

# Widening the Lens

Exploring the Role of Social Justice in Suicide Prevention  
A Racial Equity Toolkit



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Massachusetts Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Program

Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention's Executive Committee and General Membership

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## mcsp mission statement

The MCSP is a broad-based inclusive alliance of suicide prevention advocates, including public and private agency representatives, policy makers, suicide attempt survivors, families and individuals who have been impacted by suicidal behavior or lost loved ones to suicide, mental health consumers and providers, public health officials, and concerned individuals and organizations dedicated to working in partnership to reduce the incidence of self-harm and suicide in Massachusetts and mobilize a broad-based group of activists at the community level. The MCSP's mission is to prevent suicide through statewide collaboration and advocacy.

## mcsp alliance for equity mission statement

The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses and shares the mission of both of these groups to work toward integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention

- » The People of Color Caucus of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work.
- » The White Ally Caucus of the MCSP is committed to developing an understanding of how to most effectively give voice to communities of color, to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and to use our roles as allies and our white privilege to reinforce the understanding of the ways in which intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work

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# 1 introduction

The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention (MCSP) is a broad based, inclusive alliance of diverse stakeholders including state agencies, providers and community based organizations, mental health providers and consumers, suicide loss and attempt survivors, and other concerned community members, all committed to working together to reduce the incidence of suicide and self harm in Massachusetts.

The MCSP has 5 priority areas: advocacy, regional coalitions, structural development, strategic plan evaluation and membership. Through these 5 priority areas, the MCSP engages stakeholders from all across the state to collaborate and foster partnerships that maximize available resources, encourage best practice sharing, and ensure that statewide suicide prevention efforts are cohesive, comprehensive, and effective.

The MCSP is comprised of a General Membership and an Executive Committee, both of which meet bi-monthly.

The MCSP is the organization tasked with reporting on what is being done in Massachusetts to further the objectives of the Statewide Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention, and works with the evaluators to document how the resources allocated through the suicide prevention line item are serving communities across the state.

The MCSP has 10 Regional Coalitions, each of which has a seat on the Executive Committee, to ensure that the work of the Coalition truly represents the interests of the entire Commonwealth. The Coalition is funded both through the DPH Suicide Prevention Program (through the line item) as well as through membership dues (which fund all advocacy efforts).

The MCSP Alliance for Equity and the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses within the Alliance came about as a direct result of one of our Executive Committee members, and her experience being the only person of color at that time on the Executive Committee—again, we understood that this work needed to be done collaboratively, and that it was crucial that the white allies at the table recognize their role in moving forward, and thus the White Ally Caucus, was established to work closely with the People of Color Caucus, recognizing that at times the work would diverge—but that our mission and our workplan had to be closely aligned.

*The People of Color Caucus of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work.*

*The White Ally Caucus of the MCSP is committed to developing an understanding of how to most effectively give voice to communities of color, to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP and to use our roles as allies and our white privilege to reinforce the understanding of the ways in which intersectionality is critical to effective suicide prevention work*

*The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses and shares the mission of both of these groups to work toward integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention.*

Once the Caucuses started meeting regularly, a workplan emerged, which included reviewing the revised Statewide Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention with a particular focus on social justice and racial equity, and on social determinants of health, which so often have different outcomes for different communities, especially communities of color. The Caucuses also reviewed and made recommendations on the MCSP's priorities. Finally, the Caucuses decided to create a toolkit/ resource guide, that would be a growing, evolving document, but that would start off as the document we wished we had at the beginning of this process.

What is it that we wished we had? Mostly, we wished we had had some resources to provide foundational information, and some guidance about how to talk about these issues effectively so we could develop



greater effectiveness for suicide prevention. Talking about race is often uncomfortable. For white people, it can evoke feelings of guilt, shame and helplessness. For people of color, it can be an exhausting process of undertaking emotional labor and repeatedly educating people who are often well intentioned but don't always understand the impact of their words, actions or decisions. For all of us, it can mean highlighting the uncomfortable ways in which our organizations—our very well intentioned, non-profit, altruistically inclined organizations – are embedded in the same inequitable structures that we need to question and change.

Like many organizations devoted to mental health and suicide prevention, the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention is predominantly, but not exclusively, white. Like many other organizations, we have struggled with how to address issues of social justice and racial equity. These conversations were not easy conversations to start, and they were not easy conversations to bring into every level of the organization. We were fortunate to have a strong example of integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Program, but coalition work is unique in that it must address the needs and perspectives of many stakeholders. Our strength and our challenge is that we have so many different perspectives and experiences that inform our members/ participants experience and values in approaching suicide prevention, mental health, as well as issues of social justice and racial equity. We also recognize that integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention takes considerable time, energy and collaboration—and that we needed leadership both from people of color and white allies. None of us can do this work alone and expect true change.

When the MCSP began the process of working towards integrating social justice and racial equity into our work and organization, we did so with several common agreements. The first was that this work could not be siloed away in subcommittee— social justice and racial equity needs to be a lens through which we all view all of our work, rather than a separate, additional priority area. Our work with all populations, not only racial and ethnic minority populations, will be enhanced by greater attention and understanding of race, culture, and ethnicity. We also understood that the goal of becoming a socially just organization would take considerable effort, because we would need to increase our understanding and consider how best to integrate that increased understanding into our ongoing work. This would take time, especially because issues of racial and cultural justice are emotional and difficult to consider and to talk about. We understood that exploring one's own experiences can be a major initial foundational step to understanding the importance of including a greater focus on diversity, equity, and social justice, and have included exercises at the end of this toolkit that can help individuals in your organization begin to take this step. At the same time as we came to all of these agreements and understandings, we knew that our meeting agendas were full, and that if we were to address these issues solely during regular meeting times, it would take too long to affect real change. Additional, directed focus was needed.

Therefore, we created the MCSP Alliance for Equity as separate committee that could delve more deeply into social justice and racial equity and bring back recommendations to incorporate in the work and structure of the Coalition—at all levels, from Executive Committee to General Membership, as well as providing information that our stakeholders, particularly our Regional Coalitions and Member Organizations could use to examine their own work and their own organizational norms and structures.

We do not have all the answers of how to integrate racial equity and social justice into our—or any other— organizations. We still have many questions, and more questions arise the more work we do. Yet, we do have some insight into our own processes, and our own challenges. We have some insight into our own organizational strengths that we feel have helped us begin to move toward being a more equitable, racially just organization, but we recognize that we have not arrived at an 'endpoint', and that such an endpoint doesn't exist.

We have been more deliberate about the conversations we have been having, and have been focusing both internally on externally on what we could be doing better. And there is a lot we know we still could be doing better and we are consciously moving toward being a more racially equitable organization.

Hopefully, for some of you, the resources included in this toolkit will help you come up with answers that work best for your own organization, and for yourselves. Hopefully, you will share with us your own challenges, questions, and what has worked for you, so that we can continue to add to this document with additional resources, questions and—some—possible answers.

What we have learned, and what we hope to share in this document is a process—a process that has been incredibly beneficial and challenging, and has led to some progress, but is by no means one size fits all, is not necessarily linear, and it is by no means an endpoint. We will continue to navigate this process within our own organization and work, and will continue to expand this resource accordingly.

What we have to offer is largely based on what we wished we had known at various points during our own process, what has been repeatedly brought up or asked about why we are doing this work and how it relates to mental health and suicide prevention, and how this work relates to our organizational norms and structures.

While there are many aspects of social justice that we could have picked (gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, etc.) to start with, we decided to lead with racial equity for a number of reasons.

- » In the US race is a defining social identity and racism is a ubiquitous problem
- » One's race is an indicator of a person's and a community's success and wellness.
- » We have prioritized an anti-racist strategy in order to create a more equitable society and a wider range of suicide prevention approaches.
- » Of all oppressions, it is often the one that is back-burnered
- » In suicide prevention, issues of race, racism and communities of color have had little attention

Additionally, at the MCSP, while we have diversity across many other dimensions (gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, etc.) there was a noticeable lack of diversity when it came to race and ethnicity.

In making this choice, we are not saying that other oppressions are not equally important or critical to examine in suicide prevention; we are just starting with race. We understand that by examining race, we begin to develop a process for addressing social inequities across other demographics. We also see that race, or any oppressed social identity, does not stand alone and the concept of intersectionality is critical.

Intersectionality—the theory that oppressions intersect, and must be examined together rather than in isolation—is a concept that is integral to all effective social justice work. It is imperative that we examine the ways in which different oppressions are compounded, and this was something that was at the forefront of our thought process from the outset. Currently, our work focuses on racial equity as well as social justice in a broader sense. In working this way, we can look at how oppression is compounded when racism intersects with other oppression(s) ie. gender, sexual identity, class, religion—(see handout on intersectionality). In the future, and with additional iterations of this toolkit, this process will be instructive as we begin to lead with other areas of oppression. No matter what oppression we are keeping in the forefront, it is essential that all our work be done with the understanding that no piece of our identity exists in a vacuum, therefore, none of the oppression(s) we experience (or the privilege we experience) exist without the sum total of all of our other identities, whether they are a part of the 'dominant' group or 'oppressed' group. This allows us to not only honor and make space for individual identities and experiences, but also provides greater nuance. For

example, white women and women of color both experience misogyny and oppression based on their gender, but do not experience all gender-based oppression in the same way.

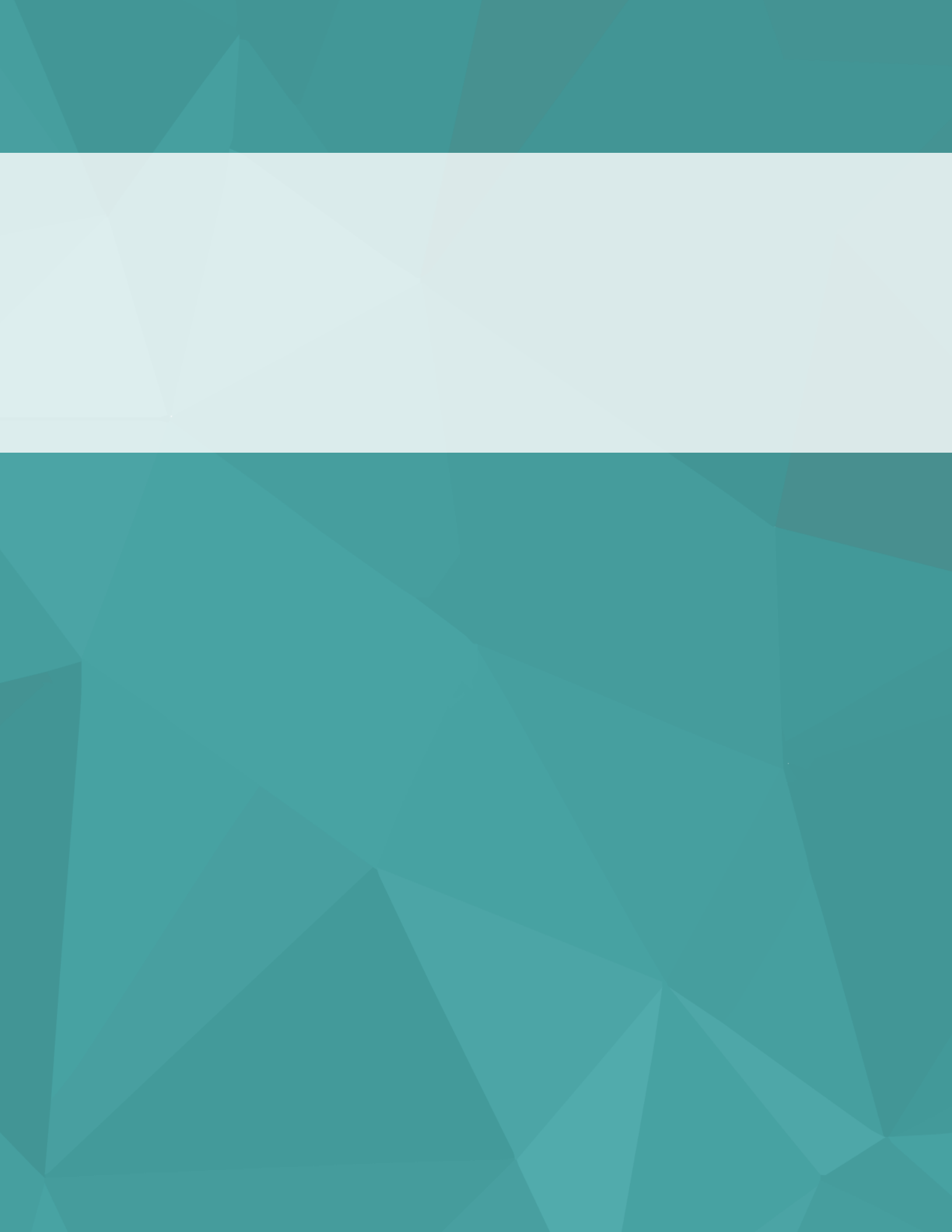
In envisioning and implementing our work, and in our vision for the information and resources provided in this toolkit, we started with the key belief that intersectionality is integral to all social justice work. Even though we decided that it was important to lead with racial equity, we understood the importance of examining the connection between oppressions, and the ways in which dismantling one oppressive structure can provide a roadmap for future social justice work.

This document is broken down into chapters that examine various areas of action and/or processes that an organization might engage in to move their organization toward social justice and racial equity. We include handouts, resource lists, exercises and organizational inventories that will help your organization or community group explore the social justice concepts addressed in the toolkit, as well as other resources for integrating social justice and racial equity into your organization or your community. We cover materials that range from suicide prevention and social justice, to cultural humility vs. cultural competence, to intersectionality, to doing social justice and racial equity work as a person of color, to shattered expectations, among other topics.

After most sections, we have included case studies that provide concrete examples of how the information and action steps of a particular section can be implemented. These are real-life examples, many of which come from our own experience, and include challenges, approaches, outcomes and narrative all of which clarify the process and resistance that had to be overcome along the way.

It should be noted that in implementing the exercises, handouts and concepts from this toolkit, especially if your organization is predominantly white, that there will be points of resistance that will often present themselves in unexpected ways. We have tried to demonstrate through these case studies the ways in which points of resistance can not only be instructive, but also can be opportunities for further discussion and growth.

This toolkit is a living document, and just as there is no endpoint to working toward becoming a socially just organization, there is also no endpoint in providing resources, engaging in conversations, and sustainably and effectively implementing structural change. Because of this, we will continue to expand on this toolkit, which will eventually be available in many different iterations. We will be adding materials on other oppressions in addition to race as well materials for specific stakeholders such as clinicians and other providers, community members, or regional coalition chairs.



# 2 getting started: assessing & developing foundational knowledge

## How to Use This Section

### **Issues of Race and Suicide Prevention:**

Racial Equity and Suicide Prevention: Why is it important?

How to Be a White Ally

What is White Privilege?

Doing Social Justice and Racial Equity Work as a Person of Color

Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility

Intersectionality

Shattered Assumptions: Exploring Racial Justice in America

### **Exploring New Knowledge:**

Background Information: Knowledge Inventory

Resource List

Case Study: MCSP Alliance for Equity

## How to Use This Section

As you begin the process of examining foundational social justice and racial equity concepts, and as you begin to integrate these concepts into your organization and your work, the handouts and resources in this section can help provide information for you and your colleagues for the purposes of internal conversation, as well providing clear explanations of foundational knowledge. These handouts make connections between racial justice, social equity and mental health, understanding racism and white privilege, and cultural competence vs. cultural humility to name a few for you to share with other stakeholders you may interact with.

While we believe all of this information is important, and we have assembled it in the order that we introduced (or were asked) about many of these concepts, we have also deviated slightly in order to provide a cohesive framework where one concept leads into the next (although there may be other arrangements that would work equally well). There is no prescribed order for the handouts in this section, particularly if your organization is coming to this work because of a particular inciting incident or shared concern. Use the order or framework that you think will help your organization understand and integrate these concepts most effectively.

It might make sense for one organization to discuss white privilege and cultural competence vs. cultural humility as an initial foray into social justice before attempting to discuss suicide and racial equity. It might make more sense for another organization, where there is a great deal of skepticism about the relevance of these concepts to begin with, to start with the handout on how racial equity and social justice are integral to mental health and suicide prevention work.

These handouts can be used in a number of ways:

- » as the foundation for intentional dialogue within your organization. Handouts can be used in pairs, small dialogue groups, or presented to a larger group. It is important to note that many times when people first encounter this information, they have both intellectual and emotional reactions. As such, there needs to be spaces where people can talk to others about these reactions, as well as the content of the handout. Often this more intimate conversation can't happen in a large group; so how to introduce this material needs to be considered and ample time needs to be invested.
- » as background reading for informational purposes prior to events such as a board retreat or a speaker on issues of racial equity and social justice in mental health or suicide prevention.
- » as resources for other organizational work, by providing or making the information available (as appropriate) to your community partners who are also interested in this work.

It should also be noted that embarking on work toward making your organization more racially equitable and socially just is not linear; it is instead recursive and as such some of these concepts may require additional work as you proceed along your path. They might need to be addressed when your organization has gained more knowledge, had more in-depth conversations, or done more exercises. If you are finding that a particular handout or concept is generating enough pushback to the point where you feel it is counter-productive, you may want to move to a different topic. You will, however, want to come back to these concepts at a later date for a more nuanced and in-depth conversation, and a more detailed conversation about how each concept impacts your organization and your work.

# Racial Equity & Suicide Prevention: Why is it Important?

## **Suicide Affects Everyone**

Any death by suicide is important. Any deaths by suicide are too many.

Suicide is a public health issue that doesn't discriminate. People of Color are dying by suicide, attempting suicide, and struggling with suicidal ideation. Although some statistics indicate lower rates of suicide for People of Color, there are confounding issues such as under reporting of suicides and suicide attempts and over-aggregation of samples where high rates of suicide attempts or suicide in specific subgroups of People of Color (including but not limited to many Asian, African, Native American and Latinx cultures, that are still not disaggregated) are obscured because these subgroups are lumped in with others. There are also high levels of depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in many communities of color that need to be addressed so that upstream innovations can prevent possible suicide deaths.

