how racism has been built into social landscapes within and beyond cities. The implications of historical and contemporary racism in the United States are pervasive throughout U.S. institutions, social patterns, and geographies. The field of planning is deeply intertwined with how these histories have been rendered durable throughout the built environment. Such a history makes understanding and challenging racism a core concern for contemporary planners. Essentially every space in the United States has at one time been governed by racist, exclusionary policies. These inequities persist, in no small part, through acceptance of the history of race-based exclusions as a "neutral baseline"¹ in the social and legal fabric of U.S. society. Understanding this, an approach to planning efforts as apolitical or value-neutral are revealed to be a myth. As June Manning Thomas highlights, issues of race and inequality have not always been an explicit concern of planners, but through intentionally setting and reevaluating high standards, questions of race and planning can be prioritized.² The legacies of racism continue to have direct bearing on the policies, allocation of resources, and governance processes that are the everyday purview of planners across the nation.

Racism in built environments

How historical racisms continue to influence who has access to private and public space is critical context for planners seeking to advance goals of equity, justice, and sustainability. This necessitates a critical historical grounding for planners regarding the investments and exclusions that contributed to the formation of cities and exurban areas. Enduring long passed slavery, racist policies in the South locked many African American farmers into exploitative sharecropping arrangements³. These tenancy terms kept farmers bound to rented land in ever-increasing debt, well into the 20th century. This type of land-based exploitation coupled with pushes out of the South from continued political repression and terrorism and the pulls of manufacturing booms in Northern cities, leading to wide scale migration of Black people in the U.S.. Biased inheritance laws accelerated Black land loss as people migrated to urban areas^{4,5,6}. Further, access to USDA investments in productive agricultural systems were systematically denied to farmers of color.⁷ This exclusion from grants and technical assistance routinely made available to white farmers have deep implications for wealth-building, land loss, and the racial geographies of rural America. Black Americans are hardly the only social group to experience land-based exclusion and discrimination.

¹ Harris, C.I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review* 106 (8), 1707-1791.

² Manning Thomas, J. (2012). Social justice as responsible practice: Influence of race, ethnicity, and the civil rights era. In Sanyal, B., Vale, L., & Rosan, C. (Eds.), *Planning ideas that matter: Livability, territoriality, governance, and reflective practice*. 359-379. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

³ Green, J.J, Green, E.M., & Kleiner, A.M.. (2011). From the past to the present: Agricultural development and black farmers in the American south. In Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman, J. (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*, 47-64. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

⁴ Alkon, A.H. & Agyeman, J. (2011). Introduction: the food movement as polyculture. In Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman, J. (Eds.), *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*, 1-20. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

⁵ *ibid*.

⁶ Gilbert, J., Sharp, G., & Felin, M.S.. (2001). *The decline (and revival?) of black Farmers and rural landowners: A review of the research literature*. St. Louis: Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis.

⁷ *ibid*

Citizenship and land-use policies contributed to spatial exclusions and land theft across the nation for Chicano, Asian American and Native American communities^{8,9,10,11,12,13,14}.

Systems of racial segregation were made national policy through Federal Housing Administration mortgage-backing programs and their race-based approval criteria. Discriminatory lending policies and exclusionary residential zones on such a wide scale resulted in significant racial disparities in access to public and commercial goods and services, as well as personal wealth-building opportunities^{15,16,17,18}. These pervasive systems of exclusion continue to have powerful determinant effects on the experiences of people in cities today.

Some of the decision and policy-making described above may be outside traditional purview of planners (e.g. Alien Land Laws), but others fall squarely within the responsibilities of planners (e.g. housing segregation and urban renewal). In all cases, planners must understand how these inequities impact areas within planning concern such as land use, housing, transportation, as well as representation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes. Focusing on how inequities are produced and perpetuated in policy and decision-making processes is critical education for emerging planners. These historically-grounded planners can anticipate inequities and work in solidarity with broader coalitions to remediate injustices and prevent further inequitable outcomes.

Equity in food systems planning

Food systems planning presents a key opportunity to demonstrate how prioritizing racial equity can be worked into planning goals and processes. As a newer area of planning concern where the rules are still being written, so to speak, this field serves as a site to try new ways of planning for

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Norgaard, K.M., Reed, R., & Van Horn, C. (2011). A continuing legacy: institutional racism, hunger, and nutritional justice on the Klamath. In Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman, J. (Eds.), *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, 23-46. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

¹¹ Minkoff-Zern, L., Peluso, N., Sowerwine, J., and Getz, C. (2011). Race and regulation: Asian immigrants in California agriculture. In Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman, J. (Eds.), *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, 65-85. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

¹² Brown, S., & Getz, C. (2011). Farmworker food insecurity and the production of hunger in California. In Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman, J. (Eds.), *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, 121-146. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

¹³ Battalora, J. (2013). *Birth of a white nation: The invention of white people and its relevance today*. Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

