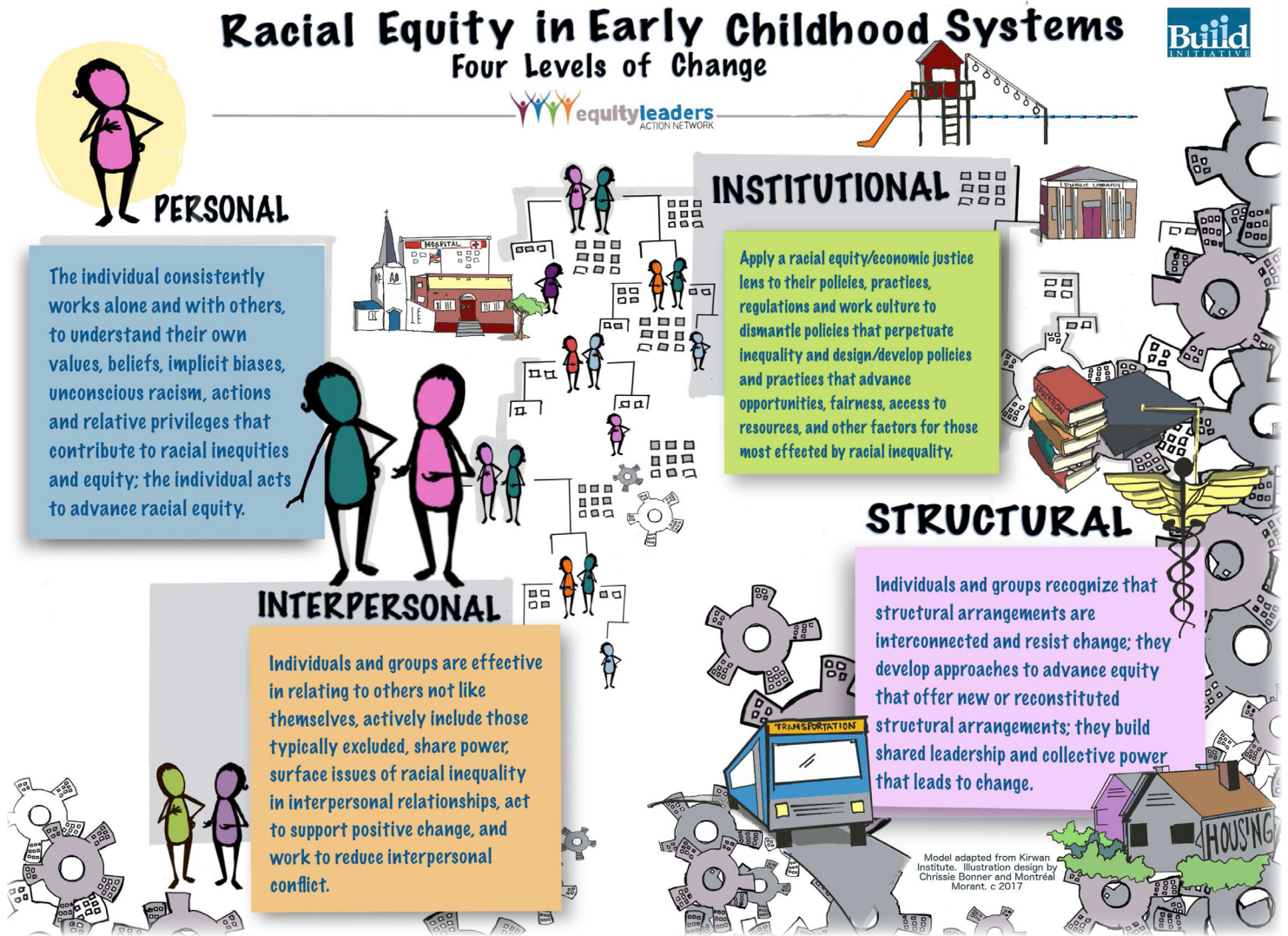


IMPLICATIONS FOR RACIAL EQUITY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: Lessons from the Equity Leaders Action Network



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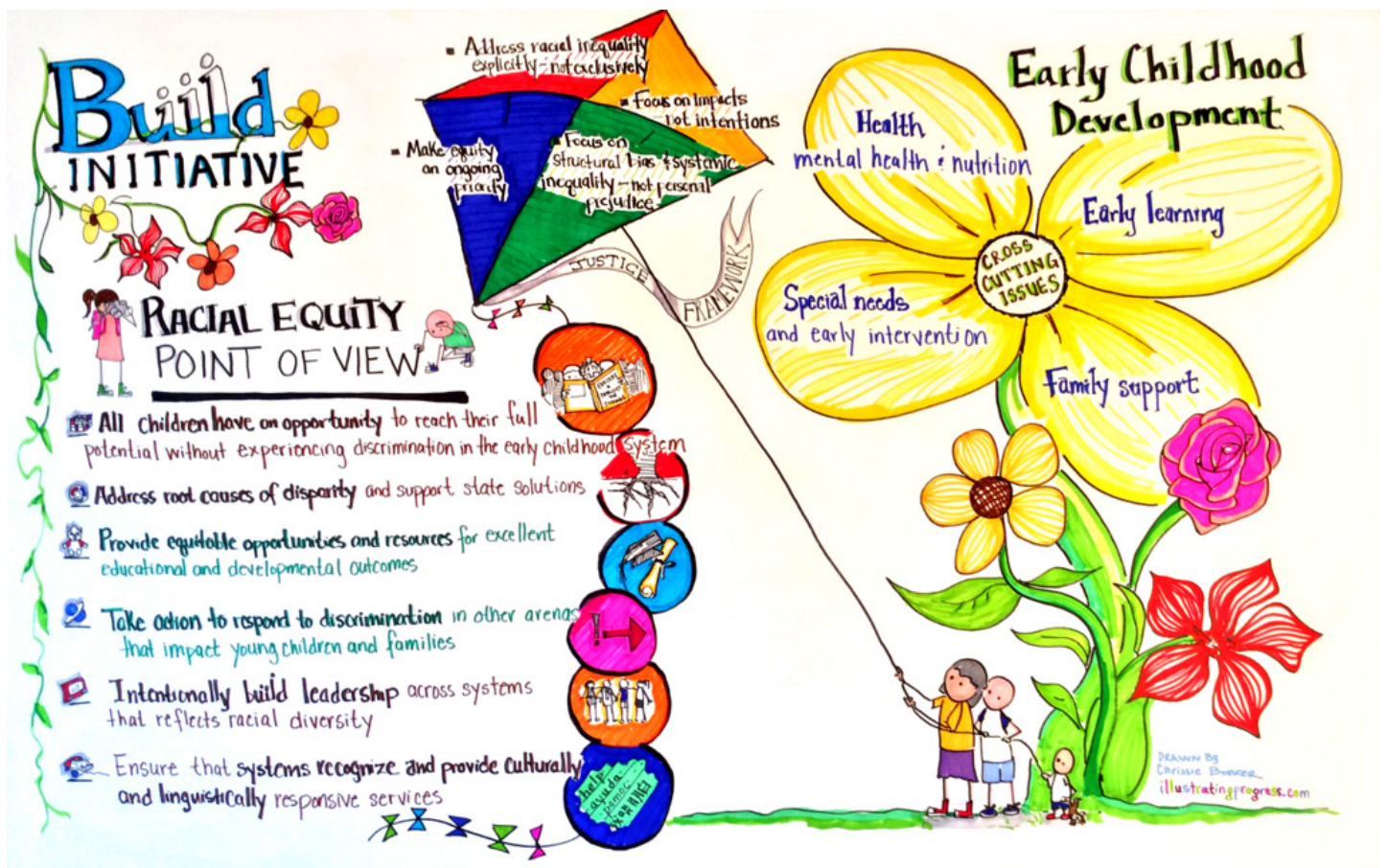
The work of the ELAN Fellowship is grounded in an urgent desire to support leaders with responsibility for the programs, services, and initiatives designed to support young children, their families, and communities. Leaders selected for the Fellowship have an opportunity to shift policy, practice, and programs to ensure benefits for racially diverse or marginalized children and families. BUILD and the faculty especially appreciate the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, without whom this journey would not have been possible. It is due to the program officers at Kellogg – who believed that the Fellowship faculty could work with a variety of leaders, supporting each to act within their roles, responsibilities, and authority – that the Fellows are now expanding their impact through networks within the early childhood system.