While suicide impacts every demographic, approaches to suicide prevention often do not. Prevention efforts need to better respond to the needs of communities of color.

As a coalition we want to be a group that is responsive to all people and communities. We want everyone to be represented, engaged, and have an impact on how our work is done. We understand most of the work in suicide prevention has been done in white communities for white people. This work is vital and important. Given the statistics on suicide, it is certainly clear that we need to continue this work. Simultaneously, to make our coalition and our work effective, we need to put more attention on people of color, social justice, and racial equity.

## **Oppression/ Systems Of Oppression Intersect With Suicide And Suicide Prevention In A Number Of Ways**

We have no control over our racial identity or if that identity puts us into a position of privilege, but we can use our privilege to address systemic racism and social injustice.

Racism and oppressive systems are pervasive and inescapable. Race isn't a personal thing: we have no control over our racial identity, and no control over whether we experience racism because of our identity, or whether we are protected from racism and seem to receive benefits (privilege) because of our race. Racism hurts both people of color (POC) and white people, albeit differently, because racial systems tell us how we are supposed to be and think and interact with others, as well as how we will be treated by others. With respect to suicide, racism increases risk of mental health concerns and suicide for PoC.

We've found that most (White) people move along by:

- » first developing an understanding of race, racism, and the effects of race and racism.
- » then developing understanding/awareness of how race and racism are systemic, not personal. And that they are also a part of that system
- » then developing an understanding of privilege, and how they are or are not privileged within a racialized system. Also, simply stating that folks have privilege and can use it is often less effective, because people don't really understand what privilege is.

Both people of color and white people have our own healing to do in this process to address how we have specifically been harmed by systems of racial oppression.

The effects of racism are not only in the individual, but also in our systems, such as mental health and suicide prevention. Oppression and oppressive systems create additional barriers for people of color to find support and resources during a suicidal crisis and existing resources may not be culturally responsive or appropriate.

In communities of color considering the effects of racism and addressing racism is a form of suicide prevention.

### **Using a Lens of Racial and Ethnic Responsiveness Improves Our Efficacy and Impacts Our Ability to do Our Work and Save Lives in All Communities**

Addressing issues of social justice and racial equity positively impacts the lives of individuals and communities of color *and* white communities and individuals.

White communities have traditionally been the focus of suicide prevention, and white people have traditionally been the developers of suicide prevention materials and resources. In order to achieve equity, we need to move beyond this inequity. Simultaneously, attending to racial equity does not mean shifting the entire focus of our work, but rather expanding the perspectives, frameworks and approaches to suicide prevention.

Resilience looks different in communities of color; we can learn from different communities about different forms of resilience.

When we talk about social justice, we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well. We can address multiple demographics (not just race but gender/ religion/ etc.) better when we examine systems level changes.



# How to be a White Ally<sup>1</sup>

## Why do White People Need to Talk About Race?

- » All of our behaviors, actions and perceptions take place within a context of power and privilege and are informed by a particular lens/ background/ set of experiences—there is no such thing as ‘neutral’.
- » Privilege is not just access to opportunity or economic/ political advantage, and it isn’t just avoidance of negative consequences of how systemic oppression denies rights to certain groups. It is also the assumption that when we walk into a room, the people in the room will tend to share our norms, viewpoints and method of communication, including how to understand and approach differing viewpoints.
- » If we don’t understand our privilege and work against systemic racism, the system will not change, we will not change, and our work/ organizations will not change. People, perspectives, experiences will continue to be systematically excluded from the table, including at the MCSP, and our work, our society and institutions will suffer as a result

## What is an Ally? What is Necessary to Become an Ally?

*“Ally: “An ally is a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he [or they] receives the benefit. Allied behavior means taking personal responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society, and so often ignore or leave to others to deal with. Allied behavior is intentional, overt, consistent activity that challenges prevailing patterns of oppression, makes privileges that are so often invisible visible, and facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression” (Ayvazian, 1995, p. 138)*

- » White people can enter into this work by understanding privilege and systemic bias, questioning our own lenses that we bring to the work we do, and working to become an ally. We must recognize that in addition to changing individual attitudes and behaviors, anti-racism work is about dismantling systems of oppression, and matching action to language.
- » LISTEN and TRUST the words, experiences and perceptions of people of color when they tell us what racism means to them/ how it has impacted them. Even if we can’t see or haven’t seen the impact—it is important to understand that not seeing the impact is a part of our privilege.
- » ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY and APOLOGIZE for problematic and harmful behavior. Recognize the difference between intention and impact. Our intentions do matter but they do not matter more than or erase the impact/ harm caused. It DOES matter that we intend to work to ensure that we don’t repeat our actions or the harm we’ve caused—the goal is to align our intentions with our actions so that we can have the positive impact we aim for.
- » This work requires that we sit with discomfort and uncertainty and guilt. It requires patience with ourselves and resilience (and sometimes outside support) to ensure that the guilt doesn’t derail our continued efforts.

- » Hold ourselves accountable for our words and actions and educating ourselves and other white people. In that process, we can't expect people of color (POC) to take on the emotional labor of educating us.

One model is the **AVAF** model<sup>2</sup>

- › **A**cknowledgement involves accepting that one has committed an injury (regardless of intent) and communicating that awareness to the injured party.
  - › **V**alidation legitimates the wounded party's feelings about the harm done.
  - › **A**pology involves taking responsibility for the harm one has done.
  - › **F**orgiveness follows only if the wounded party is ready.
- » Hold other white people accountable for their words and actions
- » There is no such thing as a 'perfect' ally. Even as allies, we have all been exposed to biased and racist beliefs which have shaped our perspective, and all benefit from racist social structures. We ALL have more to learn, more blind spots to identify, and more work to do.
- » It's critical to take anti-racist action, make mistakes and learn from them, rather than be paralyzed by our fear of making a mistake that inadvertently upholds racism.
- » As we grow in our allyship, part of the process is uncovering privilege we have not been aware of. This can be a shameful, difficult, emotional process. It is helpful if we can talk to other white people about this process for a few reasons. First, it means that we are not expecting POC to do the emotional labor of working through OUR guilt by providing affirmation, validation or absolution. Second, it is showing others that we can sit with and work through difficult and intense emotions around our own position of power related to race, racism and white privilege. Watching and being involved in our process may help people other white people give themselves permission to begin the messy, difficult, emotional work of unpacking their own intense feelings. And they will also have a safe person (us) to share that process with.
- » This work will continue to be ongoing. We will not arrive at an 'end' point, BUT we will arrive at better and better iterations of ourselves, our organization and our work.

### What are Our Responsibilities as Allies?

- » Understanding that racism is a complex system of beliefs, norms and social structures that impact both agent ("dominant") and oppressed groups. Recognize how we have been shaped by these norms/systems.
- » Talking with people who share our identity and privilege as white people. This is important as 1) they may be more receptive to our voices as people who share a common experience/ identity and 2) our goals as white allies and our responsibilities as white allies give us a common position with respect to work around racial justice and social equity
- » Learning how to leverage our privilege in the appropriate contexts. Use our privilege as a white person to get other white people to listen. Use our privilege as a white person to, whenever possible, amplify and create space for the voices, ideas and experiences of POC. Help open spaces without taking them over

- » Remember that we are working *with* People of Color and are not there to set the agenda or 'rescue' anyone. People who are oppressed are the experts in their own liberation. Rather, we are holding ourselves accountable to work against oppressive norms and structures to achieve equity and racial justice.
- » Recognizing the agency and authority of the lived experience of people of color to guide the agenda and direction of the work, while understanding that we have equal responsibility in working toward our shared objectives.
- » Most importantly: being an ally requires ACTION. Concrete next steps include:
  - › Join the White Ally Caucus of the MCSP Alliance for Equity
  - › Visit [RACEJustice.org](https://www.racejustice.org) and READ.
  - › Have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.
  - › Call out (or call in)<sup>3</sup> racist behavior and racist language
- » Educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions

## What is White Privilege<sup>4</sup>

White Privilege is a system of unearned rights and benefits as well as exemption from certain negative experiences based solely on the construct of race. White privilege exists not only to confer unearned benefits but to uphold racism.

All of our experiences take place within a context of power and privilege and are informed by our particular context; with white privilege, this context often means that advantages conferred by being white are unseen and unacknowledged

White privilege is not just access to opportunity or economic/ political advantage, and it isn't just avoidance of systemic oppression based on race. It is also the assumption that when we walk into a room the people in the room will tend to share our norms, viewpoints and method of communication

Every white person in this country has white privilege—regardless of whether we are aware of that privilege.

### How Does White Privilege Intersect with Other Forms of Oppression?

White privilege functions as an advantage based on race; because we each occupy many different identities, it is possible to be disadvantaged in one area (class, gender, sexuality, etc.) and privileged in another area (race).

Being disadvantaged in another area of one's identity (ie. Class), does not erase white privilege. It simply means that with all other variables (including class), being equal, if you are white you will have certain privileges and avoidance of consequences not afforded to people of color.

### What are Some Examples of White Privilege?

- » The communication norms of most groups you interact with, personally and professionally, reflect the norms that you are accustomed to and are typical of your racial group.
- » Not having to speak for your entire racial group as a monolithic entity.
- » Not being subject to racial profiling in stores, in job interviews, by law enforcement agencies.
- » The assumption that you will be seen, judged and treated as an individual, rather than through preconceived notions about people who share your ethnicity.
- » With no evidence to the contrary, being viewed by default as competent, unthreatening, trustworthy, and worthy of respect.

### How can I Use White Privilege to Highlight Racial Injustice?

Speak up when another white person says something racist—you can do so without being told you are being overly sensitive or attributing everything to race, simply because you are a person of color. You don't have to fully educate anyone, you can simply say that you disagree, or would prefer that they don't use words like that, or that you have a different experience.

Notice when people of color are being talked over, call out the interruption, and request that the person being talked over has the opportunity to finish speaking.

Point out instances where there are no people of color in the room. Ask yourself and everyone else at the table why there are no people of color present. More importantly, ask yourself how you can work together to change this.

Use a lens of social justice and racial equity to ask questions about how and why norms are created and adhered to, how priorities are set, and how decisions are made.

## Doing Racial Equity and Social Justice Work in Primarily White Communities (or Primarily White Fields, Such as Suicide Prevention) as a Person of Color

» **Take care of yourself. Burn out is real.**

Doing racial equity and social justice work as a person of color in white communities can be tough and exhausting, and sometimes this work can be traumatic. So, it is really important to recharge and combat the trauma of racism related to the work in suicide prevention, as well as the unrelated trauma of racism we face every day.

» **Find other POC colleagues and safe spaces that nurture people of color.**

Finding people of color in suicide prevention that have similar experiences can be helpful to validate your experiences. They can also be sounding boards for approaches and strategies for doing this work.

» **Identify your White Allies**

White allies are important in the work. People of color shouldn't have to do all the labor – emotional and otherwise. Also, it is important to identify specific allies that can help you with specific concerns and to whom you can refer questions from other white people. It is not your job as a POC to educate all white folks who might have questions about racial equity and social justice.

» **You cannot and do not have to speak for all \_\_\_\_\_**

I don't know how many times I have been in a room as the only person of color and am expected to speak for all people of color. Not only am I not an expert in other POC's experiences, but I am not even an expert in other mixed heritage Japanese American's experiences. When we allow white folks to assume that we can speak in sweeping generalizations about people of color, we erase our and others' unique experiences. This is not to say that there are common experiences that many POC face when it comes to racism, but we need to go beyond this narrative to a more nuanced one. And even if there are common experiences, I shouldn't have to speak for the whole group.

» **You can insist that white folks educate themselves and take responsibility for their own piece of the work.**

Often times white folks will ask you questions about racism and your experiences. Although you may choose to answer these inquiries, you are not responsible for the education of white people. There is ample literature, podcasts, videos, that explore and explain systematic oppression and racism. You do not have to do the emotional labor of explaining racism, white privilege, or white guilt.

However, if you are in leadership in the organization, you do have a responsibility to find a balance between your obligation to engage with your organization around issues of social justice and racial equity, through sharing your expertise and knowledge, and setting boundaries around what you can and cannot do.

» **You do not have to *defend* your existence as a POC or your personal experience**

Sometimes white people will attack POC, especially those of us who point out racism in its

individual, cultural and institutional manifestations. In my experience, these conversations are not always helpful to me or the white person. It's okay to protect yourself – including walking out of a conversation that is harmful.

» **Realize that change takes time and that it is not your sole responsibility.**

The work cannot be done by only a handful of people. There needs to be buy in from the larger group including leadership.

## Cultural Humility vs. Cultural Competence

Everyone, both on a personal and professional level, brings various lenses and perspectives to our work relevant to our own identities, including our own cultural lens. When we talk about being in cultures that are not our own, the question is how can we become educated, responsive and effective in collaborating and building partnerships that lead to effective work? Much has been said about the importance of cultural competence, however, we believe that the concept of cultural humility allows us to be better partners, more effective collaborators, and to allow our approach to respect the expertise and authority of the community in which we are working.

*Cultural competence* assumes we can 'know' or 'gain expertise' about a culture other than our own and that in doing so we can eventually come to a full understanding of the needs of a particular group as well as how to address those needs.

*Cultural humility* assumes we must listen and rely on the expertise of members of the cultural group with which we are working, not only to better understand the needs of the group, but also to better frame our work in relationship to their cultural norms and broader context.

*Cultural competence* assumes that once we have reached a certain level of knowledge, we are able to speak to the needs of a particular group without asking for the input of any members of the group.

*Cultural humility* assumes that we must continually educate ourselves, and that no matter how much we learn, we can amplify the knowledge and expertise of people of color, but can never fully understand what it is like to be a person of color.

*Cultural competence* assumes that a member of the dominant group can come to fully understand the experience, context, and needs of a particular culture.

*Cultural humility* assumes that while we can empathize with many aspects of another person's lived experience based on our own marginalized identities, we can never fully know or understand what it is like to be a part of a group to which we don't belong.

*Cultural competence* assumes that we can adapt existing mental health/ suicide prevention models and educational approaches which exist within the 'dominant' framework by using the language and (sometimes) norms of the culture or group with which we are working, without questioning whether these materials would work can be adapted directly into a different cultural framework.

*Cultural humility* understands that culturally and linguistically adapted approaches are only a part of the necessary framing. Cultural humility understands that in many cases existing models cannot be adapted to meet the needs of the group, and new models and educational approaches must be created.



*Cultural competence* often assumes that culture is fixed and unchanging, as well as monolithic.

*Cultural humility* understands that culture is fluid, and that culture is not monolithic but rather varied and multi-layered.

*Cultural competence* assumes that the dominant cultural perspective is normative, rather than a cultural lens, just like any other cultural lens.

*Cultural humility* assumes that there is no 'normative' or monolithic cultural perspective, but rather we are all informed by our own cultures, identities and experiences. Cultural humility does not place the values of one culture (particularly the dominant culture) above other cultural norms and values.

*Cultural competence* emphasizes cultural difference, rather than consideration of power, privilege, oppression, and systemic obstacles.

*Cultural humility* recognizes the systemic obstacles that prevent non-dominant groups (including cultural groups) from experiencing our society as a meritocracy. Cultural humility recognizes that opportunities in our society are disproportionately available to members of dominant groups.

*Cultural competence* is based on a superficial understanding of what oppression means and assumes that adjusting language and acknowledging inequity constitutes understanding. Cultural competence can often assume that recognition of the problem in itself is a solution, rather than a first step.

*Cultural humility* has greater depth, and encourages us to ask difficult questions; not just what inequities exist, but why do these inequities exist, and what can we do about them? Cultural humility understands that identifying inequities creates a responsibility to address and dismantle them.

## Intersectionality

Coined by Kimberle' Crenshaw in 1989<sup>5</sup>, intersectionality is a social justice concept that refers to the interconnectedness of social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, class creating overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression or disadvantage.

Intersectionality addresses how systems of oppression are not just cumulative, but also compounded.

Using the pay gap as an example: White women earn 82¢ for every dollar made by a white man. African American women earn 68¢. Latina women earn just 62¢. While Asian women on average earn slightly more than White women, it is important to note that despite this, on average Asian American women are still making 75¢ to the dollar compared with their Asian male counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

In this example, African American and Latina women experience the intersectionality of their racial and gender oppression, resulting in exponentially negative consequences. The effect of their racial oppression is compounded by their gender oppression.

It is important to note that an intersectional approach must not just examine the pay gap, but must also address who has access to employment, who holds positions of power within organizations, whose norms are valued and will lead to success/promotion, etc. For example, although Asian American women make slightly more than White women, they still face the "bamboo ceiling" which prevents their professional advancement and opportunities to access leadership role.

Lack of an intersectional approach to social justice can lead to a "wait your turn" mentality in which different oppressed groups are expected to ignore their intersectional oppression in order to address a single cause of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, classism). While each form of oppression manifests differently and must be addressed accordingly, having too singular a focus on any particular identity can impede progress changing systems of oppression.

If we look at mental health as a disability, we see the intersection of mental health and racism:

- » Although reported rates of mental illness in groups of color are similar, often mental health conditions such as depression are likely to be more persistent and result in higher percentage of disability as compared to white people.<sup>7</sup>
- » Youth of color with behavioral issues are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system rather than being treated in the mental health system.
- » In general, people of color are less likely to access mental health care. While 48% of white people with mental illness received mental health services, only 31% of Blacks and Hispanics and 22% of Asians received services.<sup>8</sup>

Even when people of color receive services:

Lack of cultural understanding by health care providers may contribute to underdiagnosis and/or misdiagnosis of mental illness in people from racially/ethnically diverse populations. Factors that contribute to these kinds of misdiagnoses include language differences between patient and provider, stigma of mental illness among minority groups, and cultural presentation of symptoms.<sup>9</sup>

Intersectionality not only provides a broader framework for addressing social inequities, but also allows movements and initiatives to address the needs of the individuals and communities who not only experience the most oppression, but who also have the least access to support and resources to overcome these oppressions.

