LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE

Culturally Responsive and Racially Conscious Research Guide

This guide may be found online at https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/about/our-work.

Table of Contents

Introduction

At the Learning Policy Institute, we engage in ongoing discussions about racial equity and the ways we, as individuals and as an organization, can further our commitment to nondominant racial groups and other marginalized communities. We acknowledge that our commitment to equity work is an ongoing process—one that involves learning and *un*learning how inequities can show up in our thinking, interactions, research, and writing. This learning journey includes interrogating how we conduct research and produce knowledge.

This guide is intended to support researchers as we strive to ensure our research is anti-racist in process and impact. The guide's purpose is to help project teams reflect on the multiple stages of research so that individuals remain attentive and attuned to equity and engage in more inclusive and responsive research practices. Specifically, it asks teams to consider how race and other identity markers can show up in research design, data collection/analysis, writing, and dissemination. To do this, the guide poses questions that prompt researchers to contemplate how to adjust and adapt their research processes and products to be more anti-racist and equity-centered. Through these questions and the reflection they spur, we hope that researchers can build their expertise in conducting culturally responsive and racially conscious research in such a way that it ultimately becomes embedded in the way we do everything.

This guide is a living document—one that can be amended as teams surface new and important questions and resources that can improve equity in research processes. We encourage colleagues to offer their insights and suggestions to support our collective learning and development.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is meant to be adaptive rather than prescriptive, allowing teams to tailor its use. For example, it can be used individually or collectively as a research team. It can also be used at key points during the research process—as suggested in the guide's primary headings—or in a more spontaneous fashion to address issues as they arise. In addition, we encourage research teams to engage with the questions that are best suited to their projects. The guide is expansive, and the full set of questions may not be relevant for all projects. Thus, tailoring it to specific purposes is key.

While the guide may be used in various ways, following are some suggestions for using it in productive ways.

When planning conversations related to the guide:

- Designate a facilitator for the conversation and consider rotating facilitators within the team. Consider tapping a facilitator with previous experience in supporting or engaging in candid discussions of equity and race.
- Identify a subset of relevant questions (e.g., a subsection or selection of questions within a subsection).
    - Facilitators, or the full research team, can review the guide to determine what questions are most important and relevant.
    - Consider what questions are most relevant to the stage or content of the project.
- Schedule time for the conversation—and hold it!
- Set an agenda. (See Appendix A.)
- Give team members notice that the conversation is happening.
- Send an email to prepare team members for the conversation. (See Appendix B.)
    - Consider prompting team members to do independent pre-thinking on the questions that you will discuss to support group discussion.
    - Consider incorporating reflection or writing time into the meeting itself.

When facilitating these conversations:

- Establish norms at the beginning of the meeting to support candid and respectful conversations about race and equity and use them to guide the discussion. (See Appendix C for an example of racial equity norms.)
- Consider designating a note-taker to capture high-level reflections, questions, and thoughts.
    - Note: Equity conversations may be sensitive in nature, so detailed note-taking—or note-taking at all—may not always be appropriate.
- Leave time for reflection at the end.
    - Consider the following reflection questions:
        - What thoughts did the conversation generate for you?

- o What questions do you still have?
        - o How did the conversation go (what went well, what adjustments might we make for next time)?
        - o Are there action items or things we can do in light of our discussion?
    - o Note: Sometimes next steps or action items may be unclear, meaning teams will have to accept non-closure. This is common in equity work. But engaging in reflection IS equity work and non-closure suggests that more conversations can be had.
- Remember that these conversations should be ongoing, rather than one-off or standalone. Consider how to make these reflective practices and conversations a part of your project cadence.

Reflective Questions for Research Teams

This guide is divided into five sections: Researcher Positionality, Racial Inequity and Its Root Causes, Research Design, Writing and Language, and Dissemination. Each area touches upon key factors that influence one's ability to conduct culturally responsive and racially conscious research that corresponds with important phases of the research process. Teams can use the questions under each heading to individually or collectively reflect on and improve their processes. While each individual and team may use this guide differently, we recommend each take time to reflect on the positionality questions, as they can support all research projects and team members, regardless of phase, design, or team composition. Also, at the end of this guide, we link to resources that may be helpful for individuals and research teams as they explore the questions in the guide and seek potential solutions. (See Appendix D.)

