Advancing Better Outcomes for All Children:
Reporting Data Using A Racial[1] Equity Lens

This guide is dedicated to improving the well-being of all children. You are reading it because you understand that the phrase "all children" means **all** children. The guide hopes to assist you to produce data presentations that more intentionally speak to the circumstances of **all** children. By lifting up ways in which racial inequities shape opportunities differently, and identifying how to remove barriers to opportunity, your data will be a resource that speaks more clearly for *everyone*.

The guide is a companion piece to the *Race Matters Toolkit* produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (To access the various components of the *Toolkit*, go to www.aecf.org, and enter "Race Matters Toolkit" into the Search function.) The *Toolkit* is a primary resource for identifying how to apply a racial equity lens to the broad range of work focused on child well-being. The many ways that the *Toolkit* has been used in child advocacy work allow for a deeper understanding of the additional products that can be helpful to child advocates and practitioners who deeply care about *all* children. This is one of them. *MORE Race Matters* is an occasional series that provides advice around specific topics that advance racial equity.[2]

Conducting Your Own Data Presentation Review

We applaud the countless hours, days, even months each year that you devote to providing crucial data for your constituents. We particularly applaud that you always seek how to do that even better. The specific observations and suggestions that follow may accumulate into a stack of proposed changes that cannot be accomplished at once. For example, for those of you who produce annual data books and resources on child/family well-being, it may take more than one publication cycle. Attention to racial equity is an ongoing and cumulative process. We would not want to discourage you from your commitment or perhaps

The Basic Features of a Data Presentation Using a Racial Equity Lens

In order for you to plan your work with a racial equity lens, it is helpful to have a quick list of the features to look for in *any* document. Written material that uses a racial equity lens effectively usually contains all of the following:

- Consistent disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity;

- Analytic understanding of the structural causes of any significant disparities and disproportionality that the disaggregated data show (These causes also become key intervention points for solutions.);

- Framing of disparities/disproportionality by a narrative that leads with structural causes;

- Solutions always bundled with the problem description; and

- Photos, format, and organization that highlight a structural understanding of what's wrong and avoid mobilizing individual or group stereotypes.

even set you up for failure by assuming that you can get everything done all at once. At the end of this guide we offer some suggestions for how you might break down the work into manageable pieces so that each cycle of publication becomes more fine-tuned using a racial equity lens, and increasingly valuable as a reference for those who are committed to reducing disparities/disproportionality.[3]

Our observations and suggestions fall into two basic categories:

- Overall Organization and Presentation

- Indicators and Their Narratives

Here's how you might look afresh at your data presentation. First, scan your full document to get a refreshed sense of how it is organized, laid out, and presented. Then read the next section on "Overall Organization and Presentation" to see how well-aligned your work is with the suggestions.

Second, carefully read each of the indicators used in your presentation to see how well aligned they are with the suggestions in the section titled "Indicators and Their Narratives." With this review completed, take a look at the

closing section in this guide to consider how best to sequence the changes your review prompts you to undertake.

Overall Organization and Presentation

Selection of Indicators. It is easier to change what we measure rather than what we don't.[4] Indicators that are structural—systems-focused, policy-oriented, or programmatic in nature (e.g., student/teacher ratios, % insured, length of stay in hospital/foster care/juvenile detention) — will train the reader's eye on places where policy or program change can be focused. Indicators that are individual in nature (e.g., children's test scores), can incline the reader to default to individualist explanations for problems that exist (e.g., lack of parental support for kids' performance).

Work toward racial equity seeks measurement of programmatic and structural indicators above all. As you review your selection of indicators, how can you add more that are structural (e.g., % homes exposing children to lead in a section on housing or early childhood success; or % teens participating in after-school programs in indicators about adolescent development)?

To be sure, we need to have data that show individual impact. However, without the structural data preceding individual indicators, the reader is likely to default to individual explanations or group stereotypes to explain any disparities that are revealed.

A data presentation with a racial equity lens will consider carefully how to sequence and frame each indicator in order to keep the reader's attention on structural issues, even when the data are at the individual or family level. In the next major section we talk more about framing these indicators and their narratives.