An intersectional approach also values the voices, experiences, and suggested agendas of those individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression—as such, an intersectional approach is more inclusive of voices that are normally silenced across multiple dimensions (Silencing, like oppression, is not just cumulative, but compounded as well).

Above all, intersectionality is a lens through which we can view our social justice work. Focusing on intersectionality enables us to be better allies, to more effectively dismantle systems of oppression, and creates unity and collaboration among oppressed groups that benefits everyone.

# Shattered Assumptions: Exploring Racial Justice in America

Becoming aware of issues of racial justice or injustice is a journey which requires self-reflection and a willingness to reconsider your own understanding of race in America. It is, at times, a painful journey filled with mixed emotional reactions. In order to effectively approach this issue, we believe it is important to acknowledge this process and prepare you for the experience ahead.

For a large portion of White America, we have grown up being taught and believing that if you “work hard” you can be anything you want and achieve any social status you aim for. Becoming aware of racial inequality means being willing to explore this belief system. At first glance, that does not seem like an overwhelming task, however questioning what you believe about American culture also requires questioning your own identity as an American. This can prove to be a daunting task and prompt our defenses.

As you embark on this process, we are asking you to consider the following:

» **Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility:**

In recent times, the term “cultural competence” has been challenged due to a recognition that while we may be able to learn about a specific culture in great depth, it is impossible to be competent in all cultures. With this understanding has come a realization that what is most needed isn’t competence per se but rather cultural humility. Cultural humility means recognizing that we also view the world and social issues through our own cultural lens. That just as the people we work with have been acculturated to their culture, we have been acculturated to our culture. Cultural humility means having a willingness to challenge our own belief systems and an awareness that our world view has been created through a cultural lens and may not be the only truth.

» **Understand the concept of Shattered Assumptions:**

*Shattered assumptions* is a term that we use often in trauma response work. Experiencing a traumatic event often challenges our assumptions about the world that we live in, the people we know, and sometimes even ourselves. Perhaps the most powerful example of shattered assumptions is if we were to compare many white people’s belief about the safety of America pre-9/11. For example, if we were to have asked you on September 8th, 2001, “How likely do you think it is that we will have a massive terrorist attack on United States soil that kills thousands of Americans on one day?” What would your answer have been?

What if we were to ask you the same question on September 13th of 2001?

Your answer would have likely been dramatically different. This is an example of a shattered assumption. Prior to 9/11 you likely felt very safe in the United States and probably did not think a terrorist attack was likely. Yet, immediately following the attacks, most Americans not only thought another attack was likely, but rather imminent.

Exploring racial justice in America as white allies requires us to accept that some of our assumptions have not been true for all Americans.

» **Recognize your own feelings of defensiveness:**

It is likely that as some of our assumptions about racial justice in America are shattered,

we will feel defensive. There are moments that this may elicit a sense of guilt for the social advantages white people have had but understanding racial inequality, does not mean that you or other white people haven't worked hard or don't "deserve" what you have earned in life. What it does mean, is that as a white person, the likelihood that your hard work would equate to social success is significantly higher.

The term White Privilege also tends to trigger defensiveness. The concept of white privilege does not mean that if you are a white person, life will be easy or success is assured. What it does mean, is that as white people, there are systemic advantages we have had ranging from employment to education to access to housing and interactions with the criminal justice system. Statistically speaking, and the numbers sadly do support this statement, people of color remain more likely to be convicted for the same crime, given larger sentences, less likely to access a private attorney, less likely to be released on bail. We know that our system favors wealthier Americans and we know that people of color are statistically less likely to be wealthier, making our systems inherently discriminatory and yet, we have taken little efforts to rectify this circumstance.

Before you begin this process, we would encourage you to ask yourself the following questions.

- » What demographics do I identify with including race, gender, culture, religion, sexual identity or orientation?
- » Are any of these identities groups that have historically experienced oppression or discrimination? Do they still and what does that look like?
- » Do you feel emotionally guarded when talking about racial justice? If so, what are the emotions or thoughts that it brings that up for you?

### **Why is Racial Justice important in Suicide Prevention when the data suggests that most people dying by suicide are white?**

We cannot fight injustice of one form and ignore another. If you are invested in suicide prevention, you also must be invested in shifting the narrative around suicide and fighting the judgment and discrimination that individuals and families impacted by suicide face. We cannot accomplish this goal for all individuals and families without addressing social inequity in all areas.

## Background Knowledge Inventory

- » Have you had conversations about racial equity or social justice within your organization? Has the conversation already been started? Are you aware of who is at the table and who is missing?
- » Have you considered how different barriers might exist for different communities in participating in/ feeling welcome in your organization?
- » Have you discussed social determinants of health and disparities in outcomes for different communities?
- » How do people in your organization understand the relevance of racial inequity in terms of your work and in terms of how your organization operates?
- » Are members of your organization aware that racism functions on individual, institutional and systemic levels? Can they explain the difference between the impact of racism at each level?
- » Are members of your organization aware of the concepts of overt and aversive racism? Can they understand and explain the difference between the two and how they may impact interpersonal behavior or organizational functioning/ structure?
- » Are your organization's members familiar with the concept of white privilege? How does white privilege impact your lives on a personal and professional basis? How does white privilege shape the structure of your organization?
- » Do people in your organization understand the glossary terms? What terms do people have difficulty conceptualizing and/or have different definitions for?
- » What terms are unfamiliar/ need clarification?/ What knowledge gaps do you need to address moving forward?
- » Is there an article that your group or org. Can read together to assess knowledge/ create shared understanding? (see Resource List for some possible ideas)

### Follow Up

- » Discuss how members of your organization can examine these concepts in relationship to their own attitudes, experiences, behaviors and beliefs? Discuss how individuals can increase their knowledge and commit to goals and action steps to become more equitable in attitude, behavior and belief. Discuss how this relates to your organizational functioning.
- » Discuss how your organization might work together to address common knowledge gaps, and how these gaps can be instructive in shifting your organizational approach—especially around what questions you are asking as you move forward with your work
- » Add agenda items related to social justice education and select one or two members to take initiative in bringing information to meetings (you can use the handouts in this section as a starting point).

- » Repeat this knowledge inventory after some time has elapsed and see how your organization has progressed, re-evaluate your approach to incorporating social justice and racial equity knowledge into your work.

# Social Justice and Racial Equity Resource List

## Racial Justice and Mental Health Resources

- » *How Racism, Trauma and Mental Health Are Linked*  
NPR from Illinois State University  
Christine Herman  
<https://www.wglit.org/post/how-racism-trauma-and-mental-health-are-linked-0#stream/0>
- » *Families of Color Face Challenges When Seeking Treatment for Mental Illness*  
Real Talk: WOC & Allies  
<https://medium.com/@realtalkwocandallies/families-of-color-face-challenges-when-seeking-treatment-for-mental-illness-46ddc0cbd938>
- » *Part II: How We Talk About Mental Health is Racist*  
Real Talk: WOC & Allies  
<https://medium.com/@realtalkwocandallies/part-ii-how-we-talk-about-mental-illness-is-racist-9cc79fa108c4>
- » *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health Care: Evidence and Policy Implications*  
Thomas G. McGuire and Jeanne Miranda  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3928067/>
- » *The Effects of Racism on Mental Health (webinar)*  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Dr Karen G. Martínez, MD, MSc, Jessica Graham-LoPresti  
<https://adaa.org/webinar/consumer/effects-racism-mental-health-how-cope>
- » *The Link Between Experiences of Racism and Stress and Anxiety for Black Americans*  
Tahirah Abdullah and Jess Graham  
<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/link-between-experiences-racism-and-stress-and>
- » *Racism Lingers in Mental Health System*  
American Psychiatric Association  
Aaron Levin  
<https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2013.11b16>
- » *Suicide Isn't Just a White People Thing*  
Kimya N. Dennis. The Conversation.com  
<https://theconversation.com/suicide-isnt-just-a-white-people-thing-77367?fbclid=IwAR1kX62xFN8sl83qFmkRxxm8zfkJdr10byyxu6s-7ntY-9iEwNAODUIRtk>

## Intersectionality

- » *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*  
Kimberle Crenshaw, University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.  
<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf>



- » *Intersectionality 101—Why ‘We’re Focusing on Women’ Doesn’t Work for Diversity and Inclusion*  
Jennifer Kim, Medium.com  
<https://medium.com/awaken-blog/intersectionality-101-why-were-focusing-on-women-doesn-t-work-for-diversity-inclusion-8f591d196789>

### Allyship Resources

- » *Curriculum for White Americans to Educate Themselves on Race and Racism—From Ferguson to Charleston*  
Jon Greenberg  
<http://citizenshipandsocialjustice.com/2015/07/10/curriculum-for-white-americans-to-educate-themselves-on-race-and-racism/>
- » *11-Step Guide to Understanding Race, Racism, and White Privilege*  
Jon Greenberg  
<http://citizenshipandsocialjustice.com/2017/10/14/11-step-guide-to-understanding-race-racism-and-white-privilege/>
- » *We Need Co-Conspirators, Not Allies’: How White Americans Can Fight Racism*  
Rose Hackman  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/26/how-white-americans-can-fight-racism>
- » *11 Things White People Can Do To Become Anti-Racist Allies*  
Kali Holloway  
<https://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/11-things-white-people-can-do-be-real-anti-racist-allies>
- » *What is Whiteness? (Opinion)*  
Nell Irvin Painter  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html?referrer=&\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html?referrer=&_r=0)
- » *5 Tips for Being an Ally*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_dg86g-QIM0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dg86g-QIM0)
- » *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally-Industrial Complex*  
<http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

### Resources for Self Care for People of Color Doing Racial Justice Work

- » *POC Online Classroom*  
<http://www.poonlineclassroom.com/self-care>
- » *Love as Political Resistance; Lessons from Audre Lorde and Octavia Butler*  
<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/love-time-political-resistance/transform-valentines-day-lessons-audre-lorde-and-octavia>
- » *Self Care for People of Color After Psychological Trauma*  
<http://www.justjasmineblog.com/blog-1/self-care-for-people-of-color-after-emotional-and-psychological-trauma/>

- » *Filling Our Cups: 4 Ways People of Color Can Foster Mental Health and Practice Restorative Healing*  
Threads of Solidarity: WOC Against Racism  
<https://medium.com/@SolidarityWOC/filling-our-cups-4-ways-people-of-color-can-foster-mental-health-and-practice-restorative-healing-64e5e7584127>
- » *Self-Care Strategies for Survival: Sustaining Oneself in Social Justice Movements*  
Lauren Lofton  
<https://www.compasspoint.org/blog/self-care-strategies-survival-sustaining-oneself-social-justice-movements>
- » *Racial and Cultural Trauma: Self and Community Care Resources*  
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling/racial-and-cultural-trauma-self-and-community-care-resources>
- » *Family Care, Community-Care and Self-Care Tool Kit: Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma*  
<http://www.abpsi.org/pdf/FamilyCommunitySelfCareToolKit.pdf>
- » *The Transforming Of Silence into Language and Action*  
Audre Lorde

### Combatting Aversive Racism

- » *You're Calling Me a Racist? The Moral And Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism*  
Sarita Srivastava  
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/432738?journalCode=signs&>
- » *Your Calls for Unity Are Divisive as F\*ck*  
DiDi Delgado  
<https://medium.com/the-establishment/your-calls-for-unity-are-divisive-as-f-ck-3d6584bca72f>
- » *Be Less Racist: 12 Tips for White Dudes, By a White Dude*  
Dan Zanes  
<http://www.mashupamericans.com/issues/be-less-racist-12-tips-for-white-dudes-by-a-white-dude/>

### Understanding White Privilege

- » *What Is White Privilege, Really?*  
Cory Collins  
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>
- » *10 White Privileges You Don't Know You Have*  
Grace Goodwin  
<http://whiteprivilege.org/10-privileges-you-dont-know-you-have/>
- » *10 Things White Privilege Has Done for Me in 10 Days*  
Olivia Cole  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege\\_b\\_5658049](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege_b_5658049)

- » *White Privilege Checklist*  
Peggy McIntosh  
<http://crc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>

## Bystander Intervention

- » *How to Intervene When You See Street Harassment: An Illustrated Guide*  
Soo Oh  
<https://www.vox.com/identities/2016/12/28/13799756/bystander-intervention-deescalation>
- » *Intervention and De-escalation Resources, including Anti-Harassment 101*  
<http://deescalationandintervention.weebly.com/resources.html>
- » *A Practical Web Tutorial to Bystander Intervention and De-escalation Tactics*  
Jes Solnik  
<https://watt.cashmusic.org/writing/deescalation>
- » *Bystander Intervention Resources* from the American Friends Service Committee
  - › *Dos and Don'ts*  
<https://www.afsc.org/bystanderintervention#>
  - › *Bystander intervention webinar*  
<https://www.afsc.org/story/recap-bystander-intervention-training>
  - › *Video: Don't Just Be a Bystander—6 Tips for Responding to Racist Attacks*  
<https://www.afsc.org/video/dont-be-just-bystander-6-tips-responding-to-racist-attacks>
- » *Do's and Don'ts for Bystander Intervention*  
OCA-GLA  
<http://oca-gla.org/programs/dos-and-donts-for-bystander-intervention/>

## Resources on the Enduring Trauma of Systemic Racism in Communities of Color

- » *Slavery to Mass Incarceration* (video)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e\\_djVSag4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e_djVSag4)
- » *Infographic: Racism in the Criminal Justice System*  
<http://www.arrestrecords.com/infographic-racism-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>
- » *America's Original Sin: Slavery and the Legacy of White Supremacy*  
Annette Gordon-Reed  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-12-12/americas-original-sin>
- » *There Is No Middle Ground Between Racism and Justice*  
Ijeoma Oluo  
<https://theestablishment.co/there-is-no-middle-ground-between-racism-and-justice-8838f14e46a3/>
- » *Police Killings Have Harmed Mental Health in Black Communities, Study Finds*  
John Eligon  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/us/police-shootings-black-mental-health.html>

## Resources on How Systemic Racism Perpetuates Itself and How to Dismantle it

- » *Cycle of Socialization*  
Harro et. al. 2000
- » *Cycle of Liberation*  
Harro et al. 2000
- » *Leadership Matters: How Hidden Biases Perpetuate Institutional Racism in Organizations*  
Walker et al. Human Service Organization; Management Leadership and Governance (2017)  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23303131.2016.1249584>

## Trainings

- » *Re-Center*, <http://re-center.org>
- » *The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond*, <https://www.pisab.org>
- » *Human in Common*, <https://www.humanincommon.com>
- » *The Truth School*, <https://truthschool.org>

## Books

- » *Dear Universe*, Yolo Akili
- » *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Resmaa Menakem
- » *When Affirmative Action was White*, Ira Katznelson
- » *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown
- » *Pleasure Activism*, Adrienne Maree Brown
- » *The New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander
- » *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Robin DiAngelo

## Community Organizations Focused on Direct Services

- » *Gandara Center, Holyoke*; <https://gandaracenter.org>
- » *Lowell Community Health Center*; <https://www.lchealth.org>
- » *Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma*; <http://hprrt-cambridge.org>
- » *Cambridge Health Alliance Multicultural Mental Health Programs: Latino, Asian, Haitian, Portuguese*;  
<https://www.challiance.org/cha-services/specialty-services>
- » *La Alianza Hispana Inc.* <http://laalianza.org/>
- » *Casa Esperanza*, <https://www.casaesperanza.org/>
- » *Codman Square Health Center*, [http://www.codman.org/services/behavioral\\_health.html](http://www.codman.org/services/behavioral_health.html)

### Community Organizations Focused on Education and Advocacy

- » *DeeDee's Cry*; <https://www.facebook.com/DeeDees-Cry-1968152186789308/>
- » *Asian Women For Health*; <http://www.asianwomenforhealth.org>
- » *North American Indian Center of Boston*; <http://www.naicob.org/programs--services.html>
- » *Arredondo Family Foundation*; <https://arredondofoundation.org>
- » *The Transformation Center*; <https://transformation-center.org>

To provide feedback on or suggest additional resources email: [MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com](mailto:MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com)

## Case Study: MCSP Alliance for Equity (People of Color and White Ally Caucuses)

### Challenges

- » Integration of the work of the Alliance into all levels of the organization
- » Understanding that this would not just be an 'add on' but would be integrated through the whole organization
- » Outreach and investment/ buy in for this project from the Executive Committee and MCSP membership
- » Structuring meetings and process in an equitable and inclusive way, and getting existing members used to the new schedules/ structure.

### Approach & Solutions

- » Approaching the formation of the Alliance as a collaboration between people of color and white allies, ensuring that each group could function both separately and in partnership.
- » Ensuring that the agenda of the Alliance was formed and executed by both groups.
- » Ensuring that the structure of meetings and process took into account social justice and racial equity; ensuring that the structure of the Alliance encouraged involvement by community members.
- » Ensuring feedback and buy-in beyond the Alliance.
- » Ensuring that the work of the Alliance was not siloed, but rather impacts the entire organization at every level from Executive Committee and General Membership and informed our structure, priorities, approach, etc.

### Outcome

The outcome has been the creation of an Alliance that works constructively and collaboratively on a shared agenda, that is able to evolve and expand as necessary, and that impacts the larger work of the MCSP, while hopefully providing resources for stakeholders outside of the Coalition as well.

### Narrative

In 2017, the MCSP Executive Committee approved the creation of two separate but connected groups, the People of Color Caucus and the White Ally Caucus which then came under the overarching MCSP Alliance for Equity.

Initial approval for the creation of these two groups was easier than anticipated, however continued buy-in when the Executive Committee began discussing the extent to which the work of these subcommittees would inform our organizational priorities, structure and operation was significantly more challenging.

However, initial buy-in was enough to get the Caucuses off the ground, and later resistance was addressed openly and constructively (see the next case study on MCSP Executive Committee).