Researcher Positionality

Who are we as a research team and how does that affect what we do?

Our backgrounds and experiences can affect what we see or do not see in the course of a research project. Thus, members of a research team can ask themselves the following questions to surface potential challenges, oversights, and opportunities.

- What backgrounds, experiences, and intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, geographic, economic, etc.) do we carry with us into our research work?
- How might our positionality affect what we are attuned to in research?
- What might our positionality help us pay attention to?
- What might our positionality obscure?
- What additional perspectives within and beyond our organization (e.g., BIPOC scholars, community/insider voices) should we seek out to support us in designing, conducting, reviewing, and interpreting our research?
- How can we involve external groups and community members in strengthening our research questions, design, protocols, findings, and policy recommendations so that we capture diverse and intersectional perspectives, particularly those most impacted? How can we ensure their expertise is highlighted and properly compensated?
- How can we work with others in ways that build authentic relationships rather than transactional ones?

Racial Inequity and Its Root Causes

How can we recognize and acknowledge inequity and its root causes?

Racial inequity and other forms of social stratification are, unfortunately, characteristics of our society and educational systems. This inequity is multifaceted and nuanced and is a result of historical and structural forces. Members of a research team can ask themselves the following

questions to better understand the root causes of inequities that affect the groups and communities associated with a particular study.

- What is the demographic composition of the sample, community, and/or location in the study?
- What data or perspectives do we need to surface about the research sample, location, and communities in our study to understand how inequity is manifested?
- How would members of impacted communities describe the sources and impact of inequities they face?
- What literature should we explore and ground our research in to understand how equity issues might arise?
- What racial disparities exist in educational or other outcomes related to well-being and life opportunities?
- Do disparities exist along other lines of identity or characteristics? Do they overlap with racial inequities?
- What forces have generated or contributed to these disparities (e.g., policies, state/local history)?
- How can we acknowledge the root causes of inequity in our research so that they are not perceived as "just the way things are"?
- How can our policy recommendations get at these root causes?

Research Design

How can we make sure our processes are racially sensitive, culturally responsive, and inclusive?

Patterns related to equity or inequity can be elicited or obscured in research processes depending on how research teams structure data collection/analysis efforts. Members of a research team can ask themselves the following questions to assess if and how their methods are racially conscious and inclusive.

- How does our research design attend to potential sources and manifestations of racial inequity?
- How does our research design consider strategies that reduce inequity and enhance opportunity?
- How does our sample or site selection affect the data we collect or the perspectives we highlight? Who is or is not included? Who or what is missing?
- How do our data collection tools (e.g., interview protocols, observation guides, surveys) or analysis approaches (e.g., coding/codebooks, variables) seek to understand inequities, particularly those that fall along racial lines?
- Are the relevant demographic groups featured or described in our research?

- Are data and demographic variables put together in ways that may obscure patterns? Is disaggregation or descriptive data necessary or possible to call attention to inequities?
- What additional information or data might the research team pursue to examine inequities that arise along racial and other demographic lines to inform next steps?
- Have we planned and held conversations throughout the research process to reflect on the equity implications of our research work and processes?
- Are research tools and processes properly translated to support diverse cultural and linguistic groups?
- How are we planning to engage with research participants in ways that are sensitive to and respectful of community norms, expectations, and knowledge?
- Where can we build in opportunities to seek input from research participants, communities, and/or other relevant external partners on the study's design and approach (e.g., input on key issues/populations, input on research tools)?

Language and Writing

How can we discuss racial equity or inequity in our work? How can the writing process itself be more equitable?

The ways we talk about our research in writing and presentations matters and can help foster or undermine the equity commitments we hold. Members of a research team can ask themselves the following questions to communicate more equitable depictions of marginalized racial groups and communities:

- Are we using deficit-laden or assets-driven language to discuss the communities that face systemic inequities?
- How might we frame our work so that the system shortcomings are identified rather than assuming challenges arise from deficits associated with communities or racial groups?
- What bodies of research are we drawing on, and how do they illuminate attention to race, inequity, or other dimensions of power?
- Are we citing scholars from diverse backgrounds and experiences?
- How does our literature review attend to race, inequity, or other dimensions of power?
- Does our discussion of policies and policy recommendations appropriately articulate racial or racialized dimensions of the problem?
- Are we talking about inequity without acknowledging its root causes or sources?
- Are we comparing groups or characterizing them against a problematic norm or standard?
- How are we ensuring that we don't represent demographic groups as monolithic or convey the views of a few as representative of an entire group or community?
- At which points is it appropriate to seek input from research participants, communities, and other relevant external partners on reports or briefs (e.g., member checks, peer review)?