Introduction

Early childhood systems in the United States are not racially equitable or just. They must be rebuilt or reinvented by leaders committed to racial equity and justice. Many system leaders are committed to racial equity and justice, but this commitment alone is not sufficient. Leaders must be willing to act in accordance with their knowledge of the ecology in which childhood inequities exist and the profound contribution racially equitable programs, services, and initiatives within early childhood systems can make to improving children's lives and family well-being.

Racial equity leaders for early childhood systems change are individuals who listen and respond to community leaders, children, their families, and the workforce. Leaders work together with other people, institutions, and structures to ensure that our country's youngest children and their families have all the resources and opportunities they need for optimal development, and that disparities due to race, class, and other forms of oppression are identified, targeted, and dismantled.

Leaders may come from within or outside traditional and formal early childhood systems that support children and the adults who care for them (e.g., they may work in health, mental health, early learning, child welfare, housing, family support, economic support, or nutrition). The leaders may be state, tribal, local, or federal directors, program administrators, legislators, advocates, community activists, labor organizers, parents, faith-leaders, and others united in a common cause—eliminating structural and institutional sources of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization that can derail the early development of children and family well-being. What they must share is a profound awareness that institutional and structural racialization is not inevitable but is created and maintained by what societies and individuals choose to do and not do, see or ignore, and change or sustain.



Racial equity leaders are willing to use their roles, influence, authority, and power to speak up, challenge, and intentionally shift, within institutions and structures, behaviors that harm and practices that exclude racially diverse individuals or groups. These practices are apparent within programs, policies, practices, and systems. Equity leaders work for democratic and inclusive processes that lead to substantive, measurable changes that significantly improve child and family well-being. Racial equity leaders recognize that early childhood systems, and the many programs, services, and initiatives that are a part of systems, currently do not sufficiently advance equality, justice, and fairness for all children and the adults who care for them. The design and implementation of policies, practices, and programs may even exacerbate inequities and marginalization. Leaders are committed to acting with intentionality and purpose to increase opportunities, remove barriers, and distribute resources to create more intentional systems, policies, programs, and practices so that race, place, and class do not determine access and quality of services, programs, and initiatives that support child and family well-being.

The architects of systems change for racial equity must be supported and operate within a network to share opportunity and risk. Leaders utilize their leadership roles, authority, influence, and responsibility to take actions within individual programs, services, and initiatives and work together as an early childhood system for shared purposes. Systems change requires cultural change within complex interconnected departments, divisions, and other entities in which power and racialization may be entrenched and can challenge personal and interpersonal relationships. Racial equity leaders need to develop or refine their ability to manage ambiguity, uncertainty, resistance, hostility, and overt and covert microaggression and bias. They must also be able to commit to ongoing personal change and growth during which they confront their own contradictions, prejudices, and arrogance, among other challenges. Racial equity leaders must cultivate humility, forbearance, and fearlessness within a stance of inquiry, for they alone do not have all the answers nor are they the only people with answers. This is no small task. These leaders essentially can, through their positions of authority and influence, apply knowledge, skills, and processes that will drive systems change and make space for new voices and information, but they need and deserve support to do so. Leaders need to build and operate within a network to advance change, as they will likely be unsuccessful at advancing significant change on their own.

Our current early learning, health, home visiting, child welfare, employment services, economic supports, and other child- and family-serving programs reproduce inequality. This is due, in part, to historical policies and practices, inadequate funding, siloed programs and systems, fragmented delivery models, and lack of responsive feedback loops

Leaders need to build and operate within a network to advance change, as they will likely be unsuccessful at advancing significant change on their own.

RACIAL JUSTICE

“The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice—or racial equity—goes beyond “anti-racism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.”

RACIAL EQUITY

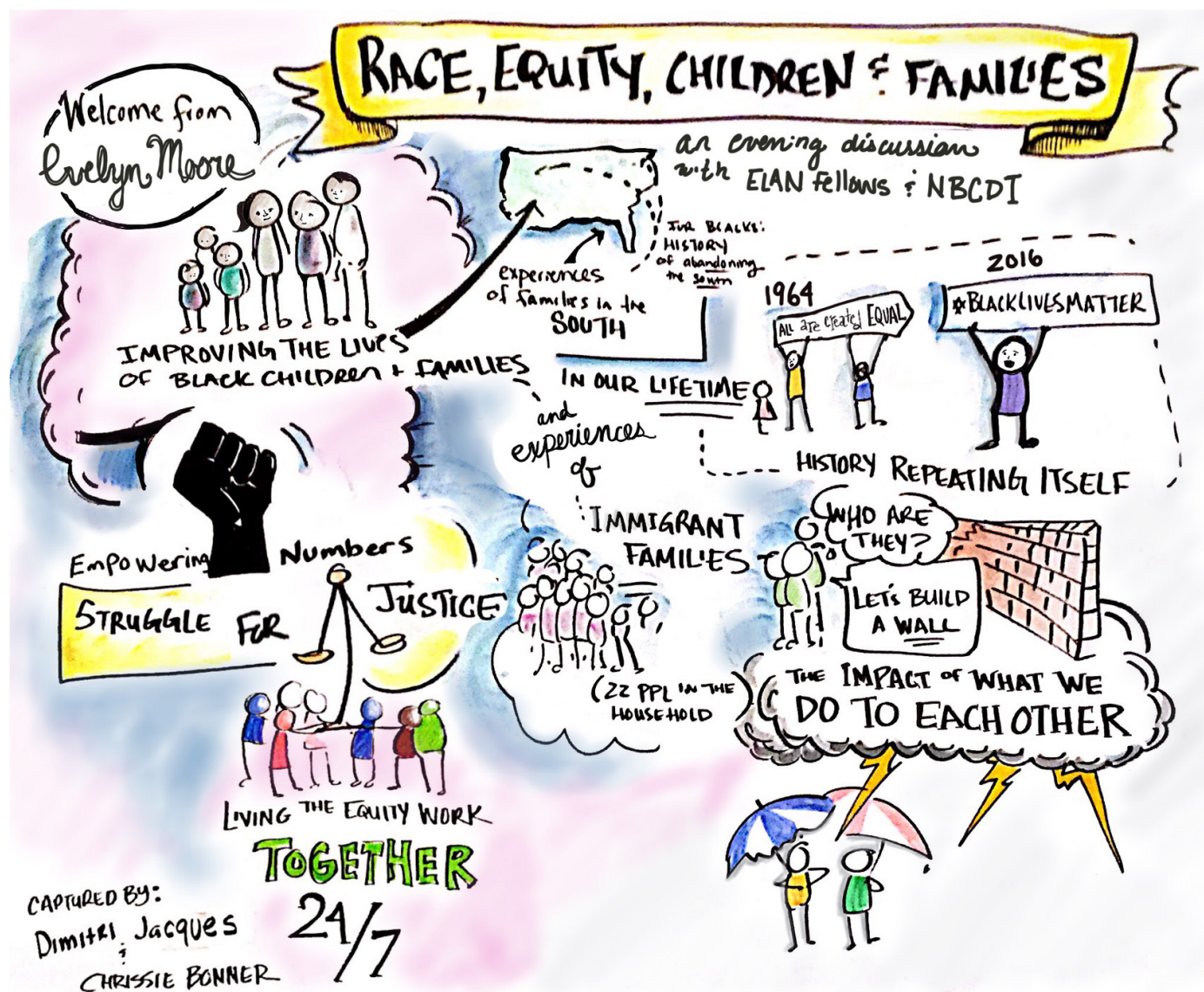
Part of racial justice. It involves working to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes “elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them.”