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¹⁶ Massey, D. & Denton, N. (1993). *American apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁷ Jackson, K. (1987). *Crabgrass frontier: The suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ Freund, D.M.P. (2007). Financing suburban growth: Federal policy and the birth of a racialized market for homes, 1930-1940. In *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*, 99-139. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

equity that can inform other areas of planning practice. From the siting of community gardens and markets, to zoning codes regulating urban agriculture and composting activities, to regional farmland preservation efforts, planners are deepening their understandings of how food is produced, distributed, consumed, and managed in waste streams^{19,20,21}. As the land policies, exclusions, and segregated urban formations outlined above illustrate, sectors and functions of the food system are a site for the perpetuation, or interruption, of racial inequities^{22,23}. The integration of food system activities into the urban landscape not simply about facilitating trendy land-uses, but rather the delivery of human rights²⁴. It is critical for planners interested in the food system to understand how race and racism differentially impact communities' experiences in relation to agriculture, land, and cultural foodways.

There has been growing critique of this lack of attention to race and racism in food systems planning and community food organizing. From this critical attention, strategies are emerging to address this shortfall. Guthman and Sweeney et al. both highlight the challenges to supporting alternative food efforts in communities of color when white privilege, misunderstanding, and paternalistic efforts too often play out in engagement or programming directed by outside entities^{25,26}. Guthman calls for increased attention to privilege, inequity, and structural racism in higher education focused on community food systems, particularly service-based courses at universities that will send students out to work with community organizations. Sweeney et al. introduce strategies for reckoning with historical wrongs through meaningful community engagement that shares visioning and decision-making with the communities most impacted by broken food systems. Researchers of local food environments are employing mapping and precise definitional attention when analyzing the racialization of food access geographies²⁷. Each of these strategies and more will need to be advanced to support planners to be well equipped in addressing racial inequities in their work. Food systems planners relying solely on their own expertise, or the transplant of promising practices from other communities in addressing food system inequities, will not get very far in remediating local issues and power disparities.

¹⁹ Hodgson, K. (2012). *Planning for food access and community based food systems: A national scan and evaluation of local comprehensive and sustainability plans*. American Planning Association.

²⁰ Dawson, J. & Morales, A. (2016). *Cities of farmers: Urban agricultural practices and processes*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

²¹ Caton Campbell, M. (2004). Building a common table: The role for planning in community food systems. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23, 341-355.

²² Giancatarino, A., & Noor, S. (2014). *Building the case for racial equity in the food system*. New York: Center for Social Inclusion.

²³ Sweeney, G., Rogers, C., Hoy, C., Clark, J. K., Usher, K., Holley, K., & Spees, C. (2015). Alternative agrifood projects in communities of color: A civic engagement perspective. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 69-75.

²⁴ White, M.M. (2010). Shouldering responsibility for the delivery of human rights: A case study of the D-town farmers of Detroit. *Race/Ethnicity*, 3(2), 189-211.

²⁵ Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: investigating the subjects of alternative food practices. *Cultural Geographies* 15. 431-447.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Raja, S., Ma, C., & Yadev, P. (2008). Beyond food deserts: Measuring and mapping racial disparities in neighborhood food environments. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 27, 469-482.

Racial Equity Assessment Tools

Fortunately for planning practice, development of racial equity assessment tools that support more racially-just decision-making is well underway. Racial equity analysis tools are most commonly used in governmental or organizational contexts, but equity is a growing concern among private sector firms as well. These racial equity tools typically consist of question sets intended to increase consideration of racial equity from the beginning of a planning process. Questions often focus on who is included in decision-making, who is most impacted by decision-making, who is accountable for negative impacts, how resources are distributed, and what data is needed to understand potential unintended consequences of decision-making processes-- all with explicit concern for racial inequity and empowerment of people and communities of color. In this way, racial equity tools allow planners to see what they otherwise might miss regarding how planning practices intersect with real people's lives across lines of difference. They call for inclusion of a diverse and community-reflective set of stakeholders to frame issues, imagine possibilities, and propose solutions from the beginning of planning and governance processes. They also draw immediate attention to power and representation throughout each component of planning activities. Relevant examples can be drawn from Balajee et al. 2012²⁸, the City of Seattle Race and Social Equity Initiative 2013²⁹, Keleher 2009,³⁰ Nelson 2015³¹, and Nelson et al. 2015³². More municipalities and racial justice organizations continue to develop racial equity analysis tools and processes to advance more equitable outcomes in their own jurisdictions and provide models to other institutions looking to do so.

Food systems planning efforts cut across interconnected aspects of environmental, economic, and social life, creating a complex landscape where externalities and unintended consequences can be difficult to anticipate and measure. Developments in assessment tools that consider this multifunctional and cross-sector nature of the food system have grown in usage and detail in recent years^{33,34}. In both the "Whole Measures for Community Food Systems" and "Framework for Assessing Effects of the Food System," social justice generally is an important consideration, but racial equity is not a central focus of these tools. Compared to racial equity assessment tools for organizations and government, racial equity assessment processes directed at food systems are a barely emergent practice. "Building the Case for Racial Equity in the Food System" is one of few assessment tools that explicitly consider racism, power, and legacies of structural inequities in food system policy-making and program development³⁵. A focus on racial equity fits in well with the principles of food systems planning. Food system planners already mobilize around concern for

²⁸ Balajee, S. et al. (2012). *Equity and empowerment lens (racial justice focus)*. Portland, OR: Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity.