Also, consider choosing the assets-focused side of an indicator wherever possible, such as graduation rate (instead of its deficit-focused twin, high school dropout rate). Such a focus flips an indicator like children without health insurance into children with health insurance. Why do we recommend this?

1) Indicators framed from an assets point of view become aspirations. Closing the gap for those who aren't faring well (in this case, those children without health insurance) fulfills an aspiration.[5]
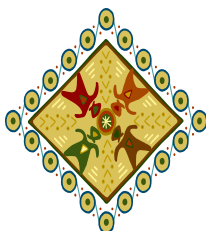
2) Assets-focused indicators make it easier not to stigmatize families or individualize explanations for shortcomings. For example, it is easier to get people to think about economic barriers when the indicator is % families with "sufficient" incomes to raise children (e.g., above poverty level) rather than when the indicator is % children living in poverty (which conjures up an array of stereotypes people have about lower-income families, especially families of color, and their children).

The selection of problem- or deficit-focused data, especially that which is dramatic or alarming, no doubt can be useful in energizing interest or mobilizing specific groups at certain political moments. Yet, the work of Frameworks Institute[6] tells us that such data are still more likely to attract broader support when the data are framed with widely shared values.

The main point is that the *routine* use of problem-focused or deficit-oriented data, especially at the individual level, may have the reverse effect of *reducing* public interest in problem-solving while also mobilizing negative imagery of those who are disproportionately affected by a range of issues.

Selection of graphics, photos, quotes. Graphics, photos, and quotes add visual and personal appeal to data. Every family in your constituency will want to see someone who looks like them or their children in the data presentation's graphics or photos. Photos or graphics depicting children, families, and communities of color should be selected with care, since they, more than depictions of whites, are subject to broad generalization.[7] Avoid imagery that mobilizes stereotypes, such as picturing a child of color (no matter how precious looking that child is) beside a deficit-focused indicator. Each page of a data presentation should be planned or scrutinized with these cautions in mind. In addition, as you look at the data presentation overall, do you see appropriate representation both quantitatively and qualitatively of children, families, and communities of color? A data presentation with a racial equity lens will show the range of children in a constituency and depict images of children of color that work against stereotypes.

Quotes can be a great vehicle for reinforcing an overall structural point of view and/or value frame. A data presentation with a racial equity lens will use quotes as (1) a window on the value frame that engages the reader's interest in ALL children, and (2) an opportunity to promote a structural emphasis and policy solutions.

Organization of the text. The sequence of data matters. Because race, income and place inform child well-being in over-arching ways—being implicated in so many of the disparities highlighted by child well-being indicators—we suggest that they be put at the very front. A data presentation with a racial equity lens will identify upfront that race matters along with class/poverty and place, (depending on your focus, possibly rural, suburban, and urban residence or specific neighborhoods). Positioning of these indicators at the beginning of the presentation is one key way to send that message.

Some data presentations give specific attention to issues of immigrant families by featuring stand-alone indicators or discuss them in "special sections" of a report. We recommend infusing that breakdown wherever possible into other indicators. Immigrant families already "stand alone" in so many ways, too often as a target. Embedding this information where relevant in the existing indicators integrates them with other families and reflects concern for them as a routine matter rather than a matter set apart from other families.

Opening essay/letter to the reader. As you focus on infusing a racial equity lens into your work, an opening essay or letter is an opportune place to convey that such attention will make your work better and your constituency's aspirations for all children more achievable. We recommend as a good example of such an essay the opening letter in the 2007 Data Book from Kentucky Youth Advocates, which can be found on their website, www.kyyouth.org.

Indicators and Their Narratives

Consistent disaggregation. In your data presentation, some indicators may offer disaggregated data by race; others may not. Is this because of lack of disaggregated data in certain areas? If so, it's worth saying at the beginning that data are disaggregated by race wherever possible. And then it's worth exploring with your data partners how to obtain data that enable a nuanced understanding of issues children and families face across the full range of data you present.