- How can team members seek input on their use of inclusive and asset-based language from research participants, communities, and other relevant external partners?
- What other processes can be used to ensure that your conclusions ring true to those closest to the central problem/phenomena under study?

Dissemination

How can the way we share our work reinforce our commitment to racial equity and cultural responsiveness?

Being intentional and thoughtful about how and who we engage as we disseminate LPI research can support our commitment to culturally responsive research processes. Members of a research team can ask themselves the following questions to support them in designing and conducting equity-oriented research dissemination:

- What audiences and stakeholders are you accountable to for this project?
- What dissemination methods, outside of the methods traditionally used by LPI (e.g., reports, briefs, webinars) can be used to engage a broader range of audiences?
  - Are there opportunities to extend related writing opportunities (e.g., blogs) to research participants or community members, including those most impacted?
- How can research participants and community members be included in speaking engagements and other research dissemination efforts? Do speakers include those directly impacted by the topic of research (e.g., students, parents) in meaningful ways?
- How do our slides and talking points articulate how racial equity is advanced through research findings and processes?
- How can we uplift how community members and stakeholders can act on the findings and implications of our research?

Appendix A: Sample Agenda

Intro and Purpose of Tool (2 min)

- The Racial Equity Committee has been working to create a tool for centering racial equity in our research methods and processes.
- The guide poses questions that can help research teams engage in "equity pauses" to reflect on how identity, race/racism, and other lines of power and oppression affect their work and how to make their research more asset-oriented and equitable in character.
- There are five sections: Researcher Positionality, Racial Inequity and Its Root Causes, Research Design, Language and Writing, and Dissemination.

Researcher Positionality (18 min)

- What backgrounds, experiences, and intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, geographic, economic, etc.) do we carry with us into our research work?
    - Spend 3 minutes discussing.
    - Share out.
- How can we involve external groups and community members in strengthening our research questions, curriculum design, and policy recommendations so that we capture diverse and intersectional perspectives, particularly those most impacted? How can we ensure their expertise is highlighted and properly compensated?
    - Type into the chat: What partners are we going to work with?
    - How does this connect with our positionality? What perceptions do we have that might shape our partnerships?
    - Whose voice is missing?

Racial Inequity and Its Root Causes (20 min)

- How can we acknowledge the root causes of inequity in our research/curriculum design so that they are not perceived as "just the way things are"?
    - What are the root causes of inequity in school funding?
    - What barriers are there to dismantling these root causes (e.g., political and economic ideology)?
- How does our curriculum introduce and explain these root causes?
    - How do we plan to design curriculum and trainings to speak to different audiences?
    - How do we incorporate different voices and perspectives into the trainings?

Appendix B: Sample Email

Hi, team.

I'm writing to circulate the agenda and prep-work ahead of our meeting this Thursday.

Agenda

- Checking in (5 min)
- Initial discussion of Culturally Responsive and Racially Conscious Research Guide (15 min)
- Discuss our positionality in conducting this research (35 min)

For action prior to the meeting:

- Jot down brief responses to the following questions. We will use these to kick off our meeting.
  1. What backgrounds, experiences, and intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, geographic, economic, etc.) do I bring into this research project?
  2. How does my positionality affect what I am attuned to in this research? What will it help me pay attention to, and what might it obscure?

About the Culturally Responsive and Racially Conscious Research Guide:

In consultation with LPI's leadership team, the REC has been working to create a protocol for centering racial equity in our research. The purpose of the protocol is to help us engage in more culturally responsive and racially conscious practices. The questions in the guide prompt research teams to consider how positionality and implicit bias can influence the various stages of research work and to address the root causes of racism and racial inequity when conducting research. We do not need to discuss every question included in the guide; we can select the questions that are most useful to the team. We will get our feet wet this week by sharing responses to the positionality questions.