The structure of the Caucuses was established very deliberately and intentionally.

From the outset, it was clear that both groups would need to work closely together, and that in fact the bulk of the work would be done as one group (the MCSP Alliance for Equity), however it was equally clear that there remained a need for two distinct groups that would have space to work separately when needed. Specifically, we knew there would be times when the People of Color Caucus would need to discuss social justice and racial equity in an affinity group context that would allow for common understanding, experience, and perspective. This was also true of the White Ally Caucus. It was clear from the outset, however, that when the groups did work separately, all of our work would come back to the larger Alliance for discussion.

The initial launch of the Alliance was slow. The first meetings were intentionally scheduled in the evenings in order to accommodate community members with full time jobs not in mental health/ suicide prevention. Meetings were also scheduled at locations that were accessible by public transportation and required no identification to enter. Our first 2 meetings were scheduled at a public library, and attendance was essentially non-existent.

Our third and fourth meetings still had limited (and mostly white) attendance.

After our fourth meeting, we decided to try something different that we hoped would enable more people to participate. Our meetings then switched to virtual (Zoom) meetings, still scheduled for the evenings. It should be noted that it was only after we made this switch, and only after we re-evaluated our outreach strategy within communities of color, specifically through individual invitations to join the Alliance, that we began to have more participation from people of color as well as white allies from all over the state.

Our group remains small but dedicated. We average 5-7 people at a meeting, but attendance can fluctuate. We have been meeting monthly for the better part of two years, with our attendance continuing to grow, and recently, we have had 2 or 3 meetings where there were more people of color than white allies. We are still working on outreach and engaging both more people of color and more white allies. We also involve individuals who cannot participate in meetings by giving them specific tasks they are interested in (ie. Doing research for resource lists or being beta-readers for our Toolkit).

The initial work of the Alliance was to evaluate and provide feedback on the existing priorities of the MCSP (membership, advocacy, structural development, strategic plan evaluation, and regional coalitions). We discussed ways in which each area could incorporate social justice and racial equity more effectively. This feedback was then brought back to the Executive Committee, where we discussed these suggestions and areas of improvement and whether and how they could be incorporated effectively, and in what timeframe.

Much of this feedback was also used in preparation for the MCSP Executive Committee's 2 retreats on social justice and racial equity.

Our next task was to evaluate the revised Statewide Strategic Plan to ensure that social justice and racial equity were effectively included. The Alliance scrutinized the revised plan and identified gaps, areas for improvement, and made suggestions that would enhance the Strategic Plan overall, as well as making it more socially just. This feedback was brought back to the Strategic Plan Revision Committee and incorporated into the plan.

Our third and current project is this toolkit for integrating social justice and racial equity into a coalition, organization or other group. In creating this toolkit, our intention is to provide resources for organizations (including our own) and communities/ community groups who want to integrate social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention and mental health work. When we began this toolkit, there were no resources that we could find that clearly articulated how the two were connected, much less how to help an organization evolve both individually/interpersonally and structurally. It is important to note that this toolkit is

a living document, and we hope that a part of the process is engaging with and learning from people all across Massachusetts, across the country, and even globally.

The role of the Alliance in shaping the toolkit was to provide input on what would be helpful, and review materials drafted by Alliance members in between meetings. We also solicited outside feedback from the MCSP EC and General Membership as well as other stakeholders.

We are eager to continue to develop and share resources for stakeholders (and ourselves!) to keep integrating social justice and racial equity into suicide prevention, and are excited to see where our work takes us.



# 3

## initiating organizational change: understanding your organizational climate & mission

How to Use This Section

**Climate Assessment and Planning:**

Organizational inventory

Organizational Diversity Action Plan

**Models of Organizational Operation:**

Organizational Action/ Initiative Examples

Continuum of Organizational Climate in Relation to Diversity and Equity

Organizational Mission Service Approach Continuum in Relation to Diversity and Equity

Case Study: MCSP Executive Committee

## How to Use this Section

This section represents an organization-wide approach in terms of both individual and organizational accountability.

You may want to begin with the inventory to assess where your organization is in relation to racial equity and social justice. Based on the inventory, you can discuss actionable changes and discuss which sections of the toolkit you want to explore.

The materials in this section can be used in a number of ways:

- » The inventory can be used to discuss leadership/ directions to engage memberships of the organization to talk about where people feel the organization is and agree upon a unified vision/perception of where everyone thinks the organization is with respect to social justice and racial equity.
- » The Diversity Action Plan is for individual accountability and follow up, and allows individuals within your organization to set personal goals around social justice and racial equity including further educating themselves or taking action steps to become more engaged in moving themselves and the organization forward.
- » The Action Initiative Examples, Continuum of Organizational Climate and Mission/ Service Approach Continuum all serve as foundational information that can ground your organization's conversations in terms of where you are, where you would like to be headed, and what intermediary steps you will have to take to reach your longer term goals.
- » The case study for the MCSP Executive Committee shares our own process in using some of these tools, and the result of beginning this work.

# Initiating Organizational Change: Organizational Inventory

- » Does your organization address issues of social justice and racial equity on a regular basis? If so, how?
- » Does your organization incorporate social justice and racial equity into every level and as a lens through which your work is viewed?
- » Is there a subcommittee or group specifically dedicated to examining your organization's work and structure and tasked with making recommendations to the larger organization? If so, how are these recommendations integrated? If not, do you think this would be beneficial to your work?
- » Does your organization actively promote equity? If so, how? If not, how might you envision doing so?
- » What partnerships does your organization have with organizations that are focused on serving communities of color or on promoting social justice and racial equity? If none exist, what organizations are available that you might want to partner with?
- » To what extent are inequities (ie. lack of representation) normalized or tolerated rather than challenged within your organization?
- » What is preventing individuals in your organization from challenging these disparities?
- » What barriers can you see that would prevent your organization from becoming more socially just and equitable? How might you begin to address these barriers?
- » To what extent does your board/ membership feel invested in becoming more equitable and socially just?
- » What are your board/ members willing to contribute to this effort? How much time and attention are your board/ members willing to devote to addressing these issues?
- » What is the composition of your board/ membership? Who is missing from the table?
- » If the composition of your board is not very diverse, do the individual board members who belong to different cultures/ communities feel heard and respected? What concessions do they feel they have to make in order to participate in your organization? What would they like to see changed?
- » When issues of social injustice and inequity present themselves, how are they addressed?
- » What issues have remained unaddressed? Has your organization discussed how racism and social inequities shape your organization and your work?

## Follow-Up

- » Make a list of concrete steps you can take to address any inequities identified by this inventory; include a timeline and concrete outcomes, as well as the individual(s) responsible for taking the lead on making sure change is discussed and implemented in a sustainable way.

- » Identify who is missing from the table and identify organizational norms that might make particular individuals and groups (People of Color, LGBTQ, poor people and people with little access to education, etc.) feel unwelcome and identify a strategy to move your organization toward more inclusive structure and norms
- » Repeat this inventory after some time has elapsed to measure progress and to set new goals

## Organizational Diversity Action Plan<sup>10</sup>

What area(s)/issues am I interested on working on to increase ethnocultural and racial responsiveness and equity?

What motivates me to do this work?

*Note: Checking in about this can be very helpful in deciding the best action to take*

What are potential challenges to me personally moving forward in this area?

Identify supportive people and restorative activities to help you sustain this work.

Specific issue I will address:

*This can be an individual or relational issue, such as improving your knowledge or awareness, or being more active in addressing inequities in interpersonal processes, or it could be an organizational relational issue such as climate checks or culture, or it could be a policy or organizational practice issues such as integrating diversity assessment into new policy proposals or training/educational/clinical practices.*

Contextual challenges or difficulties:

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My potential blind spots and concerns:

I need to know more about:

Specific learning I will engage in by \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_:  
(e.g., read 2 articles, listen to podcast, read a blog, talk to a colleague, etc.)

Specific action I will engage in by \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_:  
(e.g., talk to one person with privilege, organize a discussion, call # of representatives, write a letter)

Action partner's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Their learning: \_\_\_\_\_ Check-in on: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Their action: \_\_\_\_\_ Check-in on: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## Organizational Action/Initiative Examples<sup>11</sup>

Examples of actions that an organization might take to improve their racial, ethnocultural, and social justice responsiveness and prioritization.

### Organizational Climate Examples (within Board and organization as a whole):

- » Diversity ombudsperson/advocate (long term or per meeting)
- » Climate check-ins
- » Participation, invitations, and checks
- » Emphasizing the interpersonal process as an integral part of business.
- » Personal introductions and positionality
- » Leadership identities explorations
- » Cultural shifts—types of food, types of openings, types of sitting, types of speaking: purpose of introducing active thinking of how things are cultured.

### Organizational Mission and Approach/Enactment of the Mission Examples

- » Representation:
  - › Identity/positionality of leadership and management, consider strategies to address identified issues (e.g. outreach)
  - › Representation in images and information (e.g. updating images)
  - › Representation of information that considers links to oppression (e.g. updating information)
- » Representation:
  - › Identity/positionality of consumers, consider strategies to address identified issues
- » Values and culture of the org (making this explicit means that it is not just by default the values of the dominant group within the org or the dominant group within society)
  - › Communicating values to community people
  - › Addressing diversity not just for people of color as relevant
- » Population specific services: e.g. people of color caucus

### Both areas:

- » Diversity check ins about all agenda items/updates
- » Integrating explicit attention to process of decision making: whose voices are missing? How might this affect our decision making?

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- » Integrating explicit attention to impact of decision making, so that any policy/procedure discussion considers diversity impact (e.g. how will this decision affect PoC, LGBT, others who are marginalized, interpretive power)?
- » Items above might be collectively shared each meeting, put in place as standard practice, and/or have an individual responsible for each meeting.



## Continuum of Organizational Climate in Relation to Diversity and Equity<sup>12</sup>

- » Hostile: challenging and rejecting, antagonistic to inclusion which may be acknowledged or denied, toxic climate, damaging impact for PoC and others with primary oppressed identities within the organization.
- » Unconscious denigration: surface “performance,” integration is not truly valued, climate of microaggressions, damaging impact.
- » Marginalized: add-on in content or mission but not addressed in organizational culture. Issues are tokenized within particular people who are marginalized with little power. Climate of tolerance as long as the marginalization is not challenged. Stressful to neutral impact.
- » Marginalized-supported: add-on, climate of appreciation if issues remain separated or within tokenized people, possibly minimally competent practice, neutral to positive impact.
- » Integrated: Integrated both/and model (both integrated and focused attention); responsibility or action for diversity and equity still located primarily within some people but less tokenized; appreciative climate with recognition of inherent connections of diversity to organizational climate, relationships, and success; Positive impact.
- » Transformed: Fully integrated both/and model, dispersed proactive responsibility and action for diversity and equity, more genuine relationships and maximized contributions related to expanded perspectives and perspective taking (interpretive power), appreciative and committed climate, positive impact and growth.

### Challenges to Positive climate

- » Values in our society:
  - › Socialization for bias: Implicit bias, invisibility of oppression, exceptionalism
  - › Individualism, values of meritocracy, ethnocentric monoculturalism
  - › Taboo of discussion and associated fears of having difficult conversations or facing implications of inequities/lack of social justice
- » Lack of our own socialization/training in these issues: (both the content and the process of engaging them)

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## Organizational Mission/Service Approach Continuum in Relation to Diversity and Equity<sup>13</sup>

- » Lip service to diversity
- » Do no harm
- » Multiculturalism
  - › Valuing difference, equality, we all contribute
  - › Emphasis on cultural differences and human similarities
  - › Little attention to power
- » Diversity and inclusion:
  - › How/whether people feel included, connected, see themselves
  - › Better understanding of diverse others, proactive outreach, actively work to develop cultural sensitivity and inclusion, cultural responsiveness with community participants
  - › Avoidance or repair of major harmful actions (unconscious or conscious).
  - › Attention to power as it affects community members and services (e.g. addressing damage done by oppression)
- » Social justice: equity, advocacy, and activism
  - › Promoting distributive, relational, and procedural justice
  - › Working to address the systemic injustice through outreach, advocacy, and services that challenge the basis of systemic injustice

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## Case Study: MCSP Executive Committee

### Challenges:

- » Getting buy-in/commitment to doing social justice and racial equity work as part of our overall suicide prevention efforts, not only individually and as a board, but structurally as an organization.
- » Introducing new and difficult concepts within our organization.

### Approach/Solutions:

- » Ensuring that social justice and racial equity was brought to every level of the MCSP, including the Executive Committee.
- » Ensuring that the Committee had adequate time to focus on issues of social justice and racial equity.
- » Hiring a qualified consultant whose field of expertise is diversity training/social justice and racial equity trainings.
- » Committing to follow-up and consistent evaluation of our progress.

### Outcome:

The outcome has been an Executive Committee that has grown tremendously in terms of our understanding of the importance and connection of social justice and racial equity and suicide prevention. We still have a lot of work to do, but we have begun to create space for the conversation and question our previously unquestioned assumptions about our priorities, our organization, and our approach. Although we have a way to go, we are committed to being involved in this process and to working toward an organization and approach that is more equitable and inclusive.

### Narrative:

As mentioned in the previous case study, the initial buy in of the creation of the People of Color and White Ally Caucuses--which would then go on to form the MCSP Alliance for Equity--was not difficult. However, we were met with more resistance when it became clear that: (a) continued buy-in would require additional work and evolution/ growth on the part of the entire Executive Committee and the MCSP, and (b) the work of these subcommittees would need to actually inform and perhaps change our organizational priorities, structure and operation in order to be effective.

Common points of resistance were: "we don't have time to take on anything else or how is social justice and racial equity even connected to suicide prevention."

Other pushback was "we don't have enough time in this meeting to give this conversation the space it needs."

Subsequent discussion included:

- » Discussing the lack of representation in leadership: there is only one person of color currently serving on the Executive Committee. Discussion included questioning why this was so, how this affected the ability of the organization to effectively meet its goals.
- » Discussion of the importance of examining the connection between social justice/ racial equity and suicide prevention and, additionally, addressing the ways in which our organization was not mindful and did not address this connection
- » Discussion of knowledge gaps and addressing what people did not know and were not aware of.
- » This discussion served to highlight the need for further—and deliberate—work on social justice and racial equity. Recognizing not only the need but also the gaps that existed, the EC agreed to 2 retreats as a way to figure out how our organization might be unwittingly unwelcoming to people of color, and how to fix this.

The first retreat focused on structure and organization and the second focused on individual and interpersonal social justice and racial equity, which allowed EC members to begin to discuss how their own values/ beliefs/ perceptions were shaped, and how those values/ beliefs/ perceptions influenced the way they interacted with other people personally and professionally. We ended up adding a 3rd half-day retreat focused on understanding and applying social justice and racial equity in order to be able to focus on the ways in which social justice and racial equity could be integrated into the structure of our Coalition, and so that we could set some concrete goals around where we wanted to go as an organization.

In order to ensure that our retreats were as productive as possible, we hired outside consultants—one with expertise in organizational restructuring, and one with expertise in diversity training as well as social justice/ racial equity. This enabled us to approach the discussion from the same position—as retreat participants. It removed the power dynamics inherent in any EC member facilitating the dialogue. But most importantly, it enabled us to tap into a wealth of knowledge and skills and approaches that as a committee we would not have brought to the conversation ourselves.

There was much discussion before the initial retreat about what our goals were. It became clear that while we initially conceptualized a single, day-long retreat, that this would not be possible with the depth and breadth of information we wanted to cover, and the transformation we wanted to begin to affect. However, both facilitators were fully briefed on the dynamics and history of the MCSP, and had the opportunity to talk to several EC members to get a variety of perspectives.

At the initial retreat we focused on the current and evolving structure of the MCSP. At the second retreat, which was focused on social justice and racial equity, we focused on personal and interpersonal manifestations of racism and social inequity. The facilitator provided background information for the group on structural/systemic racism and how that impacts our own personal lens(es) through which we see ourselves and other people, our work, and the world.

After this information, the Committee was challenged to examine their own personal lens(es) as part of either the dominant or non-dominant group, and think about how those lenses shaped their behavior and interactions with others, including others in the Committee. Examples of this were cultural norms around communication style, cultural norms around responsibility (individual or collective), etc. The Committee met this challenge and we were able to have some very honest and vulnerable conversations about people's personal positionality within a broader social context. This also framed our conversation for the next retreat.

At the third, half day, retreat, we discussed different climates of social justice and racial equity within organizations, discussed where we thought the MCSP fell within those categories, and where we wanted to ultimately end up. Our facilitator led us through an exercise where we were split into two groups, and each group had a set amount of time to brainstorm action goals for the Executive Committee specifically, and for the broader organization/ general membership in order to move toward a climate that was internally more equitable, and to better integrate our values into our initiatives. We then discussed each idea as a group, and—if we felt the suggestion was appropriate and achievable-- decided on a reasonable timeline for implementation. This was then shared with the MCSP Executive Committee.

It has been just over 6 months since our second retreat, and with respect to our stated objectives, we have been mostly successful in implementing our 6 month-1 year goals of:

- » catching up EC members on retreat
- » implementing 10-15 mins on each EC agenda to include diversity meanings/ work/ knowledge (ongoing)
- » integrating questions about social justice and racial equity into our agenda items (ongoing)
- » including diversity materials and information at General Membership meetings (ongoing).

While we have not yet done our first climate check in yet, we have discussed bringing our facilitator back to consult with us and evaluate the progress we have made.

