
Racial Equity Theory of Change

Background

The Roundtable has developed a process for crafting a *Theory of Change* (TOC) for communities that are planning new initiatives, or articulating theories for programs that are already in existence. This process requires a group to engage in a process called “backward mapping” which is a way to define the intermediate and early outcomes produced as preconditions to achieving a desired long term change. This process allows a group to answer the simple, yet crucial question: “What will it take for us to achieve the long term change (LTC) we want?”

Backwards mapping is usually pursued until a group has sketched out what it sees as a “complete” set of intermediate and early steps related to achieving LTC. Groups usually judge “completeness” by the extent to which they have taken as many steps as they can without (a) moving into territory that is beyond the scope of their capacities; and without (b) adding details to their understanding of the problem that do not enhance their ideas about the types of action they will take. We often ask groups to stop working backwards when they have reached the step that would make sense to them as an early goal of their work.

This document combines the theory of change logic with a *Structural Racism* (SR) analysis. In so doing, we believe we are developing a useful methodology for communities and regions interested in designing initiatives for promoting *racial*

equity. We call that new methodology a Racial Equity Theory of Change.

Structural Racism

This refers to the many factors that work to produce and maintain racial inequities in America today. It identifies aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privileges associated with “whiteness” and the disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt within the political economy over time. It also points out the ways in which public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations reproduce racially inequitable outcomes.

What is the Racial Equity Theory of Change?

The Racial Equity Theory of Change (RETOC) is a step-by-step guide designed to help community groups depict the necessary interim and early outcomes required to reduce racial disparities in neighborhoods and regions. By setting long-term change targets and identifying the early and intermediate *preconditions* that are logically associated with those targets, groups “unpack” a change process and identify systemic and institutional barriers that must be addressed.

The basic premise of the RETOC is that chronic racial gaps in important opportunity areas, such as education, employment, housing, and healthcare, are strongly associated with *structural racism*. Consequently, the RETOC

focuses principally on the ways that *public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations* contribute to specific problems that communities would like to resolve.

Public policies are laws that directly allocate public resources and indirectly influence the distribution of private resources (e.g. increased prison construction; “Three Strikes” sentencing)

Institutional practices are the cultural norms, and decision-making and standard operating procedures of public and private institutions that may seem race-neutral, but generate racially biased outcomes (e.g., aggressive street crime and “quality of life” law enforcement).

Cultural representations are popular images and stereotypes of people of color that, though damaging to their prospects for achieving genuine equality of opportunity, are widely seen as “unbiased” or “harmless” (e.g. media depictions of black communities as unsafe).

The process laid out by the RETOC is not intended to be a “cookbook,” but rather a set of logical questions that should help community planners describe their problems appropriately, precisely, and in sufficient detail to fully elaborate how structural racism contributes to the production of problems they hope to resolve.

The RETOC process is a prerequisite for developing a useful strategic plan. It informs the actual planning process (which comes later) by providing a better understanding of the underlying structural causes of persistent racial disparities. The RETOC thus points the way to areas and types of intervention that may not be

readily apparent to community-level actors. The RETOC process should suggest directions and interim goals that would not come out of planning approaches that are race-neutral, and that are less meticulous about “unpacking” planners’ assumptions at every level.

Why use the RETOC?

The particular value of the RETOC is that it assists community-level actors in uncovering institutional-level barriers and cultural stereotypes that assist in the production and reproduction of persistent racial disparities. This methodology prioritizes the ways institutional forces (such as school systems, healthcare systems, employer practices, etc.), as opposed to individual-level forces (such as negative behaviors and values), affect both negative community outcomes and racial inequities. While we recognize that individual-level behaviors, attitudes, and prejudices also contribute to community and group outcomes, there are a plethora of anti-racism tools and resources designed to promote change at those levels. However there are far fewer tools and resources that target systems, policies, and institutions. Accordingly, the areas for intervention that emerge from the RETOC application are more likely to be institutional, cross-sectoral, systemic and cultural, than individual and/or family oriented.

