



Centering Community in Policymaking: *A framework to advance racial justice*

Thank YOU



American
Heart
Association.

American Heart Association.



Nicole Donoso Sánchez, Sept 2025



VOICES ✨
for RACIAL
JUSTICE

Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ) is committed to building ***powerful and sustainable movements for racial justice across Minnesota.***

We use training and capacity building to ***support the power*** of Black, brown, and Indigenous leaders to successfully organize for racial, social, and economic justice.

About us





Training new and emergent leaders from Black, brown, and Indigenous communities to grow social justice movements



Convening networks of BIPOC change makers to multiply our power



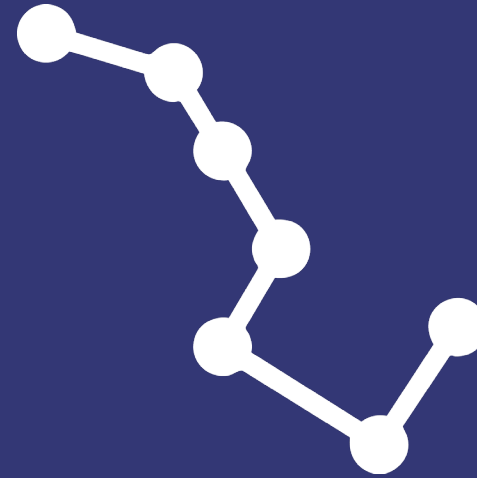
Shifting narratives through storytelling to inspire, protect, and lift up our people

Our work





Welcome to Minnesota



- Land of 10,000 Lakes, Mississippi River headwaters, biking culture
- Presence of beautiful communities (Somalian, Hmong, Latine, African American, Native tribes – Anishinaabe and Dakota)
- High civic engagement (2nd highest voter turnout 2024), top census response 2020)

Minnesota ranked 5th best state to live in

Personal finance website WalletHub says



Credit: Alissa Gold
Afton State Park - Hastings, Minnesota

Author: Dana Thiede
Published: 7:51 AM CDT August 11, 2025
Updated: 8:20 AM CDT August 11, 2025



MINNEAPOLIS — Looking for a new state to call home?

Source: Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice, University of Minnesota. See ([University of Minnesota, Humphrey School of Public Affairs](#)).

Quality of Life: Consistently ranked as one of the best places to live in the U.S.

Education: Top SAT scores nationally; strong record of Rhodes Scholars; admissions success to elite universities.

Healthcare: Home to the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, a leader in research and vaccine development.

Affordability: Housing prices below the national median.

Business & Economy: Headquarters of major companies (3M, Best Buy, Cargill, General Mills, Target, US Bank).

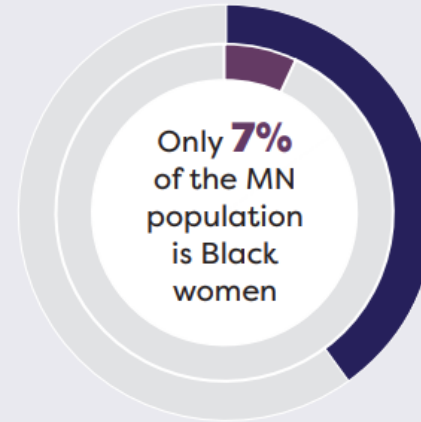
Philanthropy: Robust corporate giving culture supporting nationally recognized nonprofits.

Minnesota is a paradoxical place - great place to live for white but worst place to live for communities of color and native communities.

Racism declared a public health crisis (2020)

Deep racial disparities (employment, incarceration, education, health, housing)
— [MN House Select Committee on Racial Justice](#)

Black women and girls are uniquely vulnerable and too easily erased from public discussions about missing and murdered people. Statistics paint a devastating picture of the magnitude of the issue: over 60,000 Black women and girls are missing in the United States, and Black women are more than twice as likely than their peers to be victims of homicide.



but **40%** of domestic violence victims in Minnesota are Black women



Black women are nearly **3 times** more likely to be murdered than white women in Minnesota

By creating the Missing and Murdered African American Women's Task Force in 2021, the Minnesota Legislature became the first U.S. state to dedicate resources to investigate and to consider the measures necessary to reduce and prevent violence against Black women and girls.