Source: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

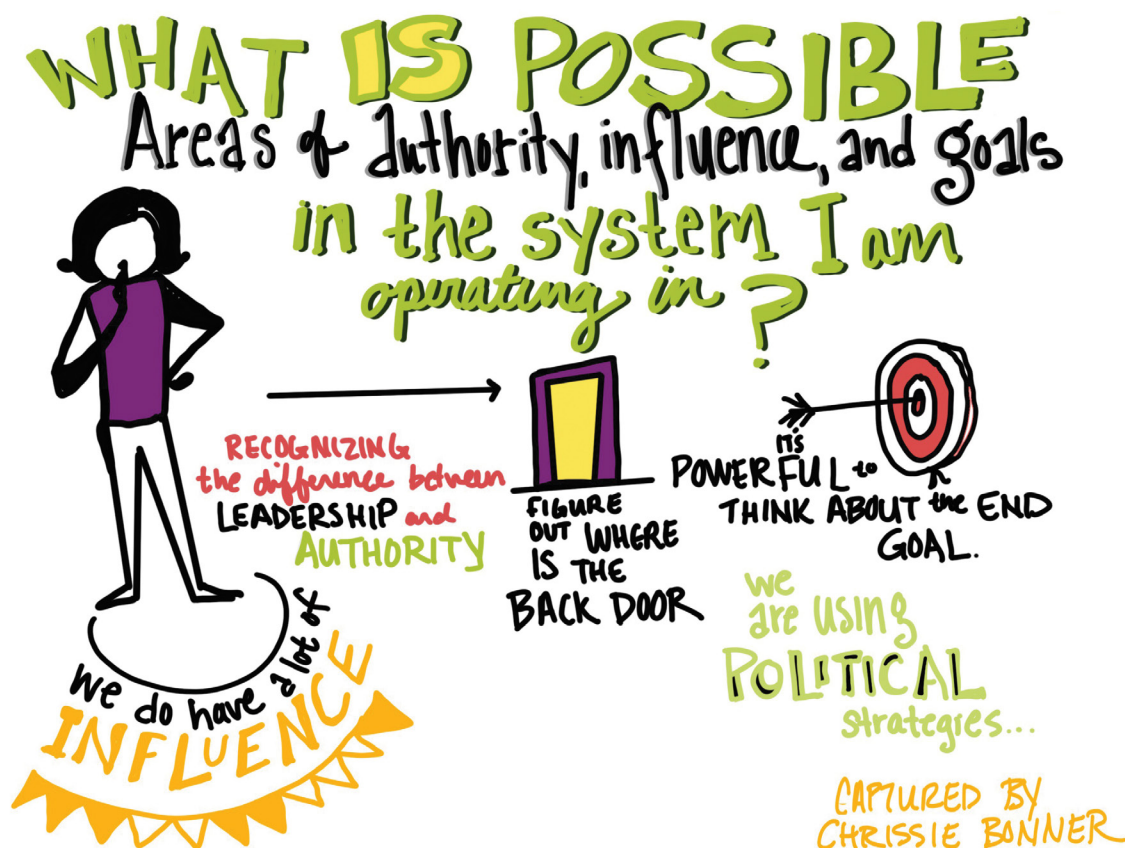
with the young children, families, workforce, or community leaders that the programs are intended to benefit. In addition, few leaders systematically use racial equity processes to identify or address inequities and this leaves them in place. Little research or anecdotal evidence exists that suggests early childhood program or systems leaders have received sufficient and sustained professional leadership training, coaching, mentoring, or other leadership supports that have included racial justice and equity leadership principles, processes, skills, or personal capacity building.

Often there is a lack of leadership acting intentionally to address inequities by removing barriers and increasing opportunities for Black, Native American, Latino/a/e, immigrant, or other underserved, marginalized populations. Increasingly, however, early childhood leaders are recognizing how inequality is reproduced and maintained. Leaders also increasingly recognize that it may be possible within current state, tribal, and county systems to begin to: 1) move purposefully toward greater racial equity within the services and programs they provide; 2) significantly improve a single system (e.g., early learning, home visiting, early intervention, child welfare) by using racial equity processes, including listening to and responding to children and their families; and 3) leverage equitable change for children and families through cross-systems collaborations (such as early learning and care, and child welfare or early learning and home visiting or health).

The leadership of the Equity Leaders Action Network (ELAN), a program of the BUILD Initiative, presents in this publication our current thinking on how best to prepare racial equity leaders committed to justice, anti-racism, fairness, and inclusion in early childhood systems. The ELAN program, which has been funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation



and now also the Ballmer Group, is designed to support a diverse cadre of leaders (e.g., American Indian, Asian American, Black, Latino/a/e, Pacific Islander, immigrant, White) able and willing to build racially equitable early childhood systems, institutions, programs, and services.¹ There were many lessons learned in designing and implementing the ELAN. The energy, wisdom, and collaborative spirit racial equity fellows and faculty brought to the ELAN community helped enormously to refine, amend, and improve what we learned about ourselves, each other, and how to carry out racial justice and equity leadership development. This document reflects our collective learning gleaned from three years of creative work within the ELAN learning community. In it we describe foundational concepts that we believe need to shape racial equity leadership efforts, core racial equity leadership competencies, and racial equity leadership capacities that need to be nurtured in racial equity leaders. The ELAN is designed to support the development of racial equity leaders committed to listening and responding to families, communities, and the workforce. It acts as a foundation for building early childhood systems, institutions, and programs with others that are intentionally equitable, anti-racist, and of high quality and reflect a society in which all children, families, and communities are equally valued, included, and supported in developing to their full potential.²



¹The inaugural ELAN racial equity leadership cohort (2017-2020) was made up of 38 racial equity leaders representing 22 states and Guam. It included 14 African Americans, 12 Whites, 6 Latino/a/e Americans, 2 American Indians, 1 Pacific Islander, 1 Iranian American, of whom 34 were women and 3 were men. Ultimately, 28 racial equity leaders completed the 3-year program. All racial equity leaders managed, operated, or directed tribal, state, or county programs, services, or initiatives that served children (prenatal to age five), families, and communities. Leaders were selected who could take action to modify, remediate, or change policies, practices, or programs that exacerbate inequities through existing state and federal resources. They had influence over distribution networks for programs and services or the policies, practices, or regulations that govern implementation and access.