What should be kept in mind of when using the RETOC?

Racial disparities are caused by the cumulative effects of multiple and integrated systems in the form of public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations. Therefore, it is likely that the RETOC will point toward actions that may seem indirectly related to the desired long-term change. However, it is important to remember that achieving the desired long-term change requires change in multiple areas that may be beyond the capacity of your group. Therefore, it

is the responsibility of community-level actors to assess their capacity to affect change in multiple areas and perhaps develop coalitions with other actors. Often sustainable improvements on multiple fronts require that community groups and other *stakeholders* work in concert; each contributing distinct resources and capacities for achieving racial equity

Stakeholders are those who have a direct interest in a particular policy, initiative, or set of social arrangements, and stand to gain or lose from its implementation or establishment. Designers and funders of local initiatives are stakeholders, as are their local partners and clients

What is to be expected from the RETOC process?

The RETOC is designed to do two things: first, assist community-level actors in unpacking the root causes and dynamics of problems, and second, help them begin thinking about action strategies likely to effect structural changes. Consideration of such strategies comes at the end of the RETOC process, however, and represents just the beginning of what needs to be a separate implementation planning phase.

To help facilitate the group process, we have come up with guidelines for building a “backwards map.” Essentially, the group should hold one question in mind as it takes each backwards step: “*what are the necessary and sufficient preconditions, or requirements, that must be in place in order for the desired long-term change in “X” to come about?*” At each step, for each statement that is put on the map, this is the question that should be posed to get to the next level of detail.

Summary of the RETOC Steps

Step 1: Define the desired Long Term Change (LTC) and its Dimensions

These are the specific racial disparities that are to be reduced or eliminated in a given place and within a given timeframe. The long-term change is generally a comprehensive vision; its components are the concrete “*dimensions*” that will be measured as a sign of success.

e.g. elimination of racial wealth disparities region wide by the year 2050 may be the desired LTC. Its dimensions could include “proportionality in minority homeownership rates, business ownership, and stock ownership.”

Step 2: Identify Necessary and Sufficient Preconditions (NSPs)

For each dimension of the long-term change, identify the minimum requirements for moving in that direction -- in other words, what are the essential prerequisites, or what’s “necessary”, to achieve the goal. As you begin to identify a list of necessary preconditions, narrow your scope by focusing only on the combination that would be “sufficient” to achieve the stated goal.

e.g. for the “...homeownership” dimension of the above LTC, “adequate access to prime mortgage lenders” might be one Precondition. Another might be “protection from predatory (subprime) lenders.”

Step 3: Describe Specific Public Policy, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations

For each precondition, determine the public policies, institutional practices, and cultural

representations that could influence the production of the preconditions specified. These are particular policies, practices and representations that community-level actors must influence or change to create the preconditions for long-term change.

This is an attempt to encourage planners to push themselves beyond individual-level changes to the types of institutional or systemic outcomes that would be preconditions for equity.

e.g., For the homeownership Preconditions mentioned above, some targeted policies, practices and representations might be federal fair lending mechanisms, local zoning processes, and real estate market “steering” practices.

Step 4: Identify and List Powerbrokers

Identify traditional and non-traditional *powerbrokers* by asking yourself about the institutions, professional positions, and individuals currently and historically responsible for affecting the policies, institutional practices and cultural representations specified in Step 3. Be sure to include powerful actors whose sole interest may be in obstructing or reversing progress in a racial equity direction. But also include actors who seemingly work in a “race neutral” manner but produce racial disparities.

e.g., commercial bank mortgage lenders, subprime lenders, real estate brokers, etc.