²⁹ City of Seattle, Washington: Race and Social Equity Initiative. (2013). *Racial equity toolkit to assess policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues*.

³⁰ Keleher, T. (2009). *Racial equity impact assessment toolkit*. New York, NY: Race Forward.

³¹ Nelson, J. (2015). *Racial equity toolkit: an opportunity to operationalize equity*. Government Alliance on Race and Equity.

³² Nelson, J., Spokane, L., Ross, L., & Deng, N. (2015). *Advancing racial equity and transforming government: a resource guide to put ideas into action*. Government Alliance on Race and Equity.

³³ Abi-Nader, J., Ayson, A., & Harris, K., et al. (2009). *Whole measures for community food systems: values-based planning and evaluation*. Portland, OR: Community Food Security Coalition.

³⁴ Nesheim, M., Oria, M., & Tsai Yih, P. (Eds.). (2015). *A framework for assessing effects of the food system*. Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. Washington DC: National Academies Press.

³⁵ *ibid.*

social, environmental, and economic justice and promote development of equitable and sustainable opportunities that best utilize limited resources. Getting explicit about racial equity in food systems planning simply helps to clarify common purpose, build stronger language, and develop data and research support for this component of the field's broader aims.

A Racial Equity Tool for Food Systems Planning

The following Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool is one proposal for operationalizing inclusion of racial equity principles into planning processes. This tool is inspired by the “lens” approach of the Multnomah County Equity and Empowerment Tool in that it defines a central purpose and calls into consideration how people, place, process, and power are related to a particular plan, policy, or proposal (See Figure 1). These perspectives inherently overlap, and the series of critical questions that comprise the tool are not organized into these “lenses” to suggest an artificial separation of these concerns. Rather, the four overlapping lenses and questions provide tools to think with regarding a plan, program, or policy in development. It is likely that not every question is appropriate for every proposal, but the question sets serve as a starting place for engagement in critical thinking about racial equity.

The Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool and Facilitation Guide (Appendix A) is laid out into an introductory section building the case for employing racial equity assessments in food systems decision making, and subsequent sections that guide the reader through the process of facilitating an assessment using the FSREA tool. The introductory section offers definitions for terms such as racial equity, structural racism, and white supremacy, and discusses how these forces are at play in the food system. Racial equity assessments as an organizational practice are introduced, as well as the benefits of incorporating such tools into planning, policy-making, and program-development processes. The guide then provides an overview of who and what is needed to when using the tool, and is followed by directions for how to conduct the assessment. The guide outlines how to move through the following activities:

- 1: Visioning an equitable food system
- 2: Building a shared language
- 3: Introduce the proposed plan, policy, or program
- 4: Using the Food System Racial Equity Tool
- 5: What happens next?

The facilitation guide also provides guidance for how groups beginning with a deeper understanding of how racism operates in the social world, and food system, can expedite their analysis by focusing on steps 3-5. Upon concluding the assessment, reflection questions are offered to help groups decide how to adapt or move their proposal forward. This tool is detailed enough to stand alone in planning and evaluation processes, but could also serve as a racial equity supplement to another broader assessment.

Use of a racial equity assessment tool must be underpinned by acknowledging that even the most well-informed, diverse collaborative conducting assessments may still have blind spots or be faced with missing information. Attention to who and what is missing from a plan or proposal and a drive for continued learning and research is important for the progressive improvement of planning processes. Planners who seek an ever greater understanding of the complexities of the food system and how it can perpetuate or ameliorate racial disparities is essential for prioritizing racial equity

Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool

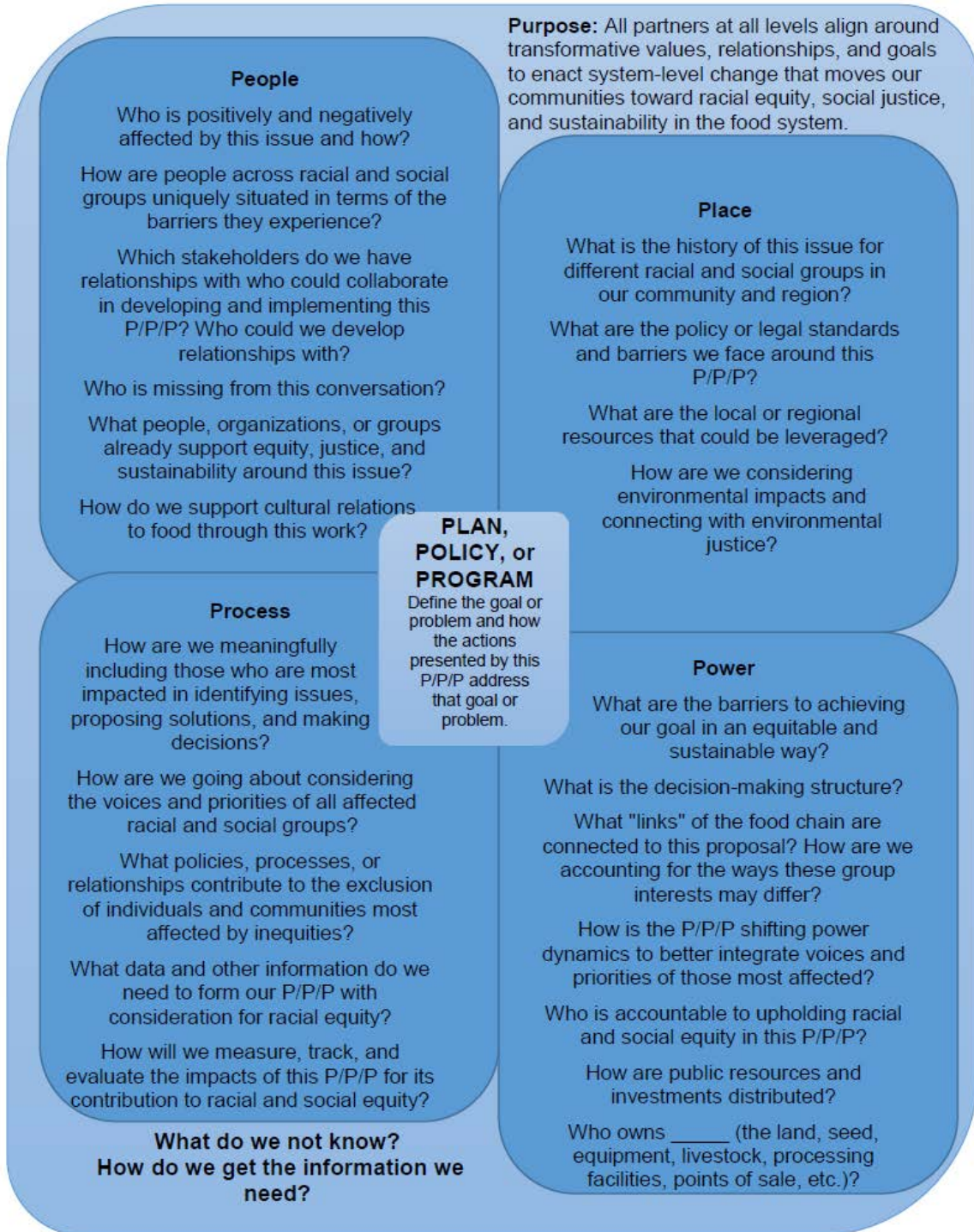


Figure 1: Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool

in food systems planning. It is imperative in the use of such a tool to clarify what questions planners need to be asking, when, and with whom to figure out how to alter planning processes for greater advancement of racial equity. Additional tools and data may need to be developed to support planners in accomplishing this aim. Any such racial equity assessment tool should be viewed as a dynamic and iterative product, one that can be improved upon over time to better address what or who has as of yet been missing or misunderstood.

Research: Tool Development

I began the process of adapting a racial equity assessment tool directed towards food system considerations in 2014 while serving as an Americorps VISTA at Dane County UW-Extension. This earlier iteration of the tool was piloted at the 2014 Dane County Food Summit. Continued interest in the tool provided opportunities to present on its development and use at the Food Summit to a variety of Madison and Dane County governmental bodies. These presentations offered opportunities to continue to reflect and receive critical feedback for its improvement. Once beginning graduate school, I was afforded the opportunity to continue this effort. Taking URPL 711: Food Systems and Marketplaces gave me a chance to conduct more foundational research to provide a strong case for using this type of tool in planning.

Grounded in these experiences and additional research, I applied for and was awarded summer research funds from the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) at UW-Madison. These funds were used to support additional pilots of the most recent iteration of this adapted tool, now called the Food System Racial Equity Assessment (FSREA) Tool. The nature of these pilots was to engage organizational groups in using the tool to discuss their own program or policy plans. These processes directly informed the development of a FSREA tool facilitation guide that would support additional groups in facilitating their own assessment processes using the tool. This facilitation guide is in the final design stages for publication through the UW-Extension Learning Store as a publicly-available resource. The pilot sessions were extremely valuable for assessing the functionality of this tool and facilitation process in real organizational settings. What follows is an overview of the ways in which the project scope was approached, a review of the two pilot sessions conducted with local organizations, and a look ahead at how the practice of using a food systems-specific, racial equity assessment tool can benefit the planning process.

Piloting the FSREA

Two pilot sessions were conducted: the first with a nonprofit organization located within a residential area of Madison, WI predominantly home to people of color. This organization's programming focuses on urban agriculture, nutrition, and physical fitness as well as overall community development, tailored to serving specific communities of color. The second pilot partner was a public agency primarily concerned with local delivery of a national family health and nutrition program. In the end, working with these two groups enabled me to engage the pilot of the FSREA tool with professionals whose work focused at neighborhood, city, county, and statewide scales.