I look forward to connecting on Thursday!

Appendix C: Sample Norms to Guide Discussion

Groups should revisit the norms before engaging in discussion and return to them if needed throughout the discussion to support respectful and candid discussion.

- Stay engaged.
- Speak your truth.
- Experience discomfort.
- Expect and accept non-closure.
- Confidentiality.
- Step up, step up.
- 24–48-hour rule.
- Criticize ideas, not people.

Appendix D: Resources

The following resources may be useful as team's engage with the guide's reflection questions. These resources can provide teams or team leads entry points for engaging in a particular topic and provide additional background knowledge.

Resources are organized along the same lines as the research guide and vary in type (e.g., blogs, videos, articles, frameworks). They are meant to support research teams in centering cultural consciousness and racial equity in various stages of the research process. The Racial Equity Committee Research Subcommittee conducted a protracted search for quality, usable resources. We relied on our collective knowledge and judgment to vet and select resources that matched the goals of the guide, while remaining accessible to both new and experienced users.

Researcher Positionality

[Researcher Positionality: A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide](#) | *International Journal of Education* (2020)

This 10-page academic article is written as a guide for student researchers. The article defines positionality, describes how positionality can impact the research process, and explains three ways that researchers can identify their positionality. It also addresses the "insider/outsider" debate, addressing the pros and cons of being an insider/outsider to the topic/group/phenomenon of study.

[Positionality & Research: How Our Identities Shape Inquiry](#) | UCLA Library (2021)

This 3-minute video explains how researcher identities can shape the research process. It provides accessible definitions of terms including positionality and social identity.

[Coming to Terms With Ourselves in Our Research](#) | Language on the Move (2020)

This blog post defines researcher positionality and provides examples from the author's research that illustrate how researcher positionality influences the research process. It also includes useful reflection questions for researchers to help them identify and understand their positionality.

[Race, Culture, and Researcher Positionality: Working Through Dangers Seen, Unseen, and Unforeseen](#) | Educational Researcher (2007)

This article describes the ways in which a lack of awareness of researcher positionality can compromise education research and provides a framework to guide researchers to consider their racial and cultural positionality.

Racial Inequity and Its Root Causes

The Case for Reparations | Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014)

This long-form article provides a detailed history of structured inequality, particularly for Black Americans. Coates lays out the case for reparations, not only in terms of financial repair but also as a means of moral repair and reckoning for the country. It is a compelling read, with references to other great resources that describe the root causes of inequality in America.

Structural Racism Explainer Collection: Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods | Urban Institute (n.d.)

This article outlines the plans, policies, and practices that shaped the development of unequal neighborhoods. It is a short read with good detail, and it includes references to a number of other useful resources.

Racial Inequality in the United States | U.S. Department of Treasury (2022)

In this blog, two staff members of the Department of Treasury describe the history of structural inequality. The blog includes helpful graphs that depict disparities in income, wealth, etc. This is the first of a series of blogs about racial inequality from the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the United States | Economic Policy Institute (n.d.)

This interactive chartbook provides a statistical snapshot of race and ethnicity in the United States, depicting racial/ethnic disparities observed through: (1) population demographics; (2) civic engagement; (3) labor market outcomes; (4) income, poverty, and wealth; and (5) health. The site houses many useful charts and graphs, with the option of viewing and downloading the underlying data.

The 1619 Project Podcasts | 2019

This 6-part podcast series hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones covers some of the key portions of the original 1619 Project. This is a useful way to access this content and learn more about the ways in which slavery shaped present-day inequality and the fight for a more whole democracy. The 1619 Project book may also be purchased from any Black-owned independent bookstore.

Research Design

Stratification Economics: A Moral Policy for Addressing Persistent Group-Based Inequality | Economic Policy Institute (Moore, 2022)

This resource introduces an alternate theoretical frame for understanding inequality. It focuses on the roots of group-based inequality, moving away from individuals and human capital approaches that undergird much research and policy. This resource can inform your team's process of developing both research questions and research design.

[Urban Institute Guide for Racial Equity in the Research Process](#) | Urban Institute (2020)

This is a comprehensive guide to research that includes several sections that may be helpful to consider during the research design phase (See pages 2–5.).