If a different reason exists for inconsistency in data disaggregation, discuss how to become more consistent. A data presentation with a racial equity lens will always disaggregate data by race. That disaggregation, however, should always be offered within a structural frame, as we discuss next.

Deep analysis of disparities with a structural frame. Write-ups that are offered around indicators usually describe the data and on occasion offer understanding for why numbers may have changed (e.g., more kids being tested for lead increases the numbers related to child lead exposure). Other narratives simply state the data without explanations for how any disparities occur. The danger of not offering structural explanations as a frame for disparities is that this can mobilize readers' default prejudices about individual- and group-based explanations for inequities.[8]

A data presentation with a racial equity lens will always offer a structural analysis of how disparities are produced. Otherwise, readers will default to whatever stereotypes or explanations they already hold. A structural analysis sets up the need for policy and practice change as the means to reduce disparities. A shortcut for developing such an analysis is to borrow from the Fact Sheets in the Race Matters Toolkit.[9] They offer national-level explanations for disparities that often play out at the local level, too. Even if you do not currently have locally-based research into the probable causes of disparities, you can cite what national research (or local research elsewhere) has found, and encourage local investigation to determine if such dynamics—or others—occur in your area.
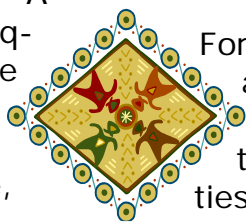
For example, if you have local data about racial disparities in school expulsions, but no local studies to understand how the disparities are produced, you could cite research at the national[10] and state[11] levels that clearly shows how suspension and expulsion policies themselves, and the manner in which they are applied, contribute to disparities in school expulsions.

Recognition of cultural variation in indicator applicability. Some routine indicators for which data are regularly collected apply differently to families of color than to their white counterparts. For example, indicators on child care may focus exclusively on licensed centers and registered family care providers. Yet, families of color are disproportionately more likely to rely on families, friends, and neighbors for informal child care than are their white counterparts.

A data presentation with a racial equity lens will identify indicators relevant for various racial/ethnic groups and track those systematically. Alternatively, it will be explicit about shortcomings in specific indicators that may have varying cultural relevance. If you were looking for indicators through the experiences of various groups of color, would you add any or revise any of your current indicators?

Need for solutions bundled with problem description. To avoid readers' compassion fatigue[12] for all children, including children of color, it's critical to identify strategies that work to reduce problems. Indicators that show disparities should consistently be paired with proposed remedies. Some indicators themselves may represent solutions (e.g., student/teacher ratio). You may want to separate indicators that lift up problems (e.g., children without health insurance) from those that identify benefits or solutions (e.g., S-CHIP use). With regard to the latter, the number of recipients is of course of interest. We propose that the *gap* between eligibility and use would add a dimension that implies additional interventions. This gap analysis, too, would disaggregate data by race.

A data presentation with a racial equity lens will always bundle solutions with problem descriptions in order to communicate that seeking change is a reasonable undertaking and that better results are possible.

Framing the text using shared values. Those of us who are devoted to data have a tendency to talk about research and data first. Yet, Frameworks Institute[13] suggests that we open our advocacy messages with widely-shared, value-based statements as a way of drawing readers in. So, before we note that "A child's first five years are crucial in shaping later-life potential," we might precede it with something like, "Newborns give us all a sense of future possibilities." It's a one-level-up abstraction intended to attract the widest audience possible and give the reader a narrative "bucket" for containing the information that follows. This becomes especially crucial as you begin to introduce disparities data, since too many readers will otherwise use whatever's already in their "race bucket" (some of which may be stereotyping) to understand what the data "mean."

Getting "picky" about words and charts. We all want to be sure our work enhances the chance for all families to succeed, including families of color. As a result, attention to individual words and phrases—as well as choices about the graphic portrayal of data—matter more than ever when talking about disparities or about children and families of color. For example, the phrase "struggling families" opens up the opportunity to talk about structural barriers to family success more than the phrase "poor families" might. It is also likely that more families will identify as struggling than those who identify as poor.