I began by reaching out to contacts in several organizations with an invitation to participate in the pilot, which I framed as practice-based research. I included in my invitations notice that I was able to offer honoraria to participating organizations, as well as their outside stakeholders, through the research funds I had been awarded. I set up audio recording equipment to record each pilot sessions to minimize note-taking during the course of conversation. Unfortunately, the recording equipment failed for the first session, but I took adequate notes to have captured much of the salient discussion. I provided participants with flip chart paper to record their notes and questions. Participants also filled out a benchmarking pre-survey and detailed evaluation survey afterwards focused on providing space for their critiques on content and process, and suggestions for revision.

The first pilot session was with the nonprofit organization. Executive leadership to direct programmatic staff were present and engaged, and a long-time organizational partner/consultant attended as well. It is worth noting that organizational leadership was racially diverse, reflective of their constituent community, and that half of these participants also had planning degrees. For their assessment, this group focused on the idea of offering free/low-cost CSA-type fresh produce distribution through their center, specifically to the families of children who participate in center programming. This group provided a close reading of the tool and emphasized how cultural differences have an impact on understandings of and relationships to concepts like “equity.” They preferred a more flexible approach to using the tool and wanted to give users the opportunity to define meanings and visions for what a more racially-just food system could look like. It is important to note that this was a diverse group of people who agreed that having a group of all white people use a tool like this would be meaningless. In terms of how this pilot was approached, it was crucial to have grant funding that provided for honoraria to these participants. This investment in process and reflection work is something that is so often missing from the food systems organization and nonprofit world. The fact that we talked about how to institute a school-based CSA program equitably, and then I was able to hand them a check to help get started, was greatly appreciated by the organization and felt already like some small piece of distributive justice had been achieved.

The pilot with the public, health-focused agency raised different kinds of questions about the FSREA process and how I understand my intended audience for this type of tool. I was hosted by local agency staff across the organizational structure from leadership to interns, and we were joined by state level administration and training staff for this agency. Perhaps because of the different approaches to this agency’s program implementation across scale, we were not able to discuss as concrete of a program proposal as with the nonprofit organization. Instead, the conversation focused on how this group understands the barriers and opportunities administer their program differently, particularly looking at programmatic intake and retention strategies. The pilot participants from this agency identified considerable constraints in what they could do or imagine was possible due to policies and restrictions from their federal funding source. Within these constraints, this group imagined how they might get support to pilot different intake strategies to demonstrate the positive impacts of changing certain program policies. When reading

the evaluations from this group, I was struck by how many participants felt sensitive or defensive regarding the use of the terms “white supremacy” and “white privilege” in the introduction of the facilitation guide. This was a recurrent theme for 6 of the 7 participants who identified as white (of 8 total participants). This feedback was indicative of a very different organizational culture, power analysis, and personal familiarity with how racism and systems of oppression influence daily life compared to the session with the nonprofit.

Discussion and Conclusions

The pilot sessions provided important feedback that directed how the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool and facilitation guide would be revised into their final form. Facilitating the pilots prompted a lot of reflection on who prospective audiences are likely to be for this facilitation guide. Is this practice more likely to be adopted by planning agencies organizations more like the nonprofit, which is multiracial across its organizational structure and articulates a justice-oriented mission? Or will more of these prospective users be like the predominantly white public agency where, even when committed to ideas of fairness and equity, additional education beyond what this tool can offer may be necessary? While it is important that a tool like this be accessible to a wide variety of organizations, using precise language and attention to power is necessary where planners meet resistance from those who would rather not challenge the way racism and privilege are perpetuated across individual, institutional and systemic cultures, structures and processes.

These organizational pilots provide valuable support for conducting this type of racial equity assessment during planning efforts concerning food systems. Drafting urban agriculture ordinances, assessing the distribution of retail food outlets, or siting food-based economic development projects require the same attention to how plans can be strengthened through explicit attention to racial equity. Employing tools like the Food System Racial Equity Assessment helps planners and stakeholders normalize talking about race and racism throughout the planning process. It provides an opportunity to ask critical questions about who is or is not served by plans, policies, or programs. Engaging in these assessments demands that planners, governmental bodies, and organizations be deliberate about having diverse and reflective teams within their staff and through relationships maintained across communities and constituencies. Use of critical assessment tools make plans, policies, and programs stronger overall by opening up visioning, framing, and solution-finding to thoughtful input and critical feedback from an early stage of development.

By employing strategies to prioritize racial equity, planners can use their process facilitation and mediation roles to advance more equitable governance and resource distribution. To do this effectively, considerations of power and social difference in cities, regions, and planning processes must be core curriculum in planning schools, and equity a central value of planning agencies. In this way, planners can continue to push critical discussions, set high standards, and adapt or develop new processes that help us achieve more equitable cities and regions.