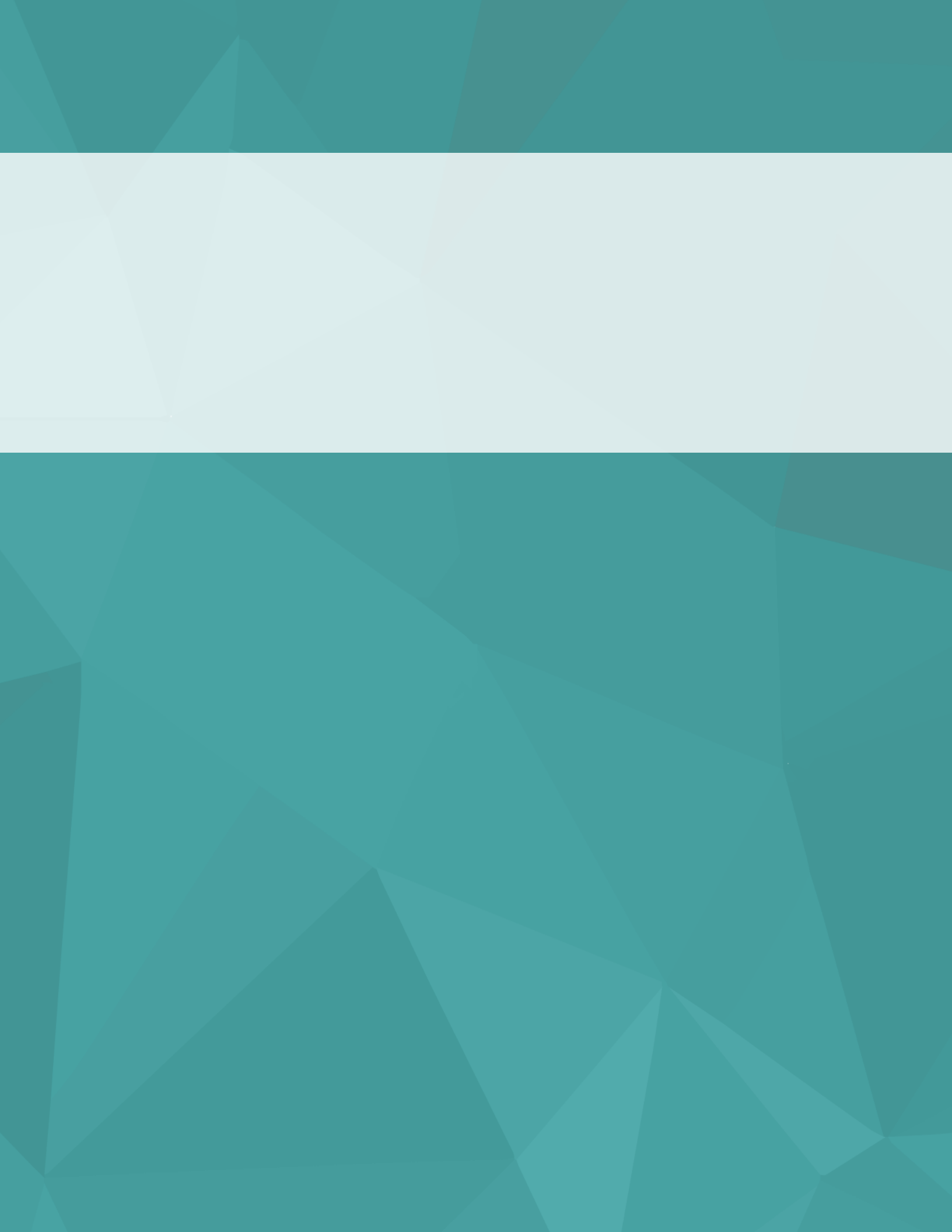
In terms of the 6 month -1 year tasks which we will be looking at next, we plan to implement:

- » accountability check ins, both individual and organizational
- » create a list of benchmarks/ goals/ timelines (ongoing)
- » finalize a list of definitions for shared understanding AND use the words in our meetings,
- » engage in a self-assessment to ask ourselves where are we going, where are our gaps, and where/what expertise do we have?

We will also be asking speakers to address social justice and racial equity, working to better understand different cultures/ communities thoughts on suicide (ongoing), promoting the toolkit beyond just MCSP (Through our regional coalitions, providers, member organizations, etc.)

We plan to re-examine our 1-2 year goals at our check in/ assessment.

This process has provided us with a framework, although it has still left much work for us to do. This goal setting process was a significant step, but it was still an initial step, and continued follow through is necessary if we are to ultimately effect meaningful and lasting change as an organization.



# 4

## tools to begin: first steps in becoming a racially and socially just organization

How to Use This Section

Reframing tool (filled out): Evaluating your mission/activities through an equity lens

**Addressing Communication Diversity:**

Identifying Cultural Differences in Communication

Communication Inventory

Culturally Responsive Approaches to Outreach, Invitation and Collaboration

MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure

MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure Text

Case Study: MCSP Initial Process and Framing Short and Long Term Objectives

## How to Use This Section

This section contains tools to help your organization to take first steps in creating the institutional changes necessary to become a socially just organization. This is by no means a comprehensive guide, however, there are helpful exercises (such as the Social Justice Reframe Tool) that can help your organization begin to unpack the structural ways in which even your framing of the issues of suicide prevention and mental health are not necessarily being seen through a lens of social justice and racial equity.

One way your organization can use this Reframe Tool is to work together to understand that a racially just approach to suicide prevention looks incredibly different than ‘traditional’ approaches, and can help you widen your perspective in terms of how the problem is defined, who or what is attributed as the cause of the problem, how we approach the solution, and (relatedly) what action is needed.

Most public health approaches to suicide prevention understand that suicide has systemic and societal causes, however, even these approaches often neglect to take into account the ways in which racism and racial oppression can be systemically contributing to mental health issues and suicide in communities of color. A racial justice reframe also can help us understand how white people are also impacted by racism, and how the systems created by racism harm white people in very different ways that nonetheless may have an impact on their mental health.

The communication handouts are intended to help your organization examine the ways in which your communication (written, verbal and non-verbal) not only is cultured, but that those cultured frameworks can impact understanding, miscommunication, and can also influence whose ideas are heard, whose voice is understood, and (therefore) who feels welcome and valued within your organization.

We have also included our MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure as a representation of the group that we’ve formed as one of the initial steps we took in trying more socially just and racially equitable, and is an example of one way other organizations could frame a similar subcommittee/ alliance/ group.



## Racial Justice Re-framing Tool

The Racial Justice Re-Framing Tool is an exercise that can help shift the way we think about our mission and initiatives and consider how we might approach these from a social justice lens. The following is an example of the reframing tool that was filled out by the MCSP Alliance for Equity, and that represents one example of how to approach a re-imagining of suicide prevention and mental health with a focus on racial equity. It is important to note that in some ways the process is the most important consideration as there is really no one 'right' answer or set of answers.

<b>Framing Element</b>	<b>Traditional Approach</b>	<b>Racial Justice Approach</b>
<b>What's the Problem?</b>	People are dying by suicide	<p>Disparity in type of approaches/ resources aimed at reaching communities of color and an injustice in the absence of attention paid to these gaps</p> <p>Lack of knowledge about how communities of color deal with suicide</p> <p>Lack of dialogue with communities of color: how can communities of color be reached? What are the needs of individuals/ communities of color with respect to mental health/ suicide?</p> <p>Lack of accurate accounting for number of deaths of people of color by suicide</p>
<b>What's the Cause</b>	Depression/ Mental Illness	Inequity in access to resources and disparity in how resources are structured and who they are structured to serve
<b>Who/ What's the Problem?</b>	Access to lethal means	Inequity in research (population(s) studied)
	Exposure to additional risk factors (domestic violence)	Eurocentric approach to suicide prevention/ Education
	Individual responsibility vs. social/ cultural responsibility	<p>Lack of understanding of different cultural approaches to mental health and suicide prevention; lack of understanding of different cultural approaches to teaching and learning</p> <p>Poverty contributing to stressors for suicide also decreased resources to address problems</p> <p>Racism and racial injustice as stressors for suicide and also decreasing access to resources</p> <p>Lack of culturally competent resources</p> <p>Lack of trust between communities of color and government agencies</p> <p>Emergency interventions are based on assumption that people can trust authority, which isn't always true in communities of color</p> <p>Understanding of depression and suicide is based on research into mostly white communities and the experiences of white people (men)</p>

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What's the Solution?</b>	<p>Trainings and education including professional and gatekeeper (including educators and parents) training</p> <p>Increased access to providers</p> <p>Means restriction</p> <p>PSA/ public service campaigns</p> <p>Hotlines/ warm-lines</p>	<p>Diversity of approaches (including culturally competent approaches) to suicide prevention and mental health</p> <p>Created education and economic opportunities to encourage people of color to go into mental health field (increase in culturally competent providers)</p> <p>Promoting mental health as equally important to physical health</p> <p>Funding/ more access to (culturally competent) mental health services (esp. through free clinics etc.)</p> <p>Addressing racism and racial injustice in health care and in suicide prevention education, as well as stressor for mental health issues and suicide</p> <p>Addressing different communication styles in approaches to mental health and suicide prevention</p>
<b>What Action is Needed?</b>	<p>More funds toward education and public service campaigns</p> <p>More funding for hotlines/ warm-lines</p> <p>Legislation for means restriction (gun legislation)</p>	<p>More funds to increase number and frequency of culturally competent trainings</p> <p>More social services to get people access to services (transportation, childcare, etc.)</p> <p>More funding for hotlines in other languages than English</p> <p>More funding for interpreters in ERs/ hospitals</p> <p>More funding to integrate culturally competent health workers</p> <p>More education about community practices around mental health/ mental illness within different communities/ cultures—what is ALREADY being done and done well? What is working? Where are the opportunities for collaboration?</p> <p>More funding for culturally sensitive research around what happens when there is a suicide in a particular community (or a death that could be a suicide?)</p> <p>More funding for accurate research around number of suicide deaths in different communities</p> <p>Finding ways to build trust between communities of color and government agencies (govt. agencies doing work around racial justice and equity resulting in systematic change in approach to dealing w/ communities of color.)</p> <p>More states seeing suicide prevention not only as a health or public health issue, but as a social justice issue.</p> <p>Research about depression and suicide includes MANY different communities and reflects experiences of people of color (may need many approaches to/ types of research)</p>

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
<b>What Values Are Highlighted?</b>	<p>Individual responsibility vs. public health approach (typically)</p> <p>Education—“middle class” values (go to a class to learn something)</p> <p>Help-seeking</p> <p>Traditional mental health approach/healing practices</p>	<p>Examination of many levels and perspectives other than individual (cultural, systemic etc.)</p> <p>Valuing the insider knowledge of communities of color to speak for themselves and represent their own experiences</p> <p>Self-determination for communities of color with respect to how issues should be addressed</p> <p>Understanding of ones position with respect to race, class, gender, etc and how that influences a particular perspective and various kinds of suicide prevention work</p>

# Identifying Cultrual Differences in Communication

## Our Culture Shapes Our Communication in Ways that are Often Invisible

How we communicate, both in personal and professional settings, is shaped by a series of unspoken and often unseen norms that are a direct result of our cultural background. When people are unaware of the fact that they have different cultural norms, miscommunication can happen—this is particularly important in suicide prevention, because whether we are communicating within or beyond our own organization(s), we are communicating about very critical, life and death, issues.

As organizations, we still exist within our respective cultural contexts, and thus our conversations happen through the filter of a particular communication style or styles. This is unavoidable. However, understanding what these norms are, while being open and educating ourselves about communication styles that may be dramatically different can not only reduce miscommunications and misunderstandings, but can also ensure that individuals with different communication styles are heard, and feel welcome and valued participants in the conversation

In order to do avoid miscommunications based on cultural communication style, we must first acknowledge that there is a dominant framework, and that to participate in systems of cultural power, it is almost always necessary to operate in that dominant framework. We must also acknowledge and understand the existence and value of other aspects of communication that may be less familiar, less valued by or even disparaged by the dominant group.

For instance, white American culture values direct, linear communication and considers eye contact necessary and an indication of sincerity. This differs from many Asian cultures where communication is often less direct, more circular, and eye contact is considered disrespectful in some contexts.

Some of the factors that can impact communication include:

- » Language preference
- » Age
- » Gender socialization
- » Culture/Ethnicity
- » Community norms
- » Place of birth/place of early childhood
- » Familiarity with community
- » Education
- » Training
- » Status
- » Perception of mental health
- » Communication style

## Dimensions of Communication: High Context Vs. Low Context

Two dimensions of communication that can result in miscommunication if speakers differ are low versus high context communication and sequential versus synchronic communication.

For high versus low context communication:

- » Low context communication relies on the words or the communication itself to understand the full meaning. It is direct and values the meanings of the words rather than the context or relationship of the speakers.

- » High context communication is a style that prioritizes non-verbal and other contextual cues to determine the meaning of what is being communicated. The relationship between the speakers is critical and is important to understand what is being communicated.

Western cultures, such as the United States, tend to value low context communication. Many other cultures, however, tend to use high context communication and depend much more on non-verbal and contextual cues to both communicate and to understand what is being communicated.

An example of a difference between high versus low context communication in suicide prevention would be that it is common (and unquestioned) practice in the mental health/ suicide prevention field to ask the question directly “are you suicidal?” In fact, this is emphasized in nearly every suicide prevention gatekeeper training. This practice presupposes that the individual on the receiving end of the communication will also have low context communication—but that may be different in different cultures. For example, it might be experienced as shaming. The answer, also, needs to be considered in cultural context, as a person from a more indirect high-context culture may not answer the question directly, which is what is expected. In sum, asking the question directly in high context cultures might not have the intended outcome.

### **Dimensions of Communication: Sequential Vs. Synchronic**

Another dimension of communication that is culturally influenced is sequential or synchronic communication.

For sequential or synchronic communication:

- » Sequential communication is communication where conversations typically focus on one topic at a time, and efficiency and timeliness are prioritized.
- » Synchronic communication can accommodate various topics at the same time, and view time as secondary to the outcome of the conversation or the task being accomplished

Most Western cultures communicate sequentially, that is one topic is addressed at a time in a linear fashion and efficiency is prioritized.

An example of a professional difference between sequential or synchronic communication might be how agenda items are discussed during meetings—is each agenda item separate, or do topics meld together, and are multiple topics discussed in the same conversation. Additionally, when it is nearing time for the meeting to end, what is prioritized; efficiency in getting through the agenda and finishing on time, or spending a bit of additional time meeting in order to more fully engage around the topic(s) at hand?

### **The Importance of Acknowledging and Valuing Different Cultural Communication Styles**

It is essential in creating an organizational environment that is able to navigate multicultural communication, that both individuals and the organization, are aware of the norms of communication for the group and that these norms are culturally influenced. When it is accepted that specific norms exist (rather than seeing one communication style over another as the ‘correct’ way to communicate), miscommunications can be examined and explained, without automatically blaming the person who is outside the norms of the group. Consider if you’re working with cultures that are not your culture, you need to explore how communication is happening, and understand that certain parameters might be different.

The fact that our communication is cultured plays into dominant cultural norms and impacts who is seen/heard, and whose ideas and communication styles are seen as valid, and it is essential to consider when communicating that not everyone is going to communicate the same way.

In other words, just because something has been said, does not mean it was received in the way in which it was intended. In fact, the same communication can have completely different meanings for the speaker and the listener, particularly if there is a difference in cultural communication style. In addition, for bilingual speakers and contexts, it is important to remember, translating from one language to another does not necessarily mean the nuance has been retained, or that the information is presented in a culturally relevant way.

In trying to diversify an organization, it is imperative that leadership and membership pay attention to cultural communication styles. Even appropriately inviting someone of another culture to the table can vary greatly in terms of what is said, what is expected, what is done first, etc. If communication is difficult among members in your organization, it may be necessary to consider what are the communication norms under which you are operating? Is there conflict around the cultural expectations around communication? It's important to be aware of the cultural dimensions of communication so that we can make sense to each other.

## Communication Inventory<sup>14</sup>

- » How would you describe your organization's style of and norms around communication?
- » To what degree are these norms seen as culturally influenced? How do "white" cultural norms influence your communication style?
- » What value does your organization place on verbal expression and directness or honesty?
- » Is your communication high or low context (low context communication emphasizing the words spoken, high context communication involves non-verbal communication, personal space, volume and speed of response.)?
- » How is communication in your organization impacted by values of self vs. relationship?
- » What are your organizational attitudes toward relationships—are they egalitarian or hierarchical?
- » Do you value independence and competition or cooperation and interdependence?
- » What are the criteria for trustworthiness related to the above factors?

### Follow Up

As a group, discuss factors that might make your communications unwelcoming to different individuals and groups, and create tangible goals around creating a more inclusive and equitable communication format/style.

Engage with members of various communities to get feedback on past and future communications, and consider their feedback

Discuss how your communication style(s) impact your organization's work, functioning and structure and identify opportunities, and how you might shift these style(s) to be more equitable and inclusive of other groups.

Repeat this inventory after some time has elapsed to measure progress and to set new goals.

## Culturally Responsive Approaches to Outreach, Invitation and Collaboration

So often we hear the complaint that communities of color don't participate more in mental health and suicide prevention efforts or that communities of color remain isolated and are not interested in collaboration. Often primarily white organizations use primarily low context communication such as a direct email or a cold call to "invite" organizations of color to the table. They are then often surprised when their invitation is met with no response and are equally surprised when the people of color who may show up at a meeting only come for one or two times and then stop attending. Most of the time, organizations don't ask themselves why this is happening and tend to place responsibility on individuals and communities of color to adapt to their norms and expectations.

What they don't realize in order to establish connections with individuals in communities of color, they need to reach out in a more personal and nuanced way in order to show that they and their organization provide opportunities for people of color to make meaningful contributions to the work and the organization. If this is not apparent by the diversity of the current members and the work that they are doing, then the following questions need to be considered:

- » What is your organization doing to show that you are inclusive and open and receptive to true collaboration with communities of color?
- » What work are you already doing in terms of meeting the needs of communities of color? Why would an organization of color would want to work with you?
- » Is your work framed in a way that is relevant to the community that you are approaching? Is a socially just and racially equitable approach integrated into your everyday work? What steps are you taking to become more socially just and racially equitable?
- » Is your organization's approach to suicide prevention and the work you are doing relevant and appropriate to communities of color?
- » Are you examining the norms of your organization to see if they serve all members of the organization and everyone you want at your table? Do you have ways to deal with conflict that might arise from conflicting cultural norms?
- » Are you building relationships with communities of color through personal outreach and building relationships? Does your approach consider cultural communication norms?
- » Who are outreaching to? Do you know and are you connecting with the community leaders who can assist you in your efforts to bring people to the table? (These leaders may not hold what the dominant culture considers to be positions of power.)
- » Are you going to where the community is, or do you always expect them to come to you?
- » Are you involved with and at the table of organizations that serve communities of color?
- » Have you considered and presented opportunities for mutual collaboration, such as projects that benefit both organizations?