2022

Police shootings and use of force against black people in Minneapolis since 2015

Yes, but we have a Racial Reality



Celebrating Resistance



We are here to name harm, and celebrate resilience and share a racial Justice tool

Grassroots organizing, collective care, hope

Organizations leading change: S.T.A.N.D. Up Minnesota Parents United, The Alliance, MPHA, MBP, MN Doctors for Health Equity, Islamic Society, Fe y Justicia, Ayada Leads, PHLC, CAPI, UofMN RJ Law Clinic, Seeds of Justice, Citizens League, COPAL, AAOP, ACER, MCLA, SEWA, Pillsbury United Community, ACLU, CMAH, Public Health Network, New Justice Project, MN Indian Affairs Council, Def Equity, YouthPrise, Black Immigrant Collective, NACDI, Common Cause, CDF, AALF, MN8, Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, Inc, MCN, CEP, Karen Of MN, New Leaders Council, HACER, UWAAF, Advocates for Human Rights, Latino Lead, JCA, Hmong American Partnership, OutFront Minnesota Community Services, Tending the Soil MN, MN Council on disability, Council on Asian Pacific MN, Gender Justice, CAAL, Nexus, MN Freedom Fund, Centro Tyrone G, MACS, League of Women Voters of Minnesota, Empower Project, CAIR, Reviving Sisterhood, TakeAction Minnesota, Education Fund, Ed Allies, SEIU, National Youth Leadership Council, Somali Youth and Family Development Center, Bridgemakers, Students United and moreeeeeeeeeee!

How the CCP Tool Was Formed



2009

Racial Equity Impact Assessment
Pocket Guide

Racial Equity Impact
Assessment (REIA) pocket
guide was printed



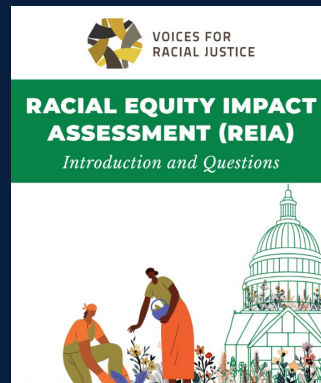
2023 –2024

REIA Kitchen Table conversations

Reimagined via collaboration with 10
organizers & advocates

Questions we asked:

- 1) What does racial justice in policy making require?
- 2) How to make a tool that transforms policy-making processes?
- 3) Gratitude to CCP Table contributors from many orgs



2025

Centering Community in Policymaking

Implementing and CCP
developing training



2023 –2024

REIA Kitchen Table conversations



Gratitude to our community

Sohini Bag
Michelle Koffa Dormoh
Nicauris Heredia-Rosario
Nan Madden
Blanca Martinez Gavina
Juan Luis Rivera-Reyes
Corenia Smith
Natalie Somerson
Elizabeth Taylor
Julio Zelaya
Monica Hurtado
Irna Landrum



The Problem: Why This Tool

Structural racism = structural problem → needs structural solutions

Racism is present in our everyday lives on different levels. The table unpacks different types of racism that are often interacting and operating at the same time.

You can address structural racism by challenging a specific institution or multiple institutions.

The Centering Community in Policymaking (CCP)

Framework focuses on these areas of systemic (institutional and structural) change — seeking to transform the spaces and processes of policymaking to liberate communities most harmed by racism.