Or, a bar graph whose %'s are figured on small bases may inadvertently mis-convey information to readers not attuned to detail. For example, let's assume that a state has experienced a 500% growth rate in its refugee population over the past 5 years. That 500% growth still only adds up to a population of 1,000 newcomer refugees. If you map the growth rate against the growth rate for the rest of the population, it will look huge. If you map it with actual numbers, it will probably look very small. Knowing that populations may already feel threatened by newcomers, we recommend choosing the graphic that reduces the chance of mobilizing prejudice.

Now What?

As mentioned earlier, it may not be feasible to work on all of these fronts simultaneously to revise your data presentation so that it is a valuable resource for <u>all</u> children and families. How might it be possible to sequence the proposed revisions?

Stage 1 – Revise your work according to suggestions in the section on "Overall Organization and Presentation." These changes can be instituted while you buy time to focus on the disaggregation of indicators wherever possible and get the data you need to do so.

Stage 2 – Revise the Indicators sections of your work using the Race Matters Toolkit Fact Sheets as the basis for a structural analysis and narrative frame.

Stage 3 – Revise the Indicators sections of your work using local research to inform a structural analysis, and local audience-relevant frames for narrative presentation.

Whatever course you choose as you seek to infuse a racial equity lens throughout your work, you have peers to call on for advice and encouragement. The commitment to racial equity is not something to check off a to-do list. Rather, it is an infused point of view and an intentional commitment that will serve you well throughout your work and strengthen the value of your organization to our increasingly diverse communities and our nation.

REPORTING DATA
**USING A RACIAL EQUALITY LENS:**
A SUMMARY CHECKLIST

What has your review shown
in the following areas?

- Selection of indicators – structural v. individual
- Selection of indicators – asset-based v. deficit-oriented
- Choice of graphics, photos, quotes
- Text organization – over-arching issues like race upfront
- Consistent disaggregation
- Use of structural frame for describing disparities data
- Framing that starts with shared values
- Choice of culturally relevant indicators
- Solutions bundled with problem description
- Words and charts that avoid the mobilization of prejudice
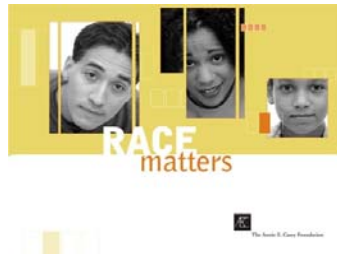
NOTES

[1]In this guide we use the terms "race" or "racial" to encompass both race and ethnicity. Our focus is on racialized categories, which are *political/social constructs,* to which people in the U.S. are assigned: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White, as well as Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino, which the U.S. Census recognizes may be of any race. These categories are used to advantage some groups (usually Whites) while disadvantaging other groups (usually "people of color"). Racial category assignment may be different from racial or ethnic self-identity.

[2]Issue #1 focuses on achieving staff and board diversity; issue #2 discusses how to promote racially equitable purchasing. See the Casey Foundation website for these materials, www.aecf.org.

[3]Hereafter we use "disparities" as shorthand for both disparities and disproportionality.

[4]Thanks to our colleagues at Kentucky Youth Advocates for this important reminder.

[5]Our sense is that this "flipped script" makes it easier to move to the Level 1 values that Frameworks Institute says work best to frame issues (www.frameworksinstitute.org/strategicanalysis/ FramingPublicIssuesfinal.pdf). It also gives the advocate a more positive platform for setting the tone of discourse.

[6]www.frameworksinstitute.org.

[7]Sociologists write extensively about racial stereotyping and the differential "burden of proof" carried by groups with marginalized status.

[8]www.frameworksinstitute.org.

[9]www.aecf.org, input "Race Matters Toolkit" into Search function.

[10]http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/discipline/opport_suspended.php

[11]http://www.ncchild.org/images/stories/Short-Term_Suspensions;_Long-Term_Consequences;_ Real_Life_Solutions.pdf

[12]Compassion fatigue refers to a reduced concern around social issues as a result of feeling that they can't be effectively addressed.

M O R E   R A C E   M A T T E R S

Occasional Updates #3