Until you have addressed these questions and shifted your approach accordingly, you may have difficulties connecting with and engaging people of color and organizations that serve communities of color. Unless your organization is willing to grow and evolve as a more socially just and racially just organization, it is unreasonable to expect that people of color will see any benefit or impact to joining your organization.



Ultimately, what people want is to know it that their voices and efforts have an impact and that their presence matters. When your organization demonstrates this, you will better be able to engage with communities of color and retain a diverse membership.

# MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure

## What Can You Do?

Join the MCSP Alliance for Equity

Educate yourself.  
Visit [RACEJustice.org](http://RACEJustice.org) and read.

» If you are a person of color, expand your knowledge about your history and culture and that of others.

» If you are a white ally educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions

Have conversations about racial equity, social justice and suicide prevention.

» If you are a person of color, have conversations in your community.

» If you are a white ally have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.

Call out racist behavior and racist language.



## Contact Information

617.297.8774

[MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com](mailto:MCSPAllianceForEquity@gmail.com)

The Alliance for Equity is a committee of the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention



## Mission Statement

*The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity* is committed to expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the MCSP at all levels of the Coalition, and promoting an understanding of the ways that intersectionality is critical to suicide prevention work. The MCSP Alliance for Equity is also committed to cultivating an understanding of how white allies can most effectively use privilege to re-center the conversation around issues of social justice and equity, and ensure that space is made for the experiences, perspectives, and expertise of individuals and communities of color.



## Why is Our Work Important?

Suicide Affects Everyone.

» As a coalition we want to be a group that is responsive to all people and communities. We want everyone to be represented, engaged, and have an impact on how our work is done.

Oppression/ Systems of Oppression intersect with suicide and suicide prevention in a number of ways

» In communities of color addressing racism is a form suicide prevention.

Using this lens improves our efficacy and impacts our ability to do our work and save lives

» Attending to racial equity means expanding the perspectives, frameworks, and approaches to suicide prevention.

» When we talk about social justice we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well.

## How Do We Work?

» The MCSP Alliance for Equity is comprised of two caucuses: the people of color caucus and the white ally caucus. Although most of the time we meet together as people color and white allies, we will occasionally break out into these groups if the discussion warrants.

» We inform the work of the MCSP at every level of the organization.

» We also focus on longer term projects and initiatives that address social justice and racial equity in suicide prevention.

» Most of our meetings are virtual.



# MCSP Alliance for Equity Brochure Text

**Name:**

The Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention Alliance for Equity

**Mission Statement:**

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- » In communities of color addressing racism is a form of suicide prevention.
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## What Can You Do?

- » Join the MCSP Alliance for Equity
- » Educate yourself: Visit [RACEJustice.org](https://RACEJustice.org) and READ.
  - › If you are a person of color, expand your knowledge about your history and culture and that of others.
  - › If you are a white ally, educate yourself about white privilege and learn to question underlying norms and assumptions.
- » Have conversations about racial equity, social justice and suicide prevention.
  - › If you are a person of color, have conversations in your community.
  - › If you are a white ally, have a conversation with another white person about white privilege.
- » Call out racist behavior and racist language.

## Case Study: MCSP Initial Process and Framing Short and Long Term Objectives

### Challenge:

Getting buy-in that structural change was a necessary component of any social justice and racial equity work.

Making time for discussions and conversations on already full agendas.

Dealing with resistance to change, and breaking free from patterns that have existed since the organization was started.

### Approach/Solutions/Outcomes:

We had an initial retreat focused on preliminary conversations about where the organization is currently and how we want to evolve, a second retreat focused on individual and interpersonal understanding of inequity and social injustice—for this effort we brought in an outside facilitator. This meant we were able to devote the majority of our third half-day retreat to structural/ organizational concerns and considerations, as well as concrete goal setting.

The MCSP and the EC are still working to implement the goals set, however we have been tracking our progress and are mostly on target with the goals suggested by the committee.

### Narrative

At our third retreat (our second retreat focused on social justice and racial equity), the Executive Committee focused on how we might re-structure our processes or our organization in a way that was more socially just.

Some example goals from that retreat included; carving out space in every meeting for further discussion/ learning/ exploration on issues of social justice and racial equity; asking questions about what were the spoken and unspoken assumptions/norms/etc that influenced the Coalition's decision-making and how these decision making processes could be more socially just by asking additional questions such as whose voice is missing? What perspectives are we not considering? What structural assumptions are we taking for granted that could be changed?

Because not all Executive Committee members were able to attend the retreat, we scheduled an additional Zoom meeting after the second retreat to discuss the goals that had been outlined at the retreat, to ensure that everyone understood all of the goals, and to get buy in from the entire committee. The Committee responded positively to the goals as well as the timeframe, with the understanding that these goals would necessarily be shifted and changed as we continued our work. Meeting minutes from both retreats were also provided to all EC members to ensure that everyone understood what was discussed at each retreat, as well as the next steps agreed upon.

It has been just over 6 months since our second retreat, and with respect to our stated objectives,

We have been mostly successful in implementing our 6 month-1 year goals of: catching up EC members on retreat, implementing 10-15 mins on each EC agenda to include diversity meanings/ work/ knowledge (ongoing), integrating questions about social justice and racial equity into our agenda items (ongoing) diversity materials and information at General Membership meetings (ongoing). While we have not yet done

our first climate check in yet, we have discussed bringing our facilitator back to consult with us and evaluate the progress we have made.

In terms of the 6 month -1 year tasks which we will be looking at next, we plan to implement: accountability check ins--both individual and organizational--,create a list of benchmarks/ goals/ timelines (ongoing), finalize list of definitions AND use the words in our meetings, and engage in a self-assessment to ask ourselves where are we going, where are our gaps, and where/what expertise do we have?

We will also be asking speakers to address social justice and racial equity, working to better understand different cultures/ communities thoughts on suicide (ongoing), promoting the toolkit beyond just MCSP (Through our regional coalitions, providers, member organizations, etc.) We plan to re-examine our 1-2 year goals at our check in/ assessment.

Changing the structure of an organization is a slow process that requires constant re-evaluation of goals, assessment of progress, and buy-in from a large percentage of the organization, particularly organizational leadership. At the MCSP, we are still at the beginning stages of transforming our Coalition into a socially just and equitable organization, although we have taken steps to identify goals, evaluate progress and gain buy in from a large percentage of the Coalition leadership.

This will be an ongoing process, which (since our understanding of social justice and racial equity will continue to grow and expand) doesn't really have an endpoint—we will always strive to better ourselves as an organization. Because it is an ongoing process with changing goals, it is important that we constantly re-assess where our priorities are and where we have (or haven't) made progress. We do not anticipate continuing this process to be easy, particularly as we move toward goals that effect greater organizational change. However, we are engaged in this process as a coalition, and hope that the collaborative approach that we use to set all our goals and priorities will ensure sufficient buy-in to generate significant and continued progress.

# 5

## continuing the journey: applying knowledge within the organizational structure & within the organization's activities

How to Use This Section

**Assessment, Development, and Implementation of Racial Equity and Social Justice Goals:**

Structural/Governance Inventory  
Equity Follow Up Chart MCSP Executive Committee  
Focus Group Recommendations

Case Study: GBRSPC Activities

**Social Justice and Racial Equity Exercises/Activities:**

Facilitators Guide  
Racial Justice Reframing Tool (Blank)  
Racial and Social Identities Exercise  
Window of Tolerance  
Wheel of Oppression  
Levering Systemic Privilege Exercise

Case Study: MCSP General Membership

## How to Use This Section

In this section, you will find materials to inform your structural governance/ organizational structure and the activities of your organization.

The structural inventory and equity follow up chart provide a suggested framework for examining existing structural norms and practices, and a suggested model for setting goals (and a timeline) around shifting those norms and practice towards greater equity.

The focus group findings are informational and can inform an initial approach/ dialogue when discussing mental health and suicide prevention within communities of color. While these findings are not universal, they do span across six different populations including the following communities: Haitian, Latinx (youth), Bhutanese Refugees, Asian (Asian American and Asian born), Brazilian and Muslim.

You will find exercises that you can use within your organization to help explore concepts such as: leveraging privilege, oppression and agency, emotional tolerance, and race and social identity.

Through these exercises, we hope that your organization will be prompted to engage in direct, honest, and uncomfortable dialogue that leads to breakthroughs in understanding which reflected in actual organizational change. We have included a facilitator's guide in order to provide you with information about the objective of each exercise and some common points of resistance that you may face as well as suggestions for implementing the exercises within your organization.

The case study is an examination of one organization's attempt at considering and implementing structural and logistic changes with the purpose of proving more equitable activities and opportunities for engagement.



## Structural/Governance Inventory

What are your organizational norms with respect to:

- » Communication
- » Decision making
- » Outreach
- » Dissemination of important information
- » Operation and day to day functioning (ie. Meeting structure)

How are your organizations norms inclusive or exclusive of other cultural contexts/ norms? How familiar are individuals in your organization with different norms? (To what extent are these 'norms' seen as 'norms' rather than just 'the way things are' or the 'status quo'?)

How does your organization respond to having these norms questioned or challenged?

How does your organization (and individuals within your organization) respond to different ideas about communication/ decision making/ outreach/ etc.? How does your organization respond to having these norms questioned or challenged?

What are your organizational norms with respect to:

- » Authority
- » Leadership
- » Accountability
- » Division of labor

In discussing organizational norms with respect to the above, do you notice any patterns about who holds positions of leadership and how tasks are distributed across the organization?

What do you believe is the responsibility of organizational leadership in addressing these issues? How can the rest of the organization support these organizational changes? How is the behavior of your organizational leadership consistent with your stated values of social justice and racial equity?

How do your bylaws/ policies and procedures incorporate social justice and racial equity?

If not, how might your written policies reflect your organizational values of social justice and racial equity?

If so, does the day to day operation of your organization reflect your organizational values? If not, what can be done to narrow the gap between organizational value and day to day behavior?

## MCSP Executive Committee Equity Follow Up Chart

After we gained some foundational knowledge and started to examine our organizational structure and began to discuss what changes we would like to implement, we decided that we needed concrete goals and a timeline in order to be able to 1) evaluate our progress and 2) hold ourselves accountable to moving forward.

The following chart is a draft that we have used to check up on our progress and forward momentum, and which we will continue to revise and update in order to set and evaluate our progress on new goals.

### Immediately-6 Months

Board Climate:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Catch up other EC members fully on this retreat	MCSP Alliance co-Chairs/ Entire EC MCSP Alliance co-Chairs—set up zoom meeting Review Social Justice and Racial Equity Action Plan and Timeline	EC will be on the same page/ have the same information about this process
Implement 10-15 minute space on each EC agenda to include diversity meanings/ work/ knowledge (ongoing)	EC volunteer will coordinate monthly discussions; EC members will rotate presenting	EC members will have the opportunity to share and learn from others EC will engage in new learning and acquire new tools to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our organization
Integrating questions about equity into how all agenda items are framed (ie. Who is included? Whose voice is missing?) (ongoing)	Rotating lead? Entire EC can address questions of social justice and racial equity as they pertain to a specific agenda item	Social justice and racial equity will be more integrated into our agendas and our work
Climate check ins (what can we do as an EC to get on the same page?) (ongoing)	TBD	EC will have a common process/ framework and goals for moving forward

Organizational/Community/Activities/Approach:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Diversity materials/ exercises and information at General Membership meetings (ongoing)	MCSP Alliance for Equity (formerly POC/WA Caucuses) General Membership/EC members Alternating/rotating presentations/ presenters	General Membership will engage in new learning and acquire new tools to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our organization as well as their own Brings social justice and racial equity to all levels of the organization

## 6 Months-1 Year

### Board Climate:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Accountability check ins (action plan handout) (ongoing)	Group discussion/ discussion with accountability partners at EC meetings	Continued individual growth/ progress on action steps re: social justice and racial equity goals See how we are moving forward as a group, identify gaps to be addressed at future meetings
Create list of benchmarks—timelines—goals— (ongoing)	Entire EC or task force	Allow us to track our progress, make corrections along the way and set goals (aspirational and currently attainable)
Finalize list of definitions AND use the words during our meetings	Entire EC, with materials provided by facilitator	EC will have a common language/ common understanding around terms and definitions re: social justice and racial equity
Self-assessment (ongoing), assess gaps as well as where/ what expertise do we have?	Entire EC (rotating leadership) Possible outside consultant	EC will have an understanding of what additional work needs to be done EC will have a better understanding of which members have expertise in a particular area that can be shared with the group EC will have a better understanding of what we need to learn to move forward

### Organizational/Community/Activities/Approach:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Asking speakers address cultural responsiveness and equity	Entire EC MCSP Alliance for Equity	Embed racial equity and social justice into all MCSP sponsored presentations
Better understand different cultures/ communities' thoughts on suicide (ongoing)	Re-circulate Greater Boston focus group results Reach out to other communities of color Entire Coalition MCSP Alliance for Equity	Improve MCSP's work in suicide prevention and impact within communities of color Create better partnerships with communities of color/ organizations that serve communities of color Create culturally responsive Coalition/EC that is welcoming to (and addresses the needs of) individuals and communities of color

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Promoting toolkit beyond just MCSP; with Coalitions, member organizations, etc. (ongoing)	MCSP Alliance for Equity bring (DRAFT) toolkit to conference promote toolkit through workshop or webinar?	Establishes the MCSP as a thought leader in suicide prevention with respect to social justice and racial equity Raises credibility of MCSP with respect to suicide prevention and equity Raises awareness and provides tools for organizations /coalitions/ communities (including our own) to incorporate social justice and racial equity into our work.
Climate check-ins (ongoing)	Entire Coalition/ rotating lead(s)	Continued organizational growth/ progress on action steps re: social justice and racial equity goals

## 1-2 Years

Board Climate:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Representative from POC Caucus on Executive Committee		
Need a consistent onboarding process		
Need more diversity for Executive Committee (ongoing)		

Organizational/Communit/Activities/Approach:

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Encourage/ require coalitions to use some MCSP funding toward culturally responsive and equitable work (ongoing)		
Communications in multiple languages (media, brochure, website) (ongoing)		

Task	Approach/Steps/Leader	Impact
Diverse leadership— outreach to other communities (ongoing)		
Partner with other groups (Black Lives Matter, Asian Women for Health, etc) (ongoing)		
Regional Coalitions— provide tools; assessment of benchmarks (ongoing)		
Learning opportunities for coalitions (webinars/ guest speakers) (Increase knowledge not just of EC or coalition chairs, but of the entire coalition) (ongoing)		

## Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition Focus Group Findings on Culture and Mental Health/ Suicide Prevention<sup>15</sup>

In FY15 and FY16, the Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition organized a series of focus groups with both clinicians and community members. Eleven focus groups were held within six cultural communities; Asian (Asian-American and Asian-born), Haitian, Latinx, Brazilian, Muslim and Bhutanese refugees. The following findings are from those focus groups.

Following the focus groups, this information was used to develop a proposal for mini-grants which were then given to organizations in the Greater Boston area that addressed the needs of and suggestions from people of color. This sparked several community wide initiatives that were then sustained by the organizations that received the grants.

Three suggestions for services that were mentioned frequently and by all three cultural groups in year 1 are:

- » Personal stories from people like me about their experiences with depression, suicidality, help-seeking and treatment
- » Education for parents about mental health and mental illness in children
- » Conversations and support groups

Two suggestions that were mentioned by all three cultural groups that we talked to in year 2 are:

- » Use established community infrastructure (churches, mosques, refugee assistance centers, community health workers, schools etc.) to provide information about depression and suicide
- » Develop inter-generational and inter-cultural activities to help increase community connections

Two suggestions that have been made by all six of the cultural groups that the coalition has reached out to are:

- » Increase communication about mental health and mental illness
- » Assure that culturally and linguistically appropriate clinical services are available

Below are most of the recommendations raised during the focus groups, organized by type of intervention. For further detail about any one idea, refer back to the population-specific sections titled “what would help?”