²This work is particularly focused on early childhood system change for racial equity and the improvement of developmental, health, educational, and other critical outcomes for currently and historically marginalized children and families. We recognize that others already doing racial equity leadership development may find their own experiences reflected in this document and may find it helpful for thinking through their own challenges and experiences. They also may have learned other lessons that we have not. Whatever readers' responses are, we are eager to hear about your work and learnings and hope you will share your work with us.

Five Foundational Concepts that Frame Racial Equity Leadership Development

Developing racial equity leaders in early childhood systems has one overarching goal: ***to ensure that those systems significantly contribute to the optimal development and well-being of currently and historically marginalized children, families, and communities and do not further disadvantage them.*** Despite deep social and economic inequality in the US, 90 percent of Americans believe that the government should do everything it can to ensure equality of opportunity.³

Currently, no state in the US can demonstrate that its early childhood systems (e.g., early learning, health, mental health, nutrition, family support) deliver equal opportunities for all racially and economically marginalized young children who need these services, or even most of these children. Yet, over 100 years of early childhood science (e.g., neuroscience, education, infant health, nutrition), most of it conducted in the US, has clearly established the singular importance of the first five years of life, the developmental threats posed by poverty and racialization, and the benefit to society of investing in comprehensive, high-quality early childhood programs and services. Federal early education programs, such as Head Start, maternal-child health care programs such as Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting, Title V, Medicaid, and nutrition programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among others, have shown they benefit children and families, yet these programs often do not benefit marginalized children and their families.

To address the apparent contradiction *between structural racialization and inequality, early childhood science, and early childhood systems that may perpetuate marginalization*, leadership development efforts must focus on five foundational concepts central to leaders' effectiveness in addressing the goal of systems change. *Early childhood program leaders work together to ensure programs significantly contribute to the optimal development and well-being of currently and historically underserved or marginalized children, families, and communities and do not further disadvantage them.*

FIVE FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

1. Understanding structural racialization and marginalized children, families, and communities.
2. Advancing racial equity as a process, through systems, programs, services, and initiatives.
3. Thinking and acting systemically.
4. Advancing racial equity through intentional informed strategic actions.
5. Networking, collaborating, and partnering robustly, in a manner responsive to those individuals, families, and communities early childhood policies and programs are designed to serve and support.

Each foundational concept relates to a core competency racial equity leaders must develop.

³Stiglitz, J.E. (Feb. 16, 2013). Equal opportunity, Our national myth. The Great Divide Series [Blog], New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/16/equal-opportunity-our-national-myth/>

Structural Racialization and Marginalized Children, Families, and Communities

Structural racialization is the linchpin of our country's long and tortured history of racial oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. Cultural, economic, political, and legally sanctioned acts of colonialization, genocide of Indigenous people, slavery, Jim Crow laws, internment camps, draconian immigration policies, mass incarceration, de facto and de jure segregation, voter suppression, and police brutality have sustained inequities and created disparities since before our nation's founding. Inequities are held in place by individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural acts of commission or omission. This problematic historical legacy continues to contribute to current imbalances in the distribution of power, economic resources, and opportunities.

Structural racialization influences individual and intergroup relationships, interactions, and outcomes. It also shapes child-, community- and family-serving institutions (e.g., policies, practices, regulations, and programs) and structures (e.g., laws, interaction between institutions). Structural racialization is not "racism," which is often associated with

the behaviors of individuals (e.g., covert and overt racial prejudice) towards others or ideologies (e.g., beliefs of racial superiority and inferiority) held by individuals. Neither is "race," a term used to refer to a social construct with no scientific merit, but with significant social, political, and economic power because it is used to divide people into groups based on perceived observable differences. It is a process that resists change, in part, because of interlocking structures including policies, laws, and rules that can be especially difficult to uproot or reform. These interlocking structures can act as barriers that maintain the marginalization of some groups from social and economic resources and benefits that others enjoy. For example, school segregation, including in preschools, has been particularly difficult to dismantle despite federal and state laws that do not allow discrimination based on race in education. Since the landmark 1954 US Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), US schools have become more desegregated, not less. Structural racialization helps leaders understand how, despite policies and laws, systemic racialized marginalization is maintained through other interlocking barriers, including in the examples of segregated schools, state and local school funding tax policies, lax enforcement of sanctions against realtor practices that steer Alaskan Natives, American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Latinos/as/e, Pacific Islanders, and immigrants of color to certain neighborhoods and not others, banking practices related to lending that disproportionately favor White middle-class customers compared to buyers from all the populations named above, and homeowner covenants or condominium agreements that may allow communities to exclude the populations they do not wish to have as neighbors. All these factors and others can shape which children attend schools and whether those schools are racially segregated. To address the issue of segregated schools, many of these barriers to desegregated schools would need to be eliminated, and not replaced with other barriers.

In their racial equity work for systems change, leaders must be able to sufficiently understand structural racialization to target changes in policies, practices, or regulations that disproportionately and negatively affect some groups of children or families compared to others. Segregation, disinvestment in children and communities, truncated opportunity

The ELAN uses the term **STRUCTURAL RACIALIZATION** to refer to:

"...the dynamic process that creates cumulative and durable inequalities based on race. Interactions between individuals are shaped by and reflect underlying and often hidden structures that shape biases and create disparate outcomes even in the absence of racist actors or racist intentions. The presence of structural racialization is evidenced by consistent differences in outcomes in education attainment, family wealth, and even life span."⁴

⁴powell, j.a., Heller, C. C., & Bundalji, C. (2011). Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary. The California Endowment. Retrieved from: https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/TCE_Star_WP_Training%20material%20Final%20Flint.pdf

pathways, the prenatal-to-prison pipeline, unsafe housing, parental employment in low-wage jobs, lack of access to quality health care, lack of access to quality nutrition, safe public spaces, transportation and disproportionality in outcomes, poor-quality early childhood programs, and underpaid staff are all manifestations of structural racialization. These factors and others disproportionately contribute to the marginalization of Alaskan Natives, American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Latinos/as/e, Pacific Islanders, and immigrants of color. Marginalization and exclusion of children, families, and communities from resources and opportunities associated with life success (e.g., excellent highly resourced schools, health insurance and health care access, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, access to high-quality foods, access to libraries and museums) create pathways distinctly different from the opportunity pathways of White middle-class children. These opportunity pathways often are described in racialized language, such as “good schools” versus “bad schools” or “good neighborhoods” versus “dangerous neighborhoods” that convey meaning without the necessity of referring to race.