We need to change how policy is made, who's at the table, whose voices count

	TYPE OF RACISM	EXAMPLES
INDIVIDUAL (MICRO)	INTERNALIZED RACISM lies within individuals. These are private beliefs and biases about race that reside inside our own minds and bodies. For white people, this can be internalized privilege, entitlement, and superiority; for people of color, this can be internalized oppression.	prejudice, xenophobia, conscious and unconscious bias about race, influenced by the white supremacy
	INTERPERSONAL RACISM occurs between individuals, including bias, bigotry, and discrimination. Once we bring our private beliefs about race into our interactions with others, we are now in the interpersonal realm.	public expressions of prejudice and hate, microaggressions, bias and bigotry between individuals
SYSTEMIC (MACRO)	INSTITUTIONAL RACISM occurs within institutions. It involves unjust policies, practices, procedures, and outcomes that work better for white people than people of color, whether intentional or not.	School district that concentrates students of color in the most overcrowded, under-funded schools
	STRUCTURAL RACISM is racial inequities across institutions, policies, social structures, history, and culture. Structural racism highlights how racism operates as a system of power with multiple interconnected, reinforcing, and self-perpetuating components.	The "racial wealth gap," where whites have many times the wealth of BIPOC, resulting from the history and reality of institutional racism in multiple systems

Vision: radically reimagine policymaking spaces **by Centering Community in policymaking (CCP)**

What is community?

- Community can be defined in infinite ways. It changes, it not monolithic. It is complex.
- Invitation to consider community as the Black, Indigenous and people of color communities that are most impacted by the structural harms of **white supremacy** and exploitation based on race and ethnicity.



What is policymaking?

- Every space where the decision that affect a collective gets made
- City halls and the state capitol, in school boards and government agencies, in community institutions and private corporations, and so many others.
- Policies have been a way to legalize oppression to serve the interests of those who profit from white supremacy
- Policymaking spaces have intentionally excluded the most-impacted communities for generations.

WHITE SUPREMACY: The harmful ideology that white people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions are superior to all other people's ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.



**Vision: radically reimagine policymaking
spaces **by Centering Community in
policymaking (CCP) → Authentic
Community Engagement****



A key to racial equity

Authentic Community Engagement

What is racial equity?

Racial equity exists when all people have access to the opportunities available and outcomes are not predictable by race.

Why community engagement?

Racial disparities are prevalent across multiple opportunity areas, from education to employment to health. These inequities hurt all of us – by weakening our economic, social, and cultural web of connection. Strengthening that web and building sustainable and transformative change requires deep partnership with communities for achieving racial, cultural, social and economic equity. This partnership is the backbone of community engagement. Rather than informing, educating, consulting, or merely having a dialogue with the community, true community engagement relies on partnerships and co-creation.

Principles of Authentic Community Engagement

THEME 1: Intention leads to better process and outcomes.

Address racism

Authentic community engagement intentionally addresses issues of race, institutional and structural racism, discrimination and exclusion, and embodies “cultural humility.”

Agree on process

The expectations, values, purpose, and role of both the institutions/systems and the stakeholder communities should be discussed and negotiated at the very beginning of any engagement process.

Balance power

Be aware of any working assumptions, and power dynamics and how they impact the development, sustainability, and success of partnerships. Be intentional in addressing power

imbalances, especially those affecting the community’s ability to act as an equal partner.

Self-determination

Remember and accept that collective self-determination is the responsibility and right of all people. No external entity should assume it can bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest.

Recognize different groups

Groups often self-organize. For instance, communities organically organize beyond community-based organizations (e.g. Soccer League, Churches, Barber Shop, Coffee Shop).

Notice assets

Sustain efforts and support community ownership by using an asset approach, where

community strengths are at the basis and tool to develop capacity within communities and your organization.

See different experiences

Recognize, respect and appreciate the diversity within and across communities. Be aware of the factors impacting communities’ ability to exercise their power (like historical trauma, oppression, etc.).

Stay in it for the long term

Community collaboration requires long-term commitment, by organizations involved and their partners.

Commit to communities

Ensure that any engagement efforts leave the community better — as they define it on their own terms.