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Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool:

A Facilitation Guide

Lexa Dundore

The food system is a network in which conscious and unconscious racism creates different outcomes across groups. Racial inequities in the food system create unfair differences in access to fresh and culturally appropriate foods, increases the disproportionate prevalence of diet-related diseases, creates barriers to owning land and starting food or farm businesses, and limits the voice and power of those most impacted in policy-making processes.⁷ A racial equity assessment tool specific to the food system is a critical addition to the range of tools available to advance racial equity.

Racism at individual, institutional, and structural levels produces inequalities across life chances for people of color in the United States.⁸ Racism on an individual level, including bias, discrimination, or prejudgment based on race, as well as internalization of racism, has profound impacts on both interpersonal relationships and the formation of policies that perpetuate racism on a wider scale.

Structural racism and **white supremacy** are two sides of the same process that concentrate power among white citizens and institutions to the detriment of communities of color. The difference between **white privilege** and white supremacy can be understood as a matter of scale (individual to systemic). Given the embedded nature of **institutional racism**, dramatic inequities can result from policies and programs even without the intention to create different outcomes. The national equity organization PolicyLink estimates the majority of the United States' population will be people of color by 2042.⁹ However, transfer of power, resources, and opportunities will not automatically shift to reflect these demographic changes. Extension educators, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and local governments can all play a role in prioritizing **racial equity** and creating outcomes that are fair for all. Policy making, planning, and programming related to the food system are made stronger and more effective by emphasizing racial equity as a core concern from the beginning.¹⁰ This dedication is a necessary step toward remediating past injustices and building a more equitable future.

Leaders such as Race Forward¹¹ and the Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)¹² have paved the way by creating sample racial equity assessment tools for use by organizations and local governments. The act of using a racial equity assessment tool serves as an *equity prime*: a reminder to consciously consider race, class, and gender impacts during an important choice point, thereby helping to counteract unconscious bias.¹³

Key Definitions

Institutional racism

Policies, practices, and procedures that work better for white people than for people of color, often unintentionally.¹

Racial equity

A reality in which a person is no more or less likely to experience society's benefits or burdens just because of the color of their skin.² This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce or fail to eliminate differential outcomes by race.³

Structural racism

Racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of one race and the disadvantage of other races.⁴

White privilege

"An invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks."⁵

White supremacy

"An historically-based, institutionally-perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege."⁶

By using racial equity assessment tools in planning, groups can look carefully at how their decision-making processes can influence outcomes. Racial equity assessments encourage critical thinking and context setting before resources are spent on policies or programming that do not advance racial equity in the food system. We are less likely to maintain an inequitable status quo when we take time to consider racial equity at every step. Broadening our perspectives can open our programs to new possibilities for working in a more equitable way.

Creating assessment tools that aid in planning and decision making is the first step, but tools alone cannot transform society. Communities most impacted by inequities need to be put at the center of these processes with opportunities to lead, challenge, and create goals and visions for change.¹⁴ Too often the voices of people targeted by programming and decision making are not considered. Changing this may mean engaging partners and allies in planning and assessment processes who are not part of the group's organizational structure, or who do not consider themselves to be working on food system issues. These partners have valuable perspectives on who needs to be at the table, what assets, vision, and expertise communities already possess, and the ways that different social spheres intersect to create and perpetuate inequities.¹⁵

What follows is a detailed overview of how to use one such tool: The Food System Racial Equity Assessment (FSREA) tool. The FSREA tool draws heavily from the "Equity and Empowerment Lens with a Racial Justice Focus" created by the Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity.¹⁶ This tool is similar in its focus on how programs, policies, or plans can be evaluated from the perspectives (or "lenses") of people, place, process, and power. The FSREA tool adds to this four-lens approach by focusing its questions on the specifics and complexities of the food system. By planning for equity across these four lenses, it is possible to assess the impact of program plans on racial equity goals, and to focus work so that it improves equity. This tool focuses on organizational decision making and the programs proposed by an organization, agency, or other defined group. As such, it is not an appropriate tool for broader public engagement processes.

Since the FSREA tool is not itself a training on racial equity, it is important that potential assessment participants spend time developing their own critical analyses around race and privilege prior to sitting down with the tool. This critical consciousness can be borne of personal experiences with racism, learning how racism evolved in the United States, reading or watching pieces aimed at raising consciousness regarding the different ways that racism is expressed in our society, and through a variety of other experiences. Education on race and privilege will help practitioners ground themselves in histories of resilience and struggle and understand important data on how racism effects life chances for people of color.

A helpful list of readings, trainings, and organizations engaged in racial justice and food justice work compiled by the UW-Extension Community Food Systems Team can be accessed at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/cfsi/equity-in-food-systems/21-day-challenge-resources>.¹⁷ This link includes information on participating in a 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge. This activity can be undertaken at any time, and can be a beneficial learning experience both for individuals and for groups. While participants don't need to consider themselves "experts" before using the FSREA tool, they do need to commit to deepening their understanding of racism.

It is important to recognize that other types of inequities also play out in the food system, based on income, gender, citizenship status, and other factors. While this tool focuses on racism, the analysis

developed by this process can help develop critical consciousness about how to address inequities across intersecting forms of oppression.