Leadership programs that help racial equity leaders understand how structural racialization influences child, family, and community marginalization also need to help them examine how it has shaped their lives through processes of privilege, marginalization, inclusion, and exclusion.

This examination is necessary because US society and culture is significantly racialized, and racially segregated individuals can come to the work of racial equity without having engaged in systematic self-development about how racialization has influenced them. This personal development work focused on structural racialization is an essential part of ELAN work, and racial equity leadership development in general.

ELAN helped give me that confidence, understanding, and consideration that, when I have conversations about young children and children of color in my state - 60 percent of young children are children of color - to ask, “Are we really focusing on making sure policies we are developing are not negatively impacting specific populations?”

– ELAN Fellow

Advancing Racial Equity

Racial equity leaders in programs and services within the early childhood systems seek to fundamentally change how those systems, e.g., health, early care and education, housing, employment, and food and nutrition, contribute to child development, family well-being, and system quality, accountability, and effectiveness. Leaders work together to determine shared benefit for marginalized children, their families, and communities to attain broad outcomes rather than the often-siloed individual programmatic outcomes. They are committed to systems, programs, and services in which there are no longer two opportunity pathways, one predominately for middle-class White children and another for children of color. Rather, racial equity leaders seek for all children of color and in poverty the following set of equity conditions:

- Every young child who is Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian American, Black, Latino/a/e, Pacific Islander, in poverty, of diverse abilities, of any gender and sexual expression, regardless of immigration status or circumstance, has everything needed to develop optimally.
- Resources, burdens, and rewards are distributed fairly across groups and communities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately maintained and not further disadvantaged.
- Interlocking sources of structural oppression are identified, uprooted, and dismantled.

- Policies, programs, and services designed to support young children and their families are fair and just.⁵
- Society is transformed, restructured, and redesigned with the full activism and leadership of all communities, especially those with a history of oppression and exclusion.

Racial equity leadership programs support leaders to adopt racial equity processes to change systems. These processes are intended to help leaders in early childhood departments, divisions, systems, advocacy, programs, and services to use strategies to disrupt racially inequitable policies and practices and to eliminate disparities and disproportionality. Leadership programs can support racial equity leaders to apply their knowledge of structural racialization at the institutional level to uncover and disrupt systemic, institutional, and structural policies, regulations, and practices that may contribute to disproportionality.

Leadership programs also can support leaders in recognizing the root causes of disparities and how to use tailored strategies to achieve universal goals and collaborate across programs for maximum benefit, e.g., support parents who live in communities with limited opportunities to gain employment and create access to high-quality early care and learning so they can work.

Additionally, leadership programs can support leaders in interrogating their own institution, department, or division about policies and practices related to programs and services. Leaders also should explore the intersectionality of their child- and family-serving programs and services with other programs and services such as health, education, child welfare, housing, and employment. Programs should be provided in the children and families' first language (if it is not English) and geographic location (especially when families live in areas with limited transportation options) and be respectful of the culture and ethnicity of the families. Racial equity leadership programs can enhance the ability of leaders to work across systems (e.g., early learning and child welfare, health and early learning, employment and early learning, food and nutrition, housing, transportation, child care, and employment) to align programs, develop shared achievable goals, share data and strategies, and build shared accountability.

...We will now have a whole department dedicated to early childhood focusing on prenatal to five, looking at preventing preterm birth, working with our department of public health, child, and maternal health, working with education—cross-system, and making it really purposeful with the intention of being anti-racist. Our strategic planning, our outcomes framework, our evaluation, all of it is centered on racial equity. This is the way of being able to put these things into action, all the learning from the ELAN.”

– ELAN Fellow

Advancing racial equity involves leaders using racial equity processes to intentionally address equity challenges present in early childhood systems and to act. Acting to change systems, policies, programs, and practices is critical if early childhood systems are to become more equitable. Leadership programs can provide a safe space for leaders to explore how they can use their current role, responsibility, authority, and influence to tackle equity challenges, build networks, change narratives, and create effective accountability systems and processes. These programs can also offer racial equity leaders' tools (e.g., definitions of shared language, protocols, communication skills, racial equity frameworks) that leaders can use in their own workplaces.

⁵Falk, J., Hampton, G. R., Hodgkinson, A. T., Parker, K. & Morris, A. (1993). Social Equity and the Urban Environment: Report to the Commonwealth Environment Protection Agency. Canberra: Commonwealth Environment Protection Authority, Commonwealth Government Printer.

As noted in the seminal work of John A. Powell,⁶ racial equity leadership programs must encourage racial equity leaders to think about evaluation as an opportunity to learn about complex systems, how parts interact, where to best leverage change, and how they respond to change. Systems resist change and strategies cannot be singly focused on one-time interventions. Evaluation must focus on the racial effects in the short, intermediate, and long term and highlight both intended and unintended consequences. Systems leaders for equity must use a wide range of system methods for evaluation and program design. The goals and questions evaluation attempts to answer, and the data used to answer those questions, all come from the same systems, cultures, and assumptions that create and reproduce disparities. There must be intentionality in questioning assumptions, broadening the voice of evaluators, and the methods of getting answers. Racial equity leaders must examine how they might build inclusive evaluation and assessment collaboratives of partners and allies, including individuals from communities most affected by racial disparities, and the importance of acknowledging the unequal nature of the relationships among those involved in evaluation (e.g., community members, agency staff, funders, formally trained researchers).



⁶powell, j. a. (2010). "Systems Thinking, Evaluation and Racial Justice," Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Justice. Critical Issues Forum Marking Progress: Movement Toward Racial Justice, Vol. 3. Retrieved from: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/precif.pdf>

Thinking and Acting Systemically: The Role of Early Childhood Systems in Racial Equity

Leadership programs for racial equity in early childhood systems recognize the characteristics and work culture often present in state, county, or tribal early childhood divisions, departments, programs, and services. An early childhood state, tribal, or county system is a vehicle for collaborating across multiple programs, services, departments, and divisions to organize decision making, implementation, and access to a range of supports designed to benefit young children and their families. Early childhood systems can support aligned and integrated action that builds public will; develops and retains a skilled workforce; provides infrastructure and financing opportunities; aligns standards, policies, and regulations; offers continuous learning and improvement; and engages partners, e.g., regional and community partnerships. Early childhood systems are also a means by which to distribute public resources in health, early learning, child welfare and child protection, and family economic supports such as TANF, WIC, or SNAP.

Programs and services that support early childhood growth and development must disproportionately focus on and be tailored to benefit communities or groups of families and children who experience marginalization, disparities, and inequities to ensure they can access and benefit from state, tribal, or federal resources. But early childhood systems and the individuals who work in them may reflect the racial and social class order of the larger society and, as such, may reinforce and reproduce inequities due to race, ethnicity, gender, and ability. Leaders may feel pressured by past practices and traditional ways of offering and distributing resources which may excluded marginalized communities. Leadership programs can help racial equity leaders recognize and confront their own contradictions as they emerge in their work. Racial equity leaders focus both on how systems reproduce racial disproportionality and on the potential of leaders to understand and intentionally act to build equitable and high-quality early childhood systems.