Step 5: Map a Preliminary Action Strategy

This presumes that a decision has been made to work aggressively to change specific policies, institutional practices and/or cultural representations. With these targets in mind, here are two broad suggestions:

a. Conduct a capacity assessment

Assess your capacity (political, organizational, resource, programmatic, networking and communicative) for influencing long-term change in the areas identified. Take note of important gaps in your initiative’s capacities.

b. Develop a list of stakeholders for strategic coalition building

Identify specific groups and organized interests that are likely to have a stake in the structural changes sought. These are potential strategic allies. (Here there may be some overlap with powerbrokers identified earlier). However, other strategic allies may have to be sought to fill critical resource gaps pinpointed by the capacity assessment.

RETOC: Steps, Rules, Key Questions & Helpful Hints

Steps	Guidelines	Key Questions	Helpful Hints
<p>Step One:</p> <p>a) Define Long-Term Change (LTC)</p> <p>b) Define dimensions of LTC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify rationale for pursuing LTC. ▪ Frame the desired LTC in terms of racial equity. ▪ Unpack the LTC into its component parts, and define these dimensions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For whom is the long-term outcome to be measured? ▪ What does the long-term change look like? What will signal “success”? ▪ When should the long-term change be accomplished? ▪ What are the component parts of this long-term change? ▪ Is the long-term change measurable? ▪ Is it fair to assume that if all the dimensions are accomplished you will realize the specified? 	<p>Long-term changes are the results that the initiative will hold itself responsible for producing. Typically, they are an important big step toward a really lofty target that is beyond the scope of any one community group.</p> <p>Dimensions are important measures along the way toward the desired outcome. Therefore, dimension must be clearly defined so that there is no confusion about how success will be measured.</p>
<p>Step Two:</p> <p>Identify Necessary and Sufficient Preconditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Think broadly about what’s necessary to bring about each dimension of the desired LTC. ▪ Identify the 2-4 highest priority preconditions that would be sufficient to produce each dimension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are these the most immediate before reaching that LTC dimension? ▪ What are the underlying assumptions that arise as the group identifies preconditions? 	<p>All social problems have an unlimited (and unknowable) number of direct and indirect “causes”. The task here is to use research and experience to come up with a list of the known factors that are preconditions of the LT dimensions, and ultimately the LT.</p> <p>Using theory, assumptions, and values narrow the list to what the group believes are the most important N+S preconditions, prioritize institutional preconditions.</p> <p>Remember: this is not “scientific,” and requires the group to make judgment calls about what is really N+S</p>

Steps	Guidelines	Key Questions	Helpful Hints
<p>Step Three: Describe Specific Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations (PPRs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highlight practices that are seemingly “race neutral” but produce racial disparities. ▪ Focus on the public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations that that work individually and collectively to produce the issues identified as primary influences on the preconditions. ▪ Highlight specific policies, practices and representations that directly impact preconditions identified in step 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why does the precondition occur? ▪ What would need to be in place to address the issue stated in the precondition? ▪ What local and state policies serve as barriers to changing bad outcomes in a particular area? ▪ How are these policies executed, by whom and when were they enacted? ▪ What are institutional practices, or protocols and accepted behaviors, that tend to disadvantage people of color? ▪ How are these practices sanctioned within organizations? ▪ What cultural representations (stereotypes, norms, and media messages) tend to “normalize” racial disparity in this area? 	<p>Use this step to flesh out the institutional factors that shape the precondition. For each precondition, there may be numerous of influences, focus on those shaped by institutional actors.</p> <p>Often racially disparate outcomes get masked by practices that appear race neutral, lift up these practices and examine their institutional underpinnings.</p> <p>Challenge the “normal way of doing business” or “colorblind operating procedures” by articulating specific “race neutral” policies, practices and representations, in so doing we begin to see how normal operating procedures often produce and reproduce racial disparities.</p> <p>Develop a list of policies, practices and representations then narrow its scope by determining the extent to which reversing, resolving or removing these factors would be necessary and sufficient precursors for affecting the primary influence and ultimately producing the long term goal.</p>