What you will need

- An initial proposal, outline, or identified issue
- An interval of 3 to 4 hours, perhaps more than one session
- Flip chart paper or a white board
- Markers

While the FSREA tool can be adapted to meet the particular needs of the assessment group in question, attention to the participants and emphasis on racial equity as a core concern are nonnegotiable. Although working together through all five “steps” of this assessment process is recommended, groups with trust and shared understanding of how racism operates in the food system may be able expedite their analyses. This would mean skipping steps 1 and 2 (Visioning an Equitable Food System and Building a Shared Language, respectively), to focus on the heart of the FSREA process: Using the tool’s question set to critically evaluate a proposal and reflect on what to do next (steps 3–5). The shorter version of the assessment process typically takes 2–3 hours to complete.

Suggested ground rules

- Show respect for one another
- Try on ideas
- Both/and thinking
- It’s OK to disagree
- Use “I” statements—speak from personal experience
- Share the air; step up/step back
- Own our impacts
- Challenge the statement, respect the person
- One mic
- Active listening
- Lean into discomfort

Who you will need

This may differ depending on the context and goal of the assessment process. To be successful, the leadership and staff of your organization must be supportive and champion the racial equity assessment. If you have a large group (more than 8 people), you may want to split into two smaller groups for discussion and merge your key observations and questions later. It is important to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to share their ideas. Be sure to include:

- Staff or organizers involved in the project or program
- Leaders from the group or organization
- Key stakeholders from participants or target audiences
- Partners from other groups or organizations

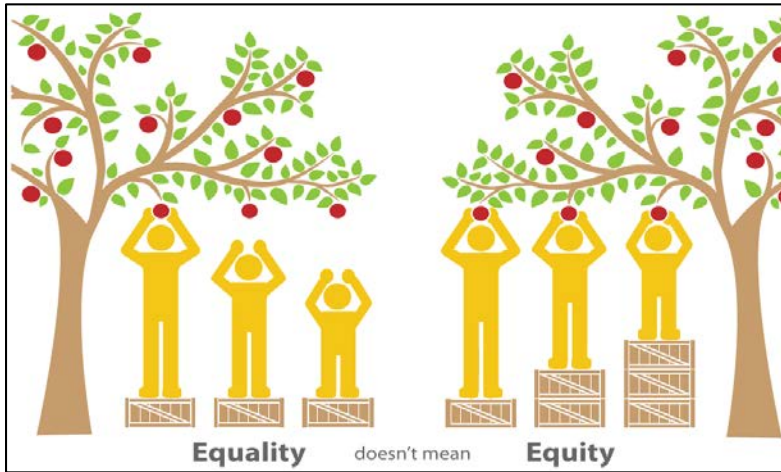
Some groups may struggle with the idea of including “outsiders” from the group or organization in what may be a sensitive assessment process. Remember that doing things differently and incorporating multiple perspectives are key goals of the FSREA. Engaging stakeholders from target audiences and the organizations that represent them is especially critical for predominantly white organizations. To ensure that this is not token participation, it is important to develop long-term relationships, provide incentives for participation, and work toward increasing representation and diversity within the organization with future hiring decisions.

Depending on the makeup of the group and participants’ familiarity with one another, facilitators may want to warm up with introductions and an icebreaker activity. This can help to cultivate some casual acquaintance and initial trust if group members do not know one another well. Agreeing on ground rules that facilitate respectful communication may also help groups navigate challenging conversations.

Using the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool

Step 1: Visioning an equitable food system

Think about the kind of organization we want to have, community we want to be a part of, or world we want to live in. In developing this vision, we can see how our proposal helps move us toward realizing that vision.



1: Image: © 2014, Saskatoon Health Region

- Make sure all participants are on the same page about what is meant by **equity**. PolicyLink defines equity as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”¹⁸
- Note the difference between what is meant by **equity** versus **equality**. Equity, as defined above, is about each person getting what they need to be successful. Equality is focused on each person getting the same, regardless of difference. A program or policy can provide equal access or support while still producing dramatic racial disparities and other gaps because not

all people or groups have the same needs.

- Does this definition of equity work and make sense for folks?
- Now, put that vision into practice:
 - Write, draw, or map your vision of what an equitable food system looks like. Choosing the scale for your vision can be tricky: Whole production and distribution systems? On a neighborhood, municipal, or state level? Focusing on a smaller scale is more practical for this activity (e.g., town, city, or neighborhood). Once you establish your baseline vision, you can make note of broader connections as needed. Your visual may not be able to include all components of the food system, but try to represent your core ideas about what is important for a food system to be fair for all. Give participants 5–10 minutes to work on their vision.
 - How do visualizations of this concept of an equitable food system compare? Where are there similarities and differences? Are any important components missing?

Step 2: Building a shared language

Begin building a common language and shared understandings to provide your planning process with a strong core.