The complexity of state early childhood systems can be daunting. Early childhood systems are driven by multiple funding streams, policies, and regulations. The government's work is siloed and divided across various departments, employees, and divisions. Leaders are driven by compliance, often meeting transactional requirements that reflect minimum expectations. State leaders are also pulled toward short-term versus long-term goals and often act to steer clear of charges of fraud, waste, or abuse. Many leaders lead with a scarcity mindset. For leaders to engage in transformative efforts, their commitment cannot be to narrow or minimal grant requirements nor can they reflect only short-term goals; transformative leaders for equity must focus on broader and longer-term outcomes.

Some states have begun to bundle two or more services related to health or early learning into one agency. However, only in rare instances do two or more agencies, e.g., health, early learning, child welfare, maternal health, and economic

Identify that one person who can get you in or carry the message for you.

That is something that I learned and did for several years, even beyond my fellowship. There was this mobilization among folks who were lower in the ranks like me, and then getting to that one senior vice president who would be able to [take the message to the] executive team to bolster this, put funding behind it, put some investment to do the training and learning.

– ELAN Fellow

Get in the habit of thinking about structural racism and other forms of oppression as being systemic and as being able to operate without their being racist actors.

– ELAN Fellow

development, work together on behalf of a group of people beyond the boundaries of a specific grant or a short-term objective that is usually driven by one member of the partnership. Departments, divisions, or agencies working together can be intentional in planning and implementing the distribution of funds, programs, and services to ensure they are distributing and designing programs, services, and initiatives tailored to address racial inequity and meet the needs of marginalized communities to reduce inequities.

To remediate inequities, racial equity leaders are supported to foster collective leadership in early childhood systems and build cross-sector networks. Racial equity leaders are expected to act within existing groups and networks in their state, and to become aware of the assumptions that drive institutional actions. In addition, racial equity leaders are supported in examining their own personal and interpersonal capacities to address issues of racialization in systems and their work, especially in relation to building and sustaining relationships within networks, collaborations, and communities. In the beginning of leadership development, leaders may take for granted many of the ways programs and initiatives operate and their specific processes and practices. Racial equity leaders must explore program requirements and regulations to determine if, as designed, they achieved the outcomes for specific populations of individuals intended to benefit from state and local resources.

Racial equity leaders may need to be supported to see the vast nature of the early childhood system and the interconnectedness of programs, services, and initiatives within the government and the opportunities they provide to address root causes of inequity. Racial equity leadership development must foster reflection and the desire to co-create solutions to remediate inequity based on the input and experiences of specific populations and program requirements. The ultimate goal of the ELAN is to nurture an awareness in racial equity leaders regarding their own agency and how intentional actions with others can tailor sustainable solutions to racially diverse children and their families and increase child and family well-being through access to state programs, services, and initiatives.

Intentional and Informed Strategic Action to Advance Racial Equity

Racial equity leadership programs must make visible the long history of and current struggles for human, civil, and economic rights, self-determination, and power of multiple populations in the US. These struggles for justice and inclusion of Blacks, Latinos/as/e, American Indians, Asian Americans, Alaskan Natives, Pacific Islanders, immigrants of color, LGBTQAI, and others provide powerful lessons to racial equity leaders. ELAN leaders seek to change the narrative and leaders' notion that populations do not have the capacity to act. We reinforce the roles that the communities play working on their own behalf to ensure safe housing, clean water, education, and good health for themselves and their children.

Taking action is a key leadership capacity. A primary objective of the racial equity leadership efforts is to support the personal and interpersonal development of leaders to position themselves to act within their institutions for institutional change and with other institutions for structural change. Taking action requires development of interpersonal relationships with children, families, and communities. Racial equity leadership programs can provide opportunities for racial equity leaders to engage with leaders who worked in communities and a variety of settings and

ELAN was personal. I did a lot of reflection on what I did and did not understand.

– ELAN Fellow


You learn a lot ... about how you can impact the system and you can implement that.

We get stuck in the planning and ELAN really pushed us to implement, which I really appreciated.

– ELAN Fellow

who may have led movements to create change that benefited specific populations. Racial equity leaders should also be introduced to children and families for the purpose of listening to their desires and experiences in working with many and varied institutions and structures as they seek to raise their children and create a response.

State leaders have authority, responsibility, and influence over funding distribution, programs, services, and initiatives. They can work with other departments, programs, and divisions that benefit children and their families to interpret and modify policy, establish practice within the workforce through skills, knowledge, and abilities, and determine the need for modification of programs and services that support families in meeting their goals for their children. Furthermore, as state leaders often make the decisions about rules, regulations, policies, and practices, an opportunity exists at each of these decision points to tailor distribution systems, programs, services, and initiatives to meet the needs of these families and children, thereby reducing inequities.



I started ELAN focused on school readiness issues for Blacks and Latinos, which is a key issue in our county. I was able to get the county to adopt an outcomes framework for children prenatal to five. But it wasn't done alone, and this is part of the work, being able to be collaborative and getting other folks to see what you see in a way that gives them influence over what systems they have.

– ELAN Fellow

Networking, Collaborating, and Partnering with Individuals, Families, and Communities Most Affected by Early Childhood Programs

Alaskan Natives, American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Latinos/as/e, Pacific Islanders, and immigrants of color experience poverty and racial and economic injustice and have historically fought and currently fight against structural and institutional barriers and oppression. Listening to their voices promotes an understanding of what state programs, services, or initiatives can do to encourage enduring positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. For a variety of reasons (e.g., implicit bias, breadth of geographic responsibility, scarcity mindset), state leaders may not be able to hear their voices or understand the value of listening to the voices, perspectives, and experiences of those they serve. Our purpose is to elevate the voices of Black, Native American, Latino/a/e, immigrant, and other people of color and recognize the importance of listening to and learning from those individuals who are furthest from opportunity, marginalized, or underserved.

Racial equity leaders might operate from old assumptions and past experiences about service distribution systems, practices in the delivery of services, or the interaction of rules, regulations, and policies. Leadership programs may need to help them integrate and seek out beneficiary voice, and to recognize it as key to their practice. Understanding families and community perspectives and opinions may help them question old assumptions and allow racial equity leaders to live their shared commitment to every child and family.

Racial equity leaders often plan, design, and implement policies, programs, services, and initiatives based on what they have heard from children, their families, and the workforce in the past. A challenge for them may be that they fear if they begin a relationship with these individuals, they will be held accountable, as leaders, to solve every issue shared. Further, they fear they may not be able to directly address each problem. Racial equity leaders also may understand that change in government takes time and that, therefore, many issues raised will take longer to remediate. Leadership programs support leaders to overcome these barriers and engage in listening to and interacting with individuals who utilize services and programs, providing an opportunity to reinforce the importance of the network to address inequities.

Leadership programs also help leaders see the efficacy and agency families and communities have for themselves as well as the goals they have for their children.