Steps	Guidelines	Key Questions	Helpful Hints
<p>Step Four: Identify and list Powerbrokers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the primary professionals and institutions (e.g. teachers, mayor, school board) responsible for shaping policies, practices and representations? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who are the actors currently in those positions? ▪ What actions do you envision embarking on, why? ▪ In what areas do you need to develop coalitions? ▪ Who are potential strategic allies? 	<p>Remember to identify those with the power and determination to obstruct or reverse progress in particular areas.</p> <p>Think broadly</p> <p>Don't forget civic and private institutions that may also play a powerbroker role.</p>
<p>Step Five: Map a Preliminary Action Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acquire/enlist the full range of capacities needed to engage powerbrokers and sustain a long-term effort. ▪ Use list of powerbrokers and policies, practices and representations to determine targets for change. ▪ Prioritize by determining which changes can occur soon and will have largest impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your capacity (political, organizational, resource, programmatic, networking and communicative) in terms of strengths and weaknesses for realizing long-term change on these actions? ▪ What is the local/regional political context for your change effort? 	<p>Make a long-term commitment to building a broad constituency to support your strategic coalition.</p>

RETOC Example: Education

Step ONE:
define desired
LT Change
and its
dimensions

Eliminate racial disparities in Educational Outcomes

- Students attending St. Louis area public schools
- Outcomes measured across cohorts of students K-12
- Racial disparities eliminated by 2025
- Success: “The experience of attending public school is not significantly different for Black students compared to White students”

NOTE:
There are Two Major Aspects to this
Desired Long Term-Change:

(A)
Within an Integrated
Setting, Reduce
Educational
Achievement Gap
between Black and
White Students

(B)
Reduce Disparities in
Educational Achievement
Across Black and White
School Districts

*NOTE: Each of these
aspects should be
unpacked even further*

Aspect (A) has several Dimensions:

- **Racial Equality in Mastery of Math, Science and Reading**
- Racial Equality in Graduation Rates
- Racial Equality in Tracking into “high” or “low” achievement paths (Gifted vs. Special Education)

In a complete example,
the aspect B would be
unpacked as well

D1 D2 D3

**NSP:
Mastery**

NSP:
Graduation

NSP:
Tracking

In a complete example, we would
map the NSP for racial equity in
graduation rates each of these
(sub) dimensions...

*Note: For each dimension, Necessary and Sufficient
Preconditions explain how to produce the change...*

NOTE: identify high priority preconditions necessary to bring about LT change

Step TWO:
Identify Necessary and Sufficient Preconditions for each dimension

Dimension 1: Racial Equity in Mastery of Math, Science and Reading

Teachers have high expectations of students of color as well as the white students

Teachers are able to engage all students and keep them interested in math and science

Schools are equipped with state of the art teaching and training tools, as well as science and computer labs