- Brainstorm to identify the key terms, ideas, and language used in the discussion. Do we have similar understandings of key words (e.g., “food justice,” “food desert,” “low income”)? Write out common acronyms (e.g., USDA, WIC, AMI) and define terms that need explanation. The group can add terms to this list throughout the assessment process.
- Are there other definitions or clarifications that are critical to an effective discussion and assessment of your program or project proposal? Spend time at this stage to establish a shared language.

Step 3: Introduce the proposed plan, policy, or program

Set the stage for the assessment by providing an outline of the proposal under consideration.

Food System Racial Equity Assessment Tool

PURPOSE: All partners at all levels align around transformative values, relationships, and goals to enact systems-level change that moves our communities towards racial equity, social justice, and sustainability in the food system.

PEOPLE

Who is positively and negatively affected by this issue, and how?

How are people across racial and social groups uniquely situated in terms of the barriers they experience?

Which stakeholders do we have relationships with who could collaborate in developing and implementing this P/P/P? Who could we develop relationships with?

Who is missing from this conversation?

What people, organizations, or groups already support equity, justice, and sustainability around this issue?

How do we support cultural relations to food through this work?

PLACE

What is the history of this issue for different racial and social groups in our community and region?

What are the policy or legal standards and barriers we face around this P/P/P?

What are the local or regional resources that could be leveraged?

How are we considering environmental impacts and connecting with environmental justice?

PLAN/ POLICY/ PROGRAM

Define the goal or problem and how the actions presented by this P/P/P attempt to address that goal or problem

PROCESS

How are we meaningfully including those who are most impacted in identifying issues, proposing solutions, and making decisions?

How are we going about considering the voices and priorities of all affected racial and social groups?

What policies, processes, or relationships contribute to the exclusion of individuals and communities most affected by inequities?

What data and other information do we need to form our P/P/P with consideration for racial equity?

How will we measure, track, and evaluate the impacts of this P/P/P for its contribution to racial and social equity?

POWER

What are the barriers to achieving our goal in an equitable and sustainable way?

What is the decision-making structure?

What "links" of the food chain are connected to this proposal? How are we accounting for the ways these group interests may differ?

How is the P/P/P shifting power dynamics to better integrate voices and priorities of those most affected?

Who is accountable to upholding racial and social equity in this P/P/P?

How are public resources and investments distributed?

Who owns _____ (the land, seed, equipment, livestock, processing facilities, points of sale, etc.)?

**What do we not know?
How do we get the information we need?**

- Ask proposal leaders to provide an overview of the plan, policy, or program. This includes answering questions about who is involved with planning and implementation, where efforts are focused, why this particular approach is being taken, what will happen over the course of this project, and how will we accomplish our goals. Note that many of these elements will be reviewed again during the assessment process. At this step, simply set the stage and provide the information necessary for all group members to engage in a thoughtful and critical analysis.

Step 4: Using the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool

Get to work: Use the tool questions to guide a critical discussion around the proposal.

- Review the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool questions on page 5.
- Highlight the idea of purpose (e.g., “The proposed shared purpose is that we all want a food system that works for everyone and for the planet.”).
- Discuss each question with regard to your plan, policy, or program. You may discuss each section of the tool one at a time, or jump around and draw lines to connect issues or ideas across categories. The questions in the tool provide a starting place to analyze a proposal from the perspectives of people, place, process, and power—you may add additional questions as necessary. The organization of the tool into these four lenses is not meant to separate the ways in which these aspects are interrelated, but instead to offer us a way to organize areas of analysis.

Step 5: What happens next?

Conclude the assessment by connecting the dots and planning the next steps.

- As you wrap up your analysis with the tool, consider these questions:
 - What commonalities came out across conversations?
 - What else strikes you as important about the conversations and ideas that came out of using the tool?
 - What (or who) was missing from the conversation and why?
 - What do we *not* know?
 - How do we get the information we need?
- Reflect on how the plan, policy, or program helps or does not help to achieve the vision of an equitable food system as outlined in step 1. Does it move us closer to part of that vision for the future?
- How does the group feel now, having concluded the assessment and outlined the connections, resources, people, questions, and potential gaps in the current proposal? What changes need to be made in order to promote racial equity as part of this program, policy, or plan? Does the current plan, policy, or program need to be scrapped or shelved until additional learning, relationship-building, input, or research happens? Does it make sense to take a step back to work toward a smaller foundational step that will make accomplishing large goals more feasible in the future?
- If revisions or additional planning work is in order, work with your partners to plan the next steps, responsibilities, and an adjusted timeline.

In many ways, this is the most important step in using the Food System Racial Equity Assessment tool: Now that we know what we know (or what we don’t know), how do we move forward? Unfortunately, it can also be the most difficult aspect to quantify or name. There is no hard and fast rule, no score sheet that could encompass the nuance necessary to determine how each project should proceed. Honest and serious consideration of the appropriateness and value of the proposal in its current state and how it could be changed to advance racial equity is crucial, or use of an equity tool has little value. Critical questions raised and gaps identified through this process are important learning steps toward accountable and inclusive programming and policy-making. While groups may not always like the

answers to these final evaluation questions, they help us see exactly where we need to focus to make an impact.

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