The efforts of leadership programs to engage with families, caregivers, and the workforce are grounded in action. Having racial equity leaders develop interpersonal relationships with groups likely to experience disproportionality, marginalization, or persistent poverty or that reside in environments without resources, (e.g., safe and affordable child care and housing, water, transportation, libraries, museums, health care institutions) is an essential step. Through site visits, ELAN racial equity leaders explore the condition of communities with limited public structures (e.g., parks, sidewalks, and streets) or that must travel long distances to get resources (e.g., groceries). These experiences have provided them with opportunities to partner with other state programs and modify their own state policies and practices or distribution systems for programs and services. Racial equity leaders may discover the difference between policy statements and actual frontline delivery staffs' implementation of programs and services. Site visits, focus groups, and interviews may help leaders reevaluate the necessary supports for designing, tailoring, and delivering high-quality experiences in programs, services, and initiatives that promote family and child well-being.



Leaders for racial equity seek to achieve the following four goals through engagement with families and community leaders:

1. Listen, understand, and learn about families' goals for their young children and providers' goals for their work with young children; learn about where services work or do not work well, where service gaps exist, and where opportunities for service and program development opportunities may be.
2. Develop experiences with populations and groups that experience racial inequities and disparities, increasing the focus on institutional and structural barriers that need to be removed to achieve equitable outcomes for children and their families.
3. Support the exploration of how historically and today, individuals and communities have fought back, resisted, and organized for self-determination, inclusion, and fairness.
4. Apply lessons learned to the design, development, and implementation of programs, services, and initiatives that target the needs of children, families, and the workforce furthest from opportunity.

As leaders seek to identify children, families, and communities who are furthest from opportunity, they must individually develop their personal and interpersonal skills to avoid bias and further confirming stereotypes or what they believe they already know. In our practice we ask leaders to work in teams, collect quotes versus notes, and debrief as a group to support the development of shared understanding and interpretation. Our practice also asks leaders to listen during the first and often the second visit to curtail the desire to respond. This is to ensure leaders are not responding or creating quick solves which do not address the root causes expressed by community leaders and families. Addressing equity requires an intersectional approach and responsiveness to the children, families, and the workforce who experience marginalization, exclusion, and persistent poverty.



We had been collecting output data and we have moved toward collecting more information about the participant level.

So, who are the families and children that are being served? That was a key opportunity for me from a Tribal perspective—there is limited or no data or a history of data being misused or misrepresented.

– ELAN Fellow

Data—both qualitative and quantitative—are important. Data can be used to describe the opportunity networks⁷ within communities for children, their families, and communities, e.g., access to transportation, safe housing, food, employment, health care, and anchor institutions such as libraries and museums. Leadership programs can use data disaggregated by race across multiple domains of well-being, e.g., health, education, employment, and housing, that shows inequalities in access, availability, and affordability of programs and services that support child and family well-being, e.g., early childhood care and education, home visiting, and food and nutrition or employment programs within states or counties that help leaders understand who is and is not accessing or benefiting from multiple programs and services.

Racial equity leadership programs must reinforce both the importance and the power of the data and how numerical data on its own presents an incomplete picture. Perspectives of groups of people, especially Alaskan Natives, American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Latinos/as/e, Pacific Islanders, immigrants of color, non-English speakers, ability-diverse individuals, and others historically or currently marginalized need to be incorporated in data collection strategies.⁸ Equity leaders build intentional feedback loops with children, their families, and communities that experience exclusion or do not benefit from existing state programs, strategies, and policies. A very important aspect of racial equity and data on which the ELAN focuses, and that should be fostered in all racial equity leadership development efforts, is the capacity to work with and listen to the experiences and perspectives of those most affected by policies, practices, and programs, specifically, the families and leaders in the communities that publicly funded programs are intended to serve. This must be an essential practice.

⁷<https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/snapshot-child-opportunity-across-us>

⁸Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., & Maczuga, S. (2012, December 1). Are Minority Children Disproportionality Represented in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education? Retrieved March 10, 2020 from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X12459678>.

Conclusion

Developing equity leaders requires the development of specific practices. Leaders also benefit from mentoring and reflective supervision or peer consultation. Leaders implement practices that lead to intentional equitable actions on behalf of children and their families. These practices are grounded in the experiences of families and communities. Leaders experience personal growth because of new relationships with fellows, families, the workforce, and communities they are responsible for serving. Leaders are expected to act within their roles and institution and with others to create opportunity by addressing institutional and structural barriers.

The process is designed to increase awareness of the strength of children, their families, and communities while increasing opportunities through access to federal, state, and tribal resources that support child and family well-being. The process works to increase opportunity by identifying and removing barriers and equitably distributing resources. Actions of the leader are not grounded in solving problems with new resources; rather, they are focused on a review of existing, policies, programs, and initiatives to identify opportunities to shift or modify them to benefit marginalized or underserved populations. This is not because early childhood systems are adequately funded but because how funds are allocated is a fundamental choice about priorities that must be identified, thought about, and acted on differently to ensure equitable results. Finally, the ELAN faculty asked leaders to monitor their actions to determine who is benefiting. These steps are not linear, nor are they independent or singularly effective. The process requires time and a commitment to listening to and responding and acting with others.

Apply Understanding of Root Causes of Inequity When Working for Early Childhood Systems Change and to Support Children, Families, and Communities.

Change, especially substantive change associated with race, classism, patriarchy, and other forms of systemic oppression within systems, institutions, groups, and individuals, cannot be identified, addressed, and dismantled if it is not sufficiently understood. Those who seek to eliminate the pernicious effects of racism on children and families need a sufficient understanding of factors such as the history of race in the US; current social, economic, and political manifestations of race; effects of race and racism on different groups; and concepts associated with race (e.g., racial privilege, implicit bias). In addition, leaders for equity in early childhood systems building use their understanding of the causes of inequality in supporting family and community agency and self-determination. They do so, in part, by working to ensure that systems are anti-racist, culturally and linguistically responsive, and inclusive. Further, racial equity leaders recognize that programs, services, and initiatives that are focused on a single issue or need may not have the desired impact on families and communities that have experienced historic and current marginalization because the structural and institutional challenges they face are due to multiple causes and inequities (e.g., housing insecurity, underemployment).

Leaders Act to Intentionally Address Racial Inequity.

State leaders have authority, responsibility, and influence over funding distribution, programs, services, and initiatives. Leaders work with other departments, programs, and divisions that benefit children and their families to interpret policy, modify policy, establish practice within the workforce through skills, knowledge, and abilities, and determine the need for additional programs and services that support families in meeting their goals for their children. Furthermore, as state leaders often make the decisions about rules, regulations, policies, and practices, an opportunity exists at each of these decision points to tailor distribution systems, programs, services, and initiatives to meet the needs of these families and children, thereby reducing inequities.

To remediate inequities, leaders foster collective leadership in early childhood systems and build networks. All racial equity leaders are expected to take action within existing groups and networks in their state and to become aware of the assumptions that drive interpersonal and institutional actions. In addition, racial equity leaders are supported in examining their own personal and interpersonal capacities to address issues of racialization in systems and their work, especially in relation to building and sustaining relationships within networks, collaborations, and communities. In the beginning of leadership development, leaders may take for granted many of the ways programs and initiatives operate and their specific processes and practices. Racial equity leaders must explore program requirements and regulations to determine if, as designed, they achieved the outcomes for specific populations of individuals intended to benefit from state and local resources.

Work with People, Programs, and Entities.

