



Anti-Racist Issue Brief

WRITING TEMPLATE

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Overview

Our public systems and institutions have a long and complex history of racial injustice. The impact of Covid-19 on social service delivery and the growing public outcry against systemic racism have placed a national spotlight on these issues, and it is more important now than ever to promote policies and priorities to combat the effects of racism and systematic disinvestment in our communities. Racial equity and social inclusion must be a core component for how the public and government officials evaluate the success of a policy or proposed solution rather than a subordinate objective or afterthought.

The this guide will provide an overview of anti-racist principles and key considerations that will assist in the production of an effective policy brief. Each section will also include writing checklist to facilitate the adoption of anti-racist framing within the following elements:

- **Intro & Framing**
- **Terminology**
- **Sourcing**
- **Data & Methodology**
- **Analysis**

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Intro & Framing

This portion of the paper will include a description of the purpose of the brief itself followed by a brief summary of key concepts, findings, and policy implications. The framing of the brief will set the tone for the rest of the document. As a result, it is critical to illustrate how the policy may interact with racial and social equity early on in the document. This is also a great place to explicitly affirm one's commitment to anti-racism and anti-racist principles.

While the intro and framing of a document is one of the first things that readers will see, it is often the last portion to be written. As a result, it is one of the best places to reiterate many of the action steps featured throughout the rest of this guide.

Checklist

Did you cite narratives or scholarship from members of the group(s) that are most impacted by the proposed policy?

When incorporating national-level data or trends, do you reference institutions that have a strong reputation of adopting a racial equity lens?



Terminology

One of the most crucial elements of an equity-focused issue brief is a commitment to using language and appropriate terminology that reflects anti-racist principles. Consider the use of the word “minority.” While this term is accurate in the depiction of groups or individuals that represent a minority share of a given population, it also carries historic and cultural weight. For example, when “minority” communities are mentioned, the identifying feature that authors tend to relate this label to is negative social or health conditions i.e. “minorities exhibit a higher incidence of cardiovascular health issues compared to majority populations.” However, these increases in health issues are not actually related to the fact that these populations are smaller (at least not directly). The issue is that decreased representation and our policy landscape has created systemic barriers and everyday stressors which contribute to these disparities via unequal health service access. As a result “historically marginalized groups” or the specific racial or ethnic category is a better descriptor. To elaborate further, the following list includes several key terms that may be misused or misunderstood:

Anti-Racism/Anti-Racist: The language of ‘anti-racism’ is not new, and in-fact dates back decades. Many activists and scholars have re-adopted this framing to illustrate that simply being “neutral” or non-racist cannot counter the net influence of systemic racism within our policies and institutions. In other words, we must be actively and intentionally anti-racist. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s work “How to be an Anti-Racist” (2020) exemplifies this framing in policy and practice.

Equality vs. Equity: On the surface, our concepts of what is “equal” or “equitable” appear to be interchangeable. But there are important differences between these two ideas. It can also be difficult to translate these ideas into practical solutions. While equality or fairness typically refers to treatment (i.e. was everyone given the same amount of food), equity refers to treatment as a method for obtaining impact (i.e. was the amount of food sufficient to satisfy everyone’s hunger). In this simplified example, each person may have a different body weight and dietary considerations, and for everyone to be fully nourished, it would likely require a different meal or portions in accordance with the individual’s own needs.



Implicit Bias: The Kirwan Institute defines implicit bias as attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. As human beings, we want to be logical, fair, and objective, but in reality, we all hold our own preconceived ideas about other people. In other words, humans cannot be ‘colorblind’ even if we wanted to. When we refer to bias as being implicit, this really only has to do with the *intent*--NOT the severity of the offense. If you are denied an opportunity based on someone’s implicit biases or beliefs, it’s just as harmful as being denied due to explicit or intentional discrimination, the impact is the same.

Racism: The use of the term “Racism” is most commonly referenced in the context of prejudice--an interpersonal act of discriminatory behavior. However, this is a very limited interpretation of how racism operates. To illustrate, [Race Forward](#) outlines four types of racism: internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic:

Internalized Racism

Internalized racism lies within individuals. This type of racism comprises our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. This can take many different forms including: prejudice towards others of a different race; internalized oppression—the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege—beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people.

Interpersonal Racism

Interpersonal racism (personally mediated) occurs between individuals; When individuals interact with others, their personal racial beliefs can impact interactions.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism occurs within institutions and systems of power. This refers to the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities.

Structural Racism



Structural racism is racial bias among institutions and across society. This involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors, including the history, culture, ideology and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.”

Social Identities: When referring to group-level social identities (e.g. Latinx, LGBTQ,)² it is always important to do your research and use identities that are preferred by the individual or community you are referring to. While many racial groups experience marginalization as a result of a historic and social landscape that privileges and prioritizes whiteness, it is important not to generalize these experiences as such by attaching overly broad labels when they are not appropriate. For example, “People of Color” should not be used merely as a stand-in or catch-all for “non-white”. Instead, cite the specific group or groups that are being referenced (e.g “Black and Latino/x).

Checklist

- Did I do background research to ensure that the social identities referenced in this paper reflect the current best-practices and preferred identities of those who are referenced in this document?
- Did I review the terminology used in this issue brief to best represent the Anti-racism principles?
- Did I include my gender pronouns along with my name and other professional titles?

² For examples, Human Rights Campaign for a [Glossary of Terms](#), the Lumina Foundation’s [Preferred Racial Identifiers](#). As always, avoid making assumptions about preferred language and defer to how the subject identifies.



Sourcing

Where one sources scholarship, narratives, and other forms of content can be just as important for the goal of writing an anti-racist policy brief as the information itself. It is important to highlight perspectives and experiences from those who are most impacted by current or proposed policies. Moreover, BIPOC scholars carry dual expertise from field specific knowledge as well as lived experiences, and it is important to include their work as part of the representation of diverse voices and perspectives.

Checklist

- Did you cite narratives or scholarship from members of the group(s) that are most impacted by the proposed policy?
- When incorporating national-level data or trends, do you reference institutions that have a strong reputation of adopting a racial equity lens?



Data & Methodology

It's likely that you've heard some sort of variation of the phrase: "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." This adage also holds true for public policy--it's impossible to improve outcomes for adversely impacted communities and eliminate racial disparities if the method of analysis does not track and document these trends. Whenever possible, include data that can be disaggregated by race and ethnicity and consider decision points within the policy landscape where inequities may be most pronounced.

Checklist

- Does the brief include data that is disaggregated by racial and/or ethnic identity?
- Does the methodology elaborate on decision points or other policies that expand on the root causes of racial inequity?





Analysis

An anti-racist policy analysis should expand on how a proposed policy or course of action would work to minimize existing racial disparities. The analysis should also include a discussion of adverse impacts or unintended consequences could result from this policy, such as racial/ethnic groups that could be negatively (or positively) affected. In the same way that many policies will feature an economic impact statement, it should be common practice to include an analysis of racial equity impact in any policy brief.

Checklist

- Does the analysis include and explanation of differences between racial groups (if applicable)?
- If racial disparities exist within the data or policy outcomes, does the analysis elaborate on the root causes of these disparities and ways to prevent them?