[A Guide to Incorporating a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research](#) | Child Trends (2019)

This is a comprehensive guide on conducting research that includes useful sections focused on research design, data collection, and data analysis (pp. 15–22). It provides guidance on developing equitable research questions, selecting the appropriate research design, deciding who will collect data and how data should be collected, thinking through considerations for qualitative and quantitative analysis, and including community members in the research process.

[Why Am I Always Being Researched?](#) | Chicago Beyond (2019)

This guide is intended to support researchers in recognizing their immense influence and unintended bias in shaping the questions asked and the inputs used to answer them. It offers reflection prompts that ask researchers to consider the risks and benefits of conducting research in communities as well as guidance on how researchers can equitably engage with communities as they design and execute their studies. (See pages 60–78.)

[Race and Ethnicity in Empirical Analysis: How We Should Interpret the Race Variable](#) | Economic Policy Institute (Logan, 2022)

This guide, though focused primarily on quantitative research, raises important points about what racial disparities and making comparisons along racial lines can really tell us. It outlines problems posed by definitions of race in available government data sets and discusses the ways that race is typically encountered in quantitative research and analysis. It discusses the limits of interpreting race coefficients (i.e., interpreting the effect or predictive power of race in measured disparities) and the additional considerations needed to contextualize findings.

[SREE Researchers of Color Brownbag: QuantCrit](#) | Wendy Castillo (2022)

In this video, Wendy Castillo provides an overview of QuantCrit (Quantitative Critical Race Theory), a rapidly developing approach that seeks to challenge and improve the use of statistical data in social research by applying the insights of Critical Race Theory (CRT). This presentation of QuantCrit is intended to provide concrete strategies for more critical quantitative research and explore a range of questions that prompt users to be engaged critics, weighing the plausibility of the study, and questioning how the material is produced, analyzed, and presented.

Language and Writing

[Talking About Racial Equity in Education](#) | Frameworks Institute (2019)

This resource provides a high-level overview of strategies that research has shown to be effective in building deeper understanding of structural inequities and support for meaningful change.

[A Language Guide to Center Racial Equity in Education Research](#) | Early Learning Network (2021)

This guide includes reflections on some of the widely used language that may perpetuate prejudices and impede progress toward dismantling inequities in education and suggests more specific, person-centered alternatives.

[Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#) | Racial Equity Tools (2021)

This glossary contains definitions of common language related to racism and racial equity (e.g., critical race theory, structural racism, and systemic racism), along with sources for the definitions.

[Equity Language Guide](#) | Washington State Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities (2018)

This language guide contains definitions of equity-related terms, as well as examples and considerations for usage. It also suggests being explicit about racism and other forms of oppression as the underlying causes for inequities that show up in our data.

[Inclusive Language Guidelines](#) | American Psychological Association (2023)

These guidelines contain definitions of terms related to equity and power and point to "terms to avoid and suggested alternatives" to support the use of inclusive language when discussing marginalized groups.

[Inclusive Language Guide](#) | California State University, East Bay (2022)

This resource provides guidance for inclusive writing on gender and sexual identity, race and ethnicity, people with disabilities, and citizenship status. It provides definitions of broader terms as well as examples of non-inclusive language and positive and affirming phrasing that can be used as alternatives.

Dissemination

[Urban Institute Guide for Racial Equity in the Research Process](#) | Urban Institute (2020)

Pages 6–7 of this guide contain questions to consider when disseminating research, including written products, events, communication plans, and outreach. Considerations include whether reports are accessible to the people being studied and how to invite a diverse audience to events.

[Why Am I Always Being Researched?](#) | Chicago Beyond (2019)

This comprehensive guide is intended to build shared power and equity into research processes. Pages 80–82 elevate important questions that research teams can consider as they prepare to share results and disseminate their work.

[A Guide to Incorporating a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research](#) | Child Trends (2019)

This is a comprehensive guide to conducting research that includes a section on research dissemination (pp. 23–26). It includes ideas and priorities to consider about audience, messaging, presentation, and the sustainability of research. In particular, the authors make some recommendations to ensure the research influences policy and is useful to the communities centered in the research. Finally, the guide includes links to other resources that may help with language selection when talking about race and racism.