### **Recommendations:**

- » Increase communication about mental health
- » Conversations with or through the church about what people are feeling lately
- » Inter-generational conversations about mental health and wellbeing
- » Educating kids to educate parents
- » Peer leadership programs to organize info sessions in churches in the neighborhood
- » Yearly church retreats

- » More community workshops
- » Ask pastors to discuss mental health and encourage their congregants to seek services if they need them
- » Support groups
- » Spanish-language support groups
- » Concrete steps and actions to take to survive depression focused more on now
- » Education for parents about youth experiences of mental illness and about raising kids
- » Education through the radio and through live TV shows
- » The “right kind of communication” to feel genuine care from someone
- » Communication from adults that’s not judgmental
- » Engage people in conversations about culture, respecting their expertise and cultural knowledge
- » Help people talk to “someone who has been through it”
- » Invest in talking about depression to break the taboo
- » Increase the number of community health workers
- » Provide an introduction to mental health for recent immigrants that includes information about culture shock and some of the other stressors that they might experience.
- » Increase conversation about suicide
- » Normalize help-seeking/ reduce stigma
- » Real life stories, to share their story and then let other people learn from it
- » Public messages such as “even counselors can use a counselor”
- » Information about mental health at community health centers
- » Examples from other people who have been through similar experiences
- » Peers telling their stories
- » Messages coming from sector leaders like spiritual leaders
- » Have more peers and consumers come forward and share their story
- » Normalize discussion of mental health and suicide by asking about it
- » Develop and disseminate a campaign to encourage help-seeking, with the messages: “it’s okay to feel this way”, “It’s not bad that you feel like killing yourself”, “It’s not the only way out” and “It’s a temporary phase”
- » Make clinical institutions more welcoming
- » Less professional turn-over
- » Use of non- judgmental, non-clinical language
- » Clinicians that listen closely to their patients and don’t make assumptions

- » Begin clinical conversations “gently”
- » More Asian mental health providers
- » Non-Asian providers who have some understanding of Asian upbringing
- » Strong provider-patient relationships
- » Diversity training
- » Welcoming, culturally-appropriate centers
- » Create and disseminate more materials in languages other than English to make institutions more welcoming
- » Create additional services for specific cultural groups
- » Train and deploy mental health counselors who speak the languages that our communities speak
- » Teach mental health professionals more indirect ways to ask about suicide. Someone said, “they just ask like it’s nothing...” “Do you want to get a knife and go somewhere where there’s no one and cut yourself...do you want to? Do you want to hang and die... do you want to leave your home...?” It’s like...they’re threatening me”
- » Gather more funding to hire more diverse outreach workers and clinicians
- » Advocate for more members of diverse community to become mental health providers
- » Address immigration status, which causes a “big black cloud of fear and despair”
- » Provide health literacy in multiple languages
- » Create a centralized list of providers who speak different languages by neighborhood
- » Make clinical services more accessible
- » More wrap-around services
- » More clinicians able to handle dual-diagnosis with substance abuse
- » Less immediate discharge of patients from the hospital
- » Care that can be provided regardless of insurance coverage
- » A center where people could come to discuss issues
- » Partial program with Spanish language capacity
- » Reach out to people who might be more open to treatment
- » More therapists who speak Asian languages
- » Make sure that mothers know what resources are available
- » More relaxed catchment areas for service provision so that people can be sent to other towns where they can be connected more quickly to mental health services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate
- » Educate gatekeepers/ meet people where they are
- » Integrate mental health within Refugee and immigrant assistance centers for referrals



- » Prepare volunteers from churches to receive people who want to just talk
- » Educate pastors and priests, radio hosts, teachers and church leaders about depression and about where to refer people who need help
- » Have someone in the hospital to talk to people with panic attacks and loneliness.
- » Use the radio to reach out about mental health
- » Provide QPR training for church leaders
- » Provide training about warning signs for suicide
- » Establish an anonymous phone line in different languages
- » Provide training to community health workers about how to identify and respond to mental health concerns and suicidal ideation
- » Ask pastors and priests and Imams to discuss mental health issues during the lectures. Help them teach their congregations that “it’s not about lack of strength or faith”
- » Have kids in high school or a friend talk about their experiences
- » Ask someone at church to speak out at the service
- » Make sure that people know the steps to hospitalize someone who is making a suicide plan
- » Provide youth with a counselor when they first come to the U.S.
- » Educate clinicians about the difference between self-injury and suicide.
- » Increase community connections
- » Create opportunities for people to meet others, creating support networks
- » Encourage small acts of kindness and small gestures, like smiling at people each day.
- » Create a recreation center and activities for people of all generations from all parts of the world
- » Create a program that allows open conversation between generations “if not to their own children, [with] other children that are around their age”
- » Additional ideas:
  - » Address suicide as a long-term initiative
  - » Recognize diversity within the culture
  - » Connect people to other activities
  - » Teach parents that “just like you would go to the doctor and get medicine when you had a fever, you can do the same for mental health and ask for medicine.”
  - » Teach parents how to navigate and have an action plan to support their children
  - » Provide more opportunities to learn English
  - » Offer concrete resources like jobs and college
  - » Advocate to make it easier for people over 65 to get citizenship

- » Provide opportunities for creative expression and showcase what people make
- » Provide drug education
- » Offer skills orientation and to send people to work
- » Teach coping skills to college-age youth, young people, those who are divorced and others about “how to feel low, how to come back from that”
- » Talk about identity with immigrant youth and help people recognize that their histories and knowledge of multiple languages makes them rich
- » Teach anger management
- » Collect better data about suicide demographics to identify high risk groups and communities that need support
- » More research on ethnic subpopulations
- » Prioritization process:
- » Cross-cultural recs:
- » Personal stories from “people like me” about their experiences with depression, suicidality, help-seeking and treatment
- » Education for parents about mental health and mental illness in children
- » Conversations and support groups
- » Use established community infrastructure (churches, mosques, refugee assistance centers, community health workers, schools etc.) to provide information about depression and suicide
- » Develop inter-generational and inter-cultural activities to help increase community connections
- » Assure that culturally and linguistically appropriate clinical services are available

Many of the specific suggestions for how to implement these changes in one community could be piloted in one community and then replicated and tested in other communities, or could be developed in multiple communities in parallel.

Choose 1-2 things to do (the coalition could do them collaboratively, or could solicit members to do them, offering mini-grants for piloting, documenting, and disseminating the models)

#### **Prioritization criteria:**

- » Stakeholder support/ capacity
- » Sustainability of the effort
- » Potential impact on... increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors for culturally diverse populations (from LT outcomes in logic model)

**Potential funding allocation:**

- » 1 focus group (military families? African American Community?) and analysis and/or approaching new communities with a list of recommendations and an offer of partnering with them and offering the coalition's resources
- » a project based on the recommendations from the focus groups
- » QPR kits for community partners

## Case Study: Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition

### Challenge:

- » Accessibility in terms of space, childcare, public transportation, cost, language barriers, etc.
- » Outreach to communities of color, particularly in mental health and suicide prevention

### Approach/Solutions/Outcome:

The GBRSPC re-framed their conversation, making accessibility at the forefront of planning their next event. As a result, the event was accessible across many different dimensions. In addition to accommodating the needs of multiple communities, it also served as a model for future work.

### Narrative:

The Greater Boston Regional Suicide Prevention Coalition has worked to make the events and activities it sponsors as accessible to all as possible. With this mission in mind, events and activities:

- » are either free or affordable
- » accessible by public transportation
- » have free child-care
- » have interpreter services if needed
- » have a “wellness ambassador” (a trained mental health clinician who can check-in with participants) if the subject matter is sensitive or potentially triggering
- » have food, especially if the event crosses a meal time)
- » are advertised in diverse communities

For example, as part of the effort to educate about problem gambling and suicide risk, the GBRSPC co-hosted an event where a play by a local Chinese American playwright was featured. The play deals with problem gambling and suicide in a Chinese American family. After the staged reading of the play, there was a panel of expert speakers who discussed the issues brought up in the play. An interpreter who could speak both Mandarin and Cantonese was present to interpret if needed. The event was in Chinatown and accessible by public transportation. In addition, there was food, childcare, and a wellness ambassador at the event. Posters for the event (in English and Chinese) were distributed not only in the Greater Boston area, but in Chinatown specifically. This is significant because mental health concerns and discussion of suicide are greatly stigmatized in Asian American communities.

The result of these efforts was twofold; first, the event itself was more welcoming for people of color, in particular the Asian American community, second, the event served as a model or example for how using different considerations for how to structure an event (access to childcare and public transportation, interpreter services), that it is not only feasible but quite manageable to incorporate at a day to day level structural changes that integrate social justice into suicide prevention work. The further impact has been that the Coalition has seen what is possible and for their FY20 budget are proposing activities that are all connected to both suicide prevention and social justice.

# Social Justice and Racial Equity Exercises/Activities

## Facilitators Guide

As you work through these exercises with people in your organization, it is important not only to be conscious of the climate of your organization in relation to racial equity and social justice, but also to be aware of your own knowledge and comfort as a trainer.

It is important to consider your personal understanding of this material. Where is your strength as a trainer? Do you feel like you can field questions about this particular topic? If not, it might be helpful to have a co-facilitator for each exercise, or postpone doing the exercise until you are more ready. In our work, we have been presenting material and exercises by using co-facilitators, who are usually one person of color and one white ally. However, it is important to note that the chair of the people of color caucus who has presented many of the exercises is also a diversity trainer with experience in dealing with these issues. It might be useful to determine if there is anyone in your organization with experience presenting material on social justice and racial equity. If not, you will want to consider a number of things before you dive in:

- » Before you work through each exercise, think about your organizational climate and historical response to this work—what challenges do you anticipate may come up, what strategies do you think might be most effective in addressing them within your organization.
- » A large piece of this work is ascertaining which exercises are appropriate in what contexts. Some considerations in choosing exercises (or choosing the timing around exercises) are: where is your organization in relation to issues of social justice and racial equity; more specifically, where is your organization in relation to the specific topic the exercise addresses. Organizational inventories can be helpful with this.
- » While we encourage framing an exercise before any doing it, if a particular exercise seems like it will elicit a good deal of resistance, you may need to ask yourself 1) is this the right time to do this exercise and 2) is there a way to present the material in a way that is appropriate for where your organization is now? You may want to consider what the sources of the resistance are and ways to address it before you do the exercise.
- » It may be helpful, if you feel the exercise is a stretch, to include a brief educational component to assist in framing—this can be done by the facilitator, another member of your organization, or someone you invite from outside your organization. There are several handouts in the first section which cover some of the main points of resistance we encountered that may be helpful in this process (such as reactions to introducing the concept of White privilege or a lack of understanding of why we are doing racial equity and social justice work within the field of suicide prevention).
- » Everyone has their own particular blind spots in doing this work, and it is helpful to figure out your own blind spots as a facilitator— perhaps identifying an alternate or co-facilitator for an exercise that hits one of these blind spots would be more effective. It is also helpful to try to understand the blind spots of individuals within your organization, and with your organization as a whole—again, sometimes this understanding only comes through trial and error, and analyzing where certain topics and exercises are met with resistance.

Even if you considered all of these issues carefully and adjusted your decisions, you are likely to encounter resistance from some people. While resistance can be difficult and uncomfortable, challenges and resistance can be instructive too and an opportunity to have further conversation/ education. It can be part of the process of understanding new ideas that challenge old belief systems which is at best uncomfortable and unsettling. In many cases, resistance comes quite unexpectedly, and may interfere with the stated objective of the exercise, however, such resistance provides an excellent opportunity to meet people where they are, and to engage around a particular concern or topic that is a stumbling block for them. Reading the room, it can be helpful to determine if an expression of resistance seems like a common sticking point, or if one person is holding up the work of the rest of the group. You can ask the group if others share this question or response. If it seems like a common stumbling block, it may be necessary to redirect the conversation until the majority of people at the table understand the concept and how to move forward. If it is just one person, you can encourage others to participate in explaining the concept (this can be even more effective than having a facilitator explain). However, when it is just one person, this can also mean that, after a reasonable period of discussion, further conversation around the individual's resistance should be tabled for a later one-on-one conversation so the rest of the group can move forward.

Relatedly, it is critical for you to keep in mind as the facilitator what the objectives of the exercise are and ensure that you are clear on how to redirect conversation toward those objectives/understandings while navigating points of resistance. We have outlined some of these objectives and points of resistance to the exercises below for your reference, as (to allow for clean, printable copies of each exercise) they are not explicitly included in the exercises themselves.

For example, the objective of the Racial Justice Reframe Tool is to understand that when examining a particular public health issue, such as suicide, through the lens of racial equity, we broaden our understanding of the topic and come up with new ideas around root causes, approaches, etc. The purpose is to help deepen and shift your organization's understanding of suicide with respect to what values are being highlighted in traditional approaches, what action steps are called for, and what is the cause and solution of the problem.

The challenge with this particular topic using the Racial Justice Reframe tool is that statistically white men die by suicide in higher rates than women and people of color; therefore people think that you don't need to look at suicide through this lens. If you encounter this pushback, it might be helpful to note that while white men do make up the largest number of fatalities, most models and approaches related to mental health and suicide prevention are created by and for white people, thus it is only with a Racial Justice Reframe that we can understand how to reach communities that are not being reached by current efforts and that this is in addition to and not instead of what we are currently doing.

The purpose of the race and social identities exercise is to understand not only that each of our identities provide us with a particular lens and that most people have identities that fall in both dominant and non-dominant group. The exercise also let us, examine the strengths within our non-dominant identities, as well as how each identity shapes our professional perspective.

The challenge with this exercise can be in our cultural conditioning to view the majority group's lens as 'normative', therefore it might be helpful to give some examples that illustrate what a 'white' (or, more broadly, a 'majority') cultural lens looks like. It can be interesting to revisit this exercise as you get further in your organizational and individual understanding to see how answers and resistance shifts.

The purpose of the leveraging systemic privilege exercise is to help people within your organization understand how they can utilize their privilege in a way that will work toward creating more just outcomes such as amplifying the voices, ideas and experiences of the non-dominant group, questioning why certain groups/ perspectives are not represented. Most importantly, we can learn to use our systemic privilege to make the

people and organizations we come into contact with examine the inequities inherent in our social systems and structures, and to work to understand how we can make these systems more equitable.

The challenge in this exercise can be getting people to understand the difference between being 'privileged' in the colloquial sense versus the ways in which unseen privilege has shaped their experience in ways they may not have even seen. For example, a woman who has experienced silencing and oppression as a result of misogyny might find it difficult to see herself in a position of power and privilege, particularly when the inherent nature of that power and privilege is that other people are silenced. It can be helpful to point out that while a particular identity has put you in a position where you lack power, being a part of any dominant group gives you advantages (and freedom from certain consequences) that other people who share your other marginalized identities but to NOT share your dominant group identity do not have access to. For example, as a white woman, I may be silenced in meetings but I am not afraid of being shot when I get pulled over by the police. I may be afraid walking home alone at night as a result of rape culture, but I am not afraid my loved ones will be deported without notice. I am not afraid that someone will call the police on me while I am trying to enter my own home. If I am a victim of violence, while my credibility will still be challenged because of misogyny, I will be given more benefit of the doubt than I would if I were a woman of color.

For the window of tolerance exercise, the objective is to have a framework for your group to understand their level of emotional engagement or detachment, and more specifically to be able to gauge how they are reacting to a particular topic or exercise in order to identify resistance or comfort.

For the wheel of oppression, the objective is to provide a framework for understanding the systems of oppression that exist based on multiple social identities, and to have people position themselves within that framework based on their identities. This can create a sense of empathy and understanding based on a knowledge that all oppressions are held together by power and function on individual, cultural, systemic / institutional levels. Additionally, the purpose is to enable people understand the movement from agent to ally and from victim to empowered that allows for action steps towards systemic change.

We encourage you to use these exercises in a manner and order that are beneficial to you. This is not a prescribed or even sequential curriculum, but rather a set of resources that can help begin transformational conversations. You know where your organization is, and what approach will work best, though there will undoubtedly be some trial and error. If these exercises create dialogue, identify resistance and concern, and ultimately move your organization and work forward, then they will have served their purpose. It can also be important realize that if you are the usual facilitator, you may be seen as the only person pushing these issues forward, and this can be detrimental to facilitation before you even begin.

Also, realize that sometimes it is better to get outside help. If you find that your organization is stymied and more harm than good is being done by pushing through material and exercises then you may want to consider hiring a diversity and inclusion trainer to help assess your organization's climate, make recommendation, and work to move your organization forward in this work.

## Racial Justice Reframing Tool

Framing Element	Traditional Approach	Racial Justice Approach
What's the Problem?		
What's the Cause Who/ What's the Problem?		
What's the Solution?		
What Action is Needed?		
What Values Are Highlighted?		



# Window of Tolerance

## Hyper-Arousal

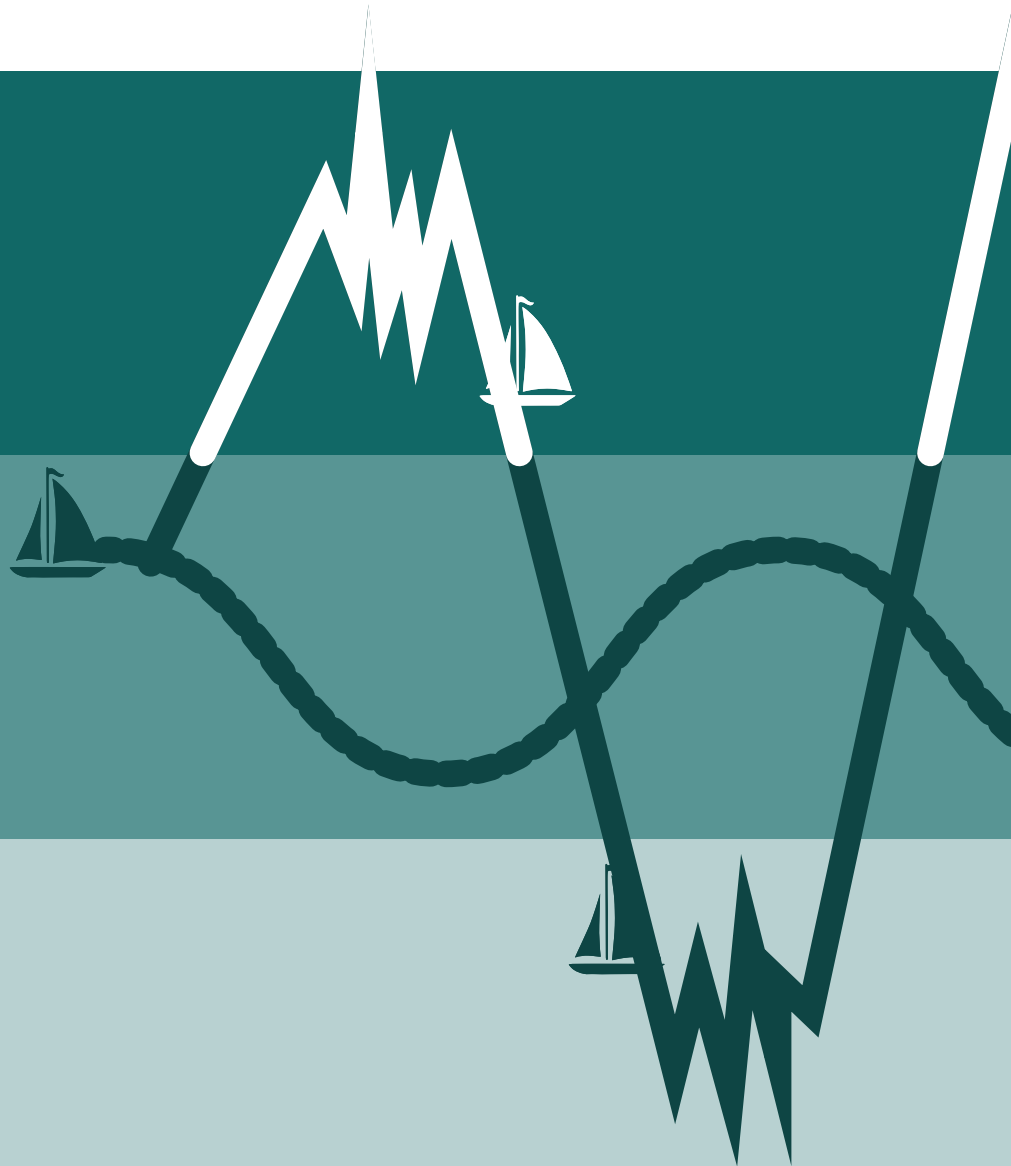
Emotional overwhelm, panic, feeling unsafe, angry, racing thoughts, anxiety, etc.