“Relationships we develop with our coalition partners must be transformative, not transactional.” - Reverend Dr. William Barber

What is authentic community engagement?

Authentic community engagement is the intentional process of co-creating solutions to inequities in partnership with people who know through their own experiences the barriers to opportunity best. Authentic community engagement is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect and that acknowledge each person’s added value to the developing solutions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines community engagement as “the process of working collaboratively with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being.”

Principles of Authentic Community Engagement

THEME 2: Grounded in respect and appreciation.

Work with communities

Work WITH communities NOT FOR, on behalf of, communities. Never do things TO communities.

Seek authentic representation

Ensure representatives of the communities are well-respected and have honest and genuine relationships with other community members.

Understand historical context

including previous attempts at engagement, stories of success, lessons learned, barriers, and tensions.

Immerse yourself in the community

Build trust, work with formal and informal leadership, and seek commitment from community organizations and leaders” to co-create solutions.

Recognize and honor all of the contributions of the community.

Allocate resources for community members to be active participants, so that community engagement is valued for its contribution to the process (e.g. offer stipends, child care, food, interpreters).

THEME 3: Tension and partnership work together.

Expect tension

Partnership in a change process isn’t always easy or peaceful. It will sometimes result in tension. Partners must challenge and hold each other accountable for staying true to the engagement principles and racial equity goals.

Address challenges

Develop a plan to address conflict, being intentional and strategic to transform challenges into opportunities.

Share power

Be ready to share power (release control of actions and/or interventions) with communities, and be flexible and creative to meet its changing challenges.



Who Is This Tool For?

***Organizers & Advocates:** deeper community relationships, bolder agendas*

***Elected Officials:** co-create thoughtful policy with BIPOC communities*

***Researchers/Evaluators:** ensure implementation has real impact*

***Community Members:** feel powerful, influence policies, own justice work*

If you care about equity & policy — it's for you



Users' Guide



- *The work of racial justice did not begin and will not end with us.*
- *This word is not linear. Not a checklist. Accept a lack of closure*
- *All questions in “we” form → collective power drives liberation: Most impacted community at center of conversations*



Centering Community in Policymaking

A Framework to Advance Racial Justice

The Centering Community in Policymaking (CCP) framework has five areas of reflection: Community Leadership, Root Causes, Collaboration, Navigating Conflict and Confirming Impact. Within each of these areas, there are questions to guide deeper reflection and analysis for your policy effort (see page 17). We intentionally place Community Leadership at the center and encourage users to return to these questions at every point in the process, from identifying the issue to negotiating the trade-offs.



Outlined below, the full framework provides key questions and reflections to consider throughout the policymaking process. It's not necessary to answer every question; we encourage you to use what resonates with your work and where you're at in the policymaking process.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:

How are the most impacted communities identifying and leading the policy solution?

Who needs to be at the center of this conversation? How is "community" being defined in this particular policy effort?

What are the dreams and visions of this community? How do they want their lives to be transformed — for themselves and future generations?

What is the specific issue or policy idea that the impacted community has proposed or supports?

What are the ways the most impacted communities want to share their expertise and how do we make that input and leadership possible?

ROOT CAUSES:

What is the racial justice issue we want to solve?

How are we identifying the root causes of the current injustice? What data are we using to define the injustice?

How do we have an intersectional analysis that recognizes the different ways injustice impacts different members within the most impacted communities?

Who benefits from this injustice and will likely oppose this policy or any changes to this system?

What does our policy solution need to remove or build to help us solve this injustice and achieve the community's long-term vision?

COLLABORATION:

How do we work together to achieve the policy solution?

How have each of us reflected on the lived experiences, biases, and traumas we're bringing to the table? How can we avoid causing harm or replicating oppression towards ourselves or others?

What are our shared values and agreements as we work in relationship with each other toward this policy change?

What are the roles, responsibilities and accountability for organizers, policymakers, & community members in this process? What is our decision-making process?