Taking action to address inequity is complex. It requires working within networks of people, programs, and entities (e.g., advocates, legislators, departments, governors, community organizations), each of which has goals and perhaps conflicting interests. A key goal that leadership development efforts must have is to support racial equity leaders' capacity to listen to and learn from those families and community members. Racial equity leaders' work is designed to identify the shared interest and benefit across multiple programs and entities.

ELAN leaders seek to understand and operationalize the vast nature of the early childhood system and the interconnectedness of programs, services, and initiatives within the government and the opportunities they provide to address root causes of inequity. Equity leaders reflect on and co-create solutions to remediate inequity based on the input and experiences of specific populations and the program requirements. The ultimate goal is for racial equity leaders to recognize their own agency and take intentional actions to tailor sustainable solutions to benefit racially diverse children and their families and increase child and family well-being through access to state programs, services, and initiatives.

Use Data and Assess Impact for Continuous Improvement.

Racial equity leaders in state systems rely on data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other factors to expose disparities and monitor progress. Racial equity leaders consistently use both qualitative and quantitative data in planning, decision making, and assessment of intended and unintended impacts. These leaders support the participation of all partners in assessment and evaluation of progress toward racial equity in their shared work.

Racial equity leaders must use data to identify and address marginalization and to understand who is and is not benefiting from early childhood programs and services. Racial equity leaders focus on available data such as state, county, or community data related to demographics; child and family outcomes; child and family access to programs and systems (health, childcare, family support, employment, education, nutrition, etc.); community conditions or opportunity; workforce, housing etc. Since one data point does not give the full story to guide systems change, it is useful to identify data from a variety of sources that tell the story of the impact of early childhood systems. Data is available at the state, local, and national levels from a variety of state and local sources (e.g., state administrative data, US Census, Kids Count).

Racial equity leaders are also challenged to grapple with what constitutes racial equity change and how it can be assessed or measured. Assessment of racial equity change at the institutional and structural levels is identified by researchers⁹ as particularly problematic because of the multifactorial nature of inequity and its presence in interacting and reinforcing systems.

⁹Leiderman, S. (2005). Doing evaluation differently. In M. Potapchuk, S. Leiderman, D. Bivens, & B. Major (Eds.) *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*, MP Associates, Inc. and the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD).

ELAN leaders recognize the importance and the power of the data and how numerical data on its own presents an incomplete picture. Perspectives of groups of people, especially from Latino/a/e, African American, Native American, non-English speaking, and immigrant communities, as well as ability-diverse individuals, and others historically or currently marginalized need to be incorporated in data collection strategies.¹⁰

Recognize that Building Equitable Early Childhood Systems Requires Committed Leadership.

The ELAN racial equity leadership supports state, tribal, and county leaders to recognize they are a critical element in systems change for racial equity. The ELAN focuses on leaders' efficacy and use of their own roles, responsibilities, and influence to explore and advance solutions to the root causes of inequities and practices that marginalize or exclude specific groups of children, their families, and communities.

Leaders understand the historical legacy and current reality of racism and exclusion and work to build systems that are anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive. Leaders act, identifying and using strategies and best practices to disrupt racially inequitable early childhood systems and to eliminate disparities and disproportionality. Leaders work across systems to disrupt systemic and structural inequities and to build alignment and support child development and family well-being. Leaders intentionally work with and listen to the experiences and perspectives of those most affected by policies and programs to advance equity. While many have a vision for equitable systems or equity in their own work efforts, advancing equity requires commitment.

Equity leaders intentionally work toward achieving equity, expanding opportunities, removing barriers, and distributing resources in ways that center and respond to the voice of Black, Native American, Latino/a/e, immigrant, and other populations who are marginalized or experience persistent poverty. This type of leadership requires an intentional process with the opportunity to practice and fail within a network of cross-sector leaders with shared objectives. Leaders must explore and activate their "why" within their roles, responsibilities, and authority to intentionally benefit Black, Native American, immigrant, Latino/a/e, and other marginalized groups. Understanding the "why" will provide energy for the effort and ground the actions in the individual scope of responsibility.

Early childhood systems in the US are not racially equitable or just; they must be rebuilt or reinvented by leaders committed to racial equity and justice. The increased awareness of racist behaviors at all levels provides a lever to insist on greater focus on the support of early childhood systems leaders who will be leaders for racial equity. Awareness, even when coupled with commitment, will not dismantle inequitable policies, practices, and structures. An understanding of the history and root causes, using data to make visible populations that state systems have not served well—or at all, tailoring universal action centered in the voice of specific children and families and working with people, structures, and programs will lead to processes that will accelerate the remediation of inequities.

¹⁰Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., & Maczuga, S. (2012, December 1). Are Minority Children Disproportionality Represented in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education? Retrieved March 10, 2020 from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X12459678>

Appendix: Core Competencies

Leaders and Leadership

- Racial equity leaders build and use knowledge regarding subjects (e.g., US history and segregation, American Indian policy, systems change) that expand their understanding of the factors that sustain and reproduce inequality (e.g., structural racialization), and is foundational to the leaders' ability to lead using racial equity processes and goals that address disparities present in populations they serve in their county, state, tribal nation, or territory.
- Racial equity leaders reflect alone and with others about how to build supportive learning communities able to collectively work to dismantle marginalization due to race, social class, ethnicity, and other factors in early childhood systems.
- Racial equity leaders understand the root causes of inequity and apply that knowledge in their work to make early childhood systems change, reduce marginalization, and support children, families, and communities marginalized by structural racialization.
- Racial equity leaders are systems thinkers who act strategically to achieve early childhood systems change that is grounded in racial equity and justice processes.

Taking Action

- Racial equity leaders intentionally act to build racially equitable early childhood policies, programs, and services within an early childhood system.
- Racial equity leaders understand the root causes of inequity and apply that knowledge in their efforts to make early childhood systems change, reduce marginalization, and work across programs and services toward integrated early childhood systems change to support children, families, and communities.
- Racial equity leaders act to address inequity at the interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels of change and employ both universal solutions and targeted strategies.
- Racial equity leaders shift policy, practice, and program in response to addressing the needs of racially diverse young children, families, and communities.
- Racial equity leaders intentionally seek to increase access to existing resources by modifying policies, programs, and practices to benefit marginalized children, their families, and communities.

Data

- Racial equity leaders use quantitative and qualitative data disaggregated by race and other factors to understand opportunity gaps, disparities, and disproportionality.
- Racial equity leaders use data to understand the root causes of inequity and apply that knowledge in their efforts to measure and monitor early childhood systems change and reductions in marginalization.

People, Programs, and Structures

- Racial equity leaders work across programs and services toward integrated early childhood systems change to support children, families, and communities.
- Racial equity leaders work within a network to advance shared interest across programs, people, institutions, and structures.
- Racial equity leaders effectively communicate with partners and allies to collectively dismantle disproportionality due to race, social class, and place to create early childhood systems that are racially equitable.
- Racial equity leaders build collaborative, inclusive networks of all potential partners and allies that elevate the voices and perspectives of those most affected by programs, services, and policies.
- Racial equity leaders listen to and learn from those families and community members.
- The systems work of racial equity leaders is designed to identify shared interests with others across multiple systems, programs, and entities.