## Window of Tolerance Optimal Arousal Zone

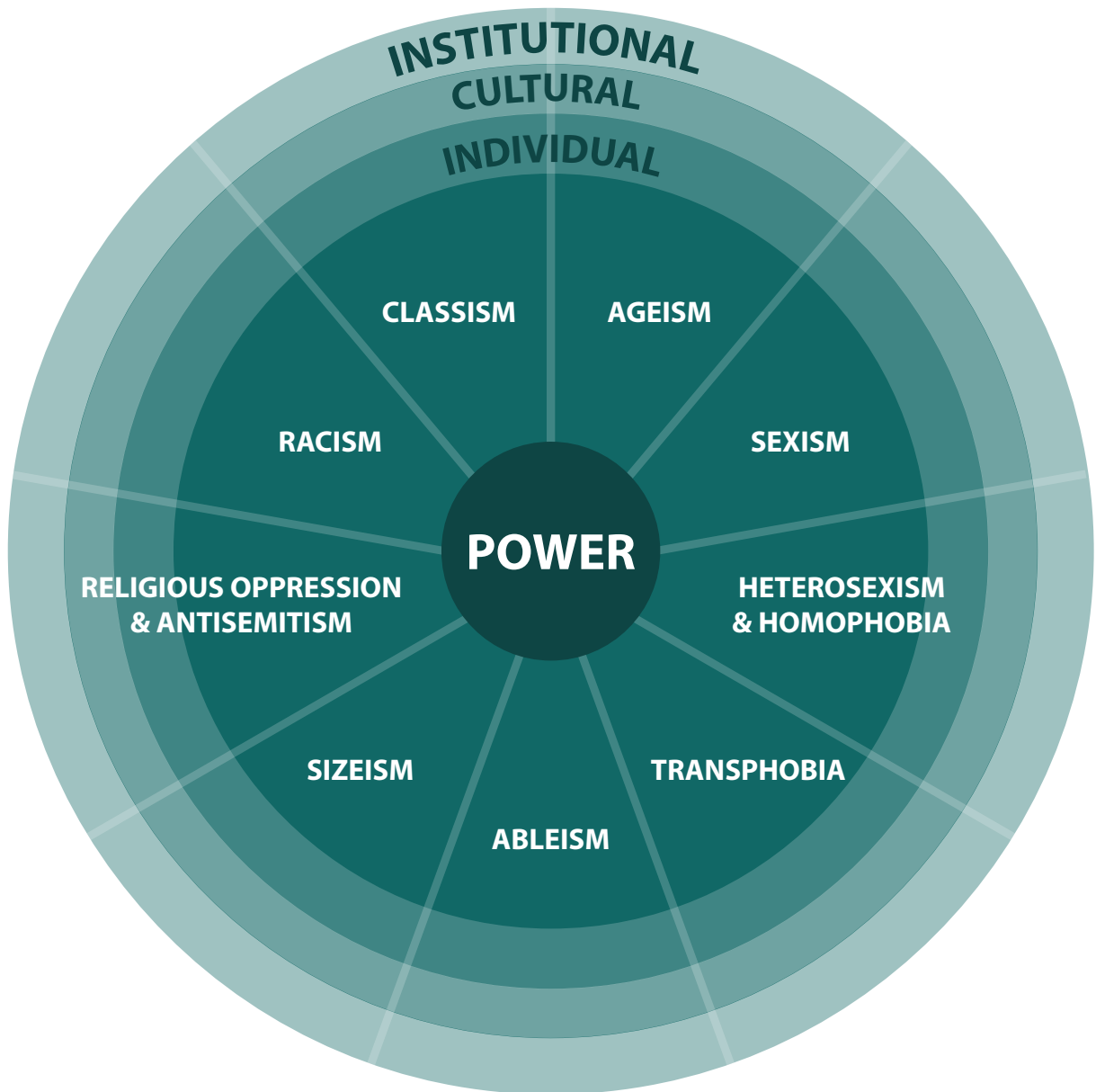
Carrying on with daily life in the river of well-being

## Hypo-Arousal

Numb, no feelings or energy, can't think, shut down, ashamed, disconnected, depression, etc.



# Wheel of Oppression



**Power + Prejudice = Oppression**

**In this model a person can move from**  
agent of oppression to an ally  
victim of oppression to empowered

## Race and Social Identities Exercise

1. Describe your race and one other social identity (gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. . .)
2. What is one challenge you face in relation to each identity (race and the other one you choose)?
3. What is one strength you have in relation to each identity?
4. How these two identities impact your work.

## Leveraging Systemic Privilege Exercise

We all have many social identities to which we belong. Some of those social identities are part of the dominant group in the United States and some are part of the oppressed group(s). In this exercise, we will identify the groups to which we belong and their position in relation to the dominant group or the oppressed group. When we are part of the dominant group, we have privilege that we can use to make space for the voices/ ideas/ experiences and priorities of the oppressed group.

1. Look at the list of social identities below. Consider if you are part of the dominant group or the oppressed group for each dimension.

- » Race
- » Gender
- » Age
- » Sexual Orientation
- » Size
- » Class
- » Able Bodied
- » Religion

2. Write the social identities in the chart below:

Dominant Group	Oppressed Group

3. For dominant identities, how can you think about leveraging your privilege to make space for the voices/ ideas/ experiences and priorities of the oppressed group? Think of three examples of things you could do:

## Case Study: MCSP General Membership

### Challenge:

Getting buy-in/ commitment to doing social justice and racial equity work as part of our overall suicide prevention efforts, not only individually and as a general membership, but structurally as an organization.

Introducing new and difficult concepts within our organization. Sporadic attendance leaving membership at very different levels of understanding and buy-in.

### Approach/Solutions/Outcome:

Ensuring that social justice and racial equity was brought to every level of the MCSP, including the General Membership.

Ensuring that the General Membership had adequate time to focus on issues of social justice and racial equity.

### Outcome:

The outcome has been that our General Membership has begun to understand—and be able to articulate—the importance and connection of social justice and racial equity and suicide prevention. We are also seeing more buy in from the membership in terms of willingness to participate and speak up during exercises related to social justice and racial equity.

There remains a significant amount of work to do, but we have begun to provide the tools, language and resources for our membership to make the connections between social justice and racial equity and suicide prevention. As we continue in this process, we hope to engage more stakeholders around the creation of specific resources for different stakeholders (providers, state agencies, Regional Coalitions, loss and attempt survivors, etc.)

### Narrative:

The MCSP General Membership meets every other month, with an average attendance of about 30 members, although there is fairly significant variation depending on a number of factors.

Our membership consists of providers, representatives from state agencies, members of our 10 Regional Coalitions, loss and attempt survivors, and concerned community members (among others.) We wanted to create an approach that, from the outset, was able to speak to and engage all of these stakeholders around issues of social justice and racial equity and suicide prevention, as well as provide some benefit to them in their own lives and work.

We began with two simple exercises which are included in this toolkit—the window of tolerance and the wheel of oppression. Our initial effort was met with mostly positive, although mixed response. It was clear that not all activities or exercises were going to be relevant or impactful with everyone at the table, however, we listened to the questions people continued to ask—the most common being “but WHY are social justice and racial equity so important in suicide prevention?”

Noting that this question came up at several meetings from several stakeholders, the MCSP Alliance for Equity worked to create a handout (included in the first section of this toolkit) examining why social justice and racial equity were integral to suicide prevention efforts

Some talking points included:

While suicide impacts every demographic, approaches to suicide prevention often do not.

Oppression and oppressive systems create additional barriers for people of color to find support and resources during a suicidal crisis and existing resources may not be culturally responsive or appropriate.

In communities of color addressing racism is a form suicide prevention.

Attending to racial equity does not mean shifting the entire focus of our work, but rather expanding the perspectives, frameworks and approaches to suicide prevention.

Addressing issues of social justice and racial equity positively impacts the lives of individuals and communities of color and white communities and individuals.

When we talk about social justice we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well.

Additionally, we can address multiple demographics (not just race but gender/ religion/ etc.) better when we examine systems level changes.

We presented the first iteration of this handout/ information to our stakeholders at a general membership meeting and took into account their questions and feedback in refining the document, as well as feedback from members of the MCSP Alliance for Equity and the MCSP Executive Committee.

Some of the additional materials/ handouts in this toolkit have also been created in direct response to conversations that originated in General Membership meetings—in this way, the inclusion of social justice and racial equity to our agendas has been as instructive for the social justice and racial equity work of the Alliance and the MCSP in general as it has been for our membership.

While we have not measured knowledge gains in any quantitative way, qualitatively, there has been a shift and an evolution in the conversations that take place around these exercises. Significantly, when questions arise, it is now not uncommon for another MCSP member or EC member to respond, rather than waiting for the facilitators of the exercise to provide a response. This furthers our goal of locating this work in many individuals within the organization, and has also created the opportunity for some extremely productive conversations—sometimes which are not related to the exercise.

We are still learning the most effective way to implement this work within the General Membership, and still figuring out how to anticipate points of resistance or areas where clarification might be needed. For some exercises we have been able to anticipate and speak to these areas ahead of time, for others, the questions that have been asked have been completely unanticipated by the facilitators.

It is significant in this process that our work is a dialogue—that questions can be asked and if not answered, at least brought to the group for meaningful discussion. In addition to providing tools, resources and knowledge/ language to our membership, it is equally significant that we are able to engage more stakeholders and more perspectives to widen the lens and deepen the conversation.

# 6 appendices

**Definitions**

**Footnotes**

## Definitions<sup>16</sup>

*Note: These concepts are very complex. There is disagreement amongst scholars about the meanings of these terms, especially the finer points or things that vary with different contexts. The definitions offered here are very basic. Our purpose is to have a shared understanding as a foundation, not to fully explore the concepts or suggest that these definitions fully capture the complexity of the concepts.*

### **Culture**

a learned and variable (changing) system of meanings that are shared and transmitted by an identifiable group of people and represent a way of living.

It is fluid and dynamic. Systems of meanings encompass include social norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as more concrete things like food, art, architecture/buildings, music, etc. Culture has modal practices (what “most” people do within a culture that characterizes that culture) as well as individual manifestation (how a particular individual engages with or reflects a culture).

### **Ethnicity or ethnocultural experience**

the distinctive cultural patterns shared by a group of people that are often unified by a common geographic origin, history, and ancestral heritage.

### **Race**

a social category to which individuals are assigned by themselves and others, usually on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color. Although related to physical characteristics such as skin color, racial categories and their distinctions are not biological, genetic, or inherent. Racial categories were historically created and are currently maintained to differentiate those who are “entitled” to power and resources and those who are not. See American Anthropological Association statement on race.

### **Sex**

a social construction related to biological differences in chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs and secondary sexual characteristics. The expectation is that these will all be congruent with a single category, but this is not always the case.

### **Gender**

a socially constructed, often categorical distinction, related to how different groups of people are expected to act and the characteristics they are expected to have, based in socially created ideas about the meaning and behavioral implications of sex.

### **Sexual Orientation**

the sex or gender one chooses in romantic, sexual, or affectional relationships. Includes aspects of identity, behavior, emotional attraction, sexual attraction. The language of “sexuality” is often being used currently, rather than “sexual orientation.”

16. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



## **Class**

a status related to different kinds of resources, access, or capital, including financial capital (money), educational capital, social capital (relationships), and social status (determined by cultural hierarchies)

## **Minority**

any group of people having less power and privilege in society.

## **Bias**

the tendency to think, feel or behave in a certain way, which arises alongside the natural processes of generalization and categorization influenced by social categories and distinctions related to power.

## **Stereotype**

an overgeneralization about a group of people. Stereotypes tend to arise from assumptions based on biases that become rigid and then spread more widely amongst a culture or group.

## **Power**

the ability to exert influence over an outcome, or a person's actions, feelings or thoughts.

## **Privilege**

the power and advantages one holds as a result of belonging to a dominant group or a group that is of higher social status. It is a social phenomenon and not a property of individuals. Here, we are referencing unearned privilege, rather than merit (power earned through effort).

## **Racism**

a system of judgments, beliefs, actions, norms, and social/institutional practices based on race that protect privilege. Racism can be interpersonal, cultural, institutional, or internalized. Racism can be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. The system of racism is most harmful to those who are in the minority (lacking the privilege and power) but is also damaging to the dominant group.

The core components of this definition can be generalized to all of the "isms", such as sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, etc. All of the isms are systems of privilege that are formed from the interaction of power with stereotypes, prejudice, and bias.

## Footnotes

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“10 White Privileges You Don’t Know You Have” Grace Goodwin <http://whiteprivilege.org/10-privileges-you-dont-know-you-have/>  
“10 Things White Privilege Has Done for Me in 10 Days” Olivia Cole [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege\\_b\\_5658049](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-things-white-privilege_b_5658049)  
“White Privilege Checklist” Peggy McIntosh <http://cwc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>  
[www.RaceJustice.org](http://www.RaceJustice.org)
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8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
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11. Developed by Karen L. Suyemoto (klsuyemoto.net). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
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14. References: Suyemoto appendix
15. Focus group project lead: Emily Bhargava
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# WIDENING THE LENS:

## exploring the role of racial justice in suicide prevention

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### What We Did and Why We Did It

#### CONTEXT:

- » Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention (MCSP) is an organization based in Massachusetts (United States) founded in 1999 to reduce suicide and self-harm across the state.
- » MCSP focuses on collaboration, public awareness, and advocacy.
- » MCSP has ten regional coalitions that focus on more direct community interventions.
- » Mostly a white organization, with more diversity in other areas such as age, sexual orientation, and gender.
- » Many different kinds of stakeholders at the table from providers, non-profit organizations, state agencies, people with lived experiences, and other concerned community members.

#### PROBLEM:

- » Lack representation of People of Color (POC) in suicide prevention and mental health and in our organization.
- » Lack of resources, trainings, messaging, and services for POC in suicide prevention and mental health.
- » Lack of resources for organizations (including ours) to develop and implement a racial equity and social justice approach.

#### SOLUTION:

- » Establish the MCSP Alliance for Equity which is comprised of the people of color caucus and the white ally caucus in order to affect broader organizational change in MCSP
- » Bring racial equity and social justice to our work at all levels of our organization
- » Develop the toolkit to guide our work and to share with other organizations

#### PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT:

To develop and share resources that provide foundational information about racial equity and social justice, to offer some guidance about how to talk about these issues effectively, and consequently to shape our organization (and other organizations) to be more effective for and inclusive of all populations.

#### HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT:

- » To gain foundation knowledge as a way to begin to have difficult conversations about racial equity, social justice, and suicide prevention.
- » To provide information that challenges preconceptions and unquestioned assumptions that impact the work of your organization.
- » To provide tools to bring these concepts to all levels of your organization.
- » To assess where your organization is in relation to racial equity and social justice and to develop action steps for implementing desired change.

### Racial Equity and Suicide Prevention: Why is it Important?

#### SUICIDE AFFECTS EVERYONE

While suicide impacts every demographic, approaches to suicide prevention often do not. Prevention efforts need to better respond to the needs of communities of color.

#### OPPRESSION/SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION INTERSECT WITH SUICIDE & SUICIDE PREVENTION IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

The effects of racism are not only in the individual, but also in our systems, such as mental health and suicide prevention. Oppression and oppressive systems create additional barriers for people of color to find support and resources during a suicidal crisis and existing resources may not be culturally responsive or appropriate.

In communities of color considering the effects of racism and addressing racism is a form of suicide prevention.

#### USING A LENS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC RESPONSIVENESS IMPROVES OUR EFFICACY AND IMPACTS OUR ABILITY TO DO OUR WORK AND SAVE LIVES IN ALL COMMUNITIES

White communities have traditionally been the focus of suicide prevention, and white people have traditionally been the developers of suicide prevention materials and resources. In order to achieve equity, we need to move beyond this inequity. Simultaneously, attending to racial equity does not mean shifting the entire focus of our work, but rather expanding the perspectives, frameworks and approaches to suicide prevention.

When we talk about social justice we are talking about addressing the ways systems of oppression create risk; this has implications not only for communities and individuals of color but for other oppressed groups as well. We can address multiple demographics (not just race but gender/ religion/ etc.) better when we examine systems level changes.

### Doing Racial Equity and Social Justice Work in Primarily White Communities as a Person of Color

- » Take care of yourself. Burn out is real.
- » Find other POC colleagues and safe spaces that nurture people of color.
- » You cannot and do not have to speak for all \_\_\_\_\_
- » You can insist that white folks educate themselves and take responsibility for their own piece of the work.
- » You do not have to defend your existence as a POC or your personal experience
- » Realize that change takes time and that it is not your sole responsibility.

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### Wheel of Oppression