How can we each contribute our specific skills, knowledge and capacity to achieve the policy solution?

CONFLICT:

How do we navigate the tensions and trade-offs to decide the policy details?

What is our process or agreements around navigating conflict and tension as we work toward this particular policy?

What are the non-negotiables or bottom lines for our policy — the things we will not sacrifice or the compromises we won't make because they would violate our shared values and agreements?

How will we work together to negotiate the unavoidable trade-offs of any policy for different communities — and different people within our communities?

How do we assess whether this policy conflicts with other policies or might have unintended consequences in our communities?

CONFIRMATION:

How do we make sure the policy achieves the change we want?

What types of resources — funding, staff capacity, community organizations — do we need for the policy to be successful?

How do we ensure the policy is implemented in a positive way and leaders are held accountable to make the policy work the way we envision it?

How are the most impacted communities providing feedback on the effects of the policy in their daily lives? How is that being integrated into evaluation of and changes to the policy?

How is the policy effort creating opportunities for the most impacted communities to build capacity and power to advance solutions in the future?

Current Effort 2025 –2026

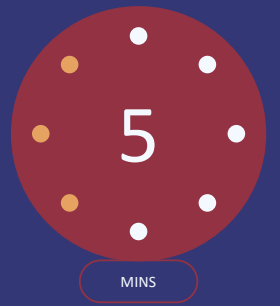


We're using this tool ourselves within the **Racial Equity Impact Notes (REIN) Coalition**.

- **As we develop our policy efforts, we use CCP to:**
 - **Guide our policy details**
 - **Deepen our relations with the coalition members (practice equity)**
 - **Stay accountable to and center to those most impacted communities and invest in their leadership**
- **This fall (October), we'll be holding a 4-session training series for coalition members to dive deep into the framework and apply it to REIN work.**
 - **We will evaluate our impact to do 1) Expand this impact 2) To connect it to Storytelling training**



Your time to engage with the tool



Everyone think about this question

Think of a policy you've worked on. It can be local, state, federal, or even internal to your organization. Reflect on this individually (5 minutes) feel free to jot down thoughts:

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

**Who were the most impacted
communities in that policy effort?
What was your relationship with them?**

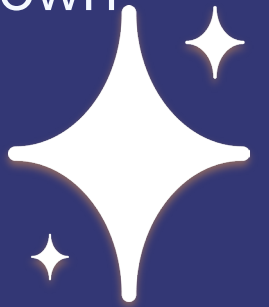


Table activity based on the color of your table:



Instructions:

1. With the same policy effort in mind reflect on this individually (5 mins) feel free to jot down your thoughts.

ROOT CAUSES (BLUE): What was the racial justice issue you wanted to solve? Who had benefited from this injustice, and who had been part of the opposition to this policy?

COLLABORATION (GREEN): How did you work together to achieve the policy solution? What shared values and agreements did you establish while working together toward this policy change?

CONFLICT (RED): How had you navigated the tensions and trade-offs to decide the policy details (language)? What was your process or agreements around navigating conflict and tension as you worked toward that particular policy?

CONFIRMATION (ORANGE): How had you made sure the policy achieved the change you wanted? How had you ensured that leaders were held accountable to make the policy work the way you had envisioned it?

2. Pair with someone at your table to introduce yourself, your issue area and discuss (10 mins):

Welcome!



Community Testimony



**Juan Luis
Rivera-Reyes**

Coalition Organizer

juan@thealliancetc.org

Closing & Reflection

Racial justice is not a final destination — it's not a place we "arrive" at and declare the work complete.

We need to practice equity at all levels especially in policy making spaces where the decisions that affect the collective are made without truly centering the experience and expertise of our communities of color and indigenous communities

It is our responsibility to practice equity in how we show up in conversations, in our organizations, and in our communities every single day. When we move with intention, we create ripples of change that make the larger shifts possible.

We are facing structural racism, and for that, we must begin thinking and acting with structural solutions.

Thank you!