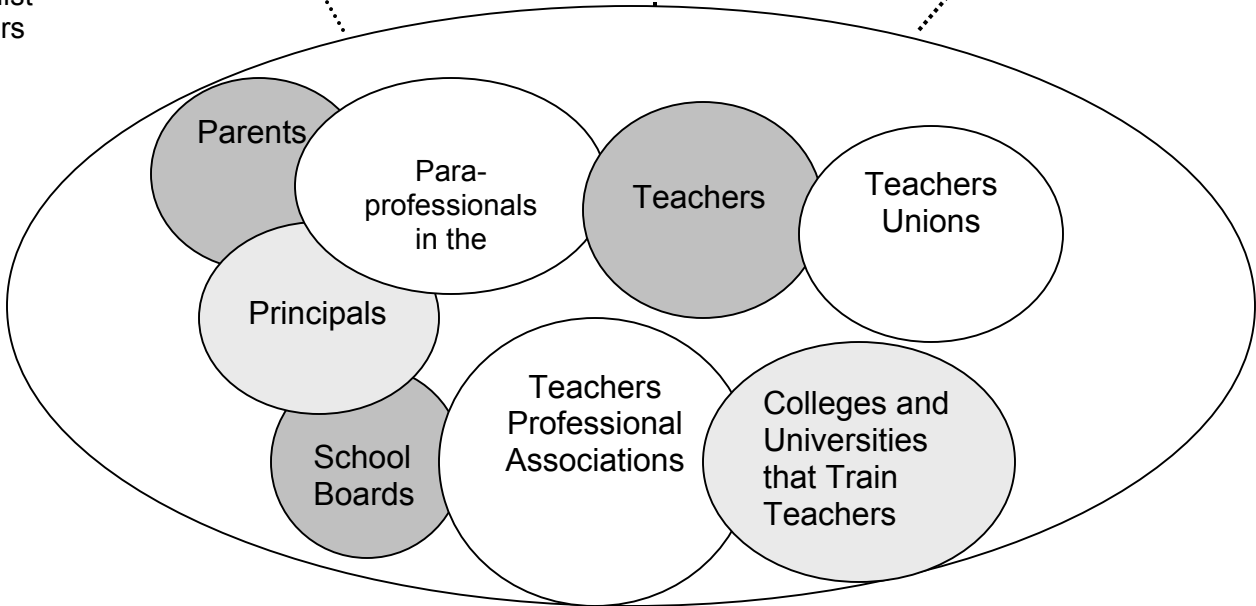
Step THREE:
describe public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations that impact each the precondition

Representation example:
Teachers recognize the racial stereotypes that depict students of color as low achievers and disinterested in intellectual and scientific pursuits.

Practice example:
Teacher training and professional development prepares teachers to engage students of color in ways that are culturally sensitive and effective

Policy example:
Adequate funding exists for schools to purchase up-to-date materials and equip schools with resources such as computer labs and science labs

Step FOUR:
Identify and list Powerbrokers



Glossary

Terms	Description
Backwards mapping	The process of working from the desired long-term change “backwards” toward the early stages of the change process. This is in many ways the opposite of how most people think about planning, and focuses on the question “what must occur before our outcome can be achieved?” instead of asking “what can we do to bring the outcome about?” It surfaces “necessary and sufficient” preconditions for reaching the outcome of interest.
Capacity	The resources and ability needed to effect a defined long-term change.
Coalition building	Formation of strategic linkages with other advocacy, research, media and other organizations and individuals to build full range of capacities needed for structural change.
Cultural representations	Popular images, frames and stereotypes of people of color that, though often damaging to their prospects for achieving genuine equality of opportunity, are widely seen as “unbiased” or “harmless.” (e.g. media depictions of black neighborhoods as unsafe.)
Dimensions	These are the various aspects of a desired long term change that, when taken together, represent each aspect of what is to be accomplished. For example, “improve child health” would have at least three dimensions: physical health, mental health, and emotional health. Often it is important to break an outcome into its component parts in order to understand that each part may require a different pathway of change to bring it about.
Institutional practices	These are the “legitimate” decision-making and standard operating procedures of public and private institutions that, though seemingly race-neutral, continually generate racially biased outcomes (e.g., “last hired, first fired”).
Powerbrokers	Civic, political and business leaders and institutions that actively participate in high-level public policy decision-making.
Public policies	These are laws that directly allocate public resources and indirectly influence the distribution of private resources. Public policies reflect the interests of powerbrokers and their constituencies within the public. These interests derive, in part, from core values such as beliefs about race, gender and religion.
Racial equity	Racial equity is a yardstick for determining what is right or “fair” with respect to social outcomes.
Stakeholders	Those who have a direct interest in a particular policy, initiative, or set of social arrangements and stand to gain or lose from its implementation or establishment. Designers and funders of local initiatives are stakeholders, as are their local partners and clients. Some powerbrokers may also be stakeholders in a particular policy outcome or local initiative.
Strategic allies	Organizations and individuals with capacities vital for achieving structural change in a particular issue-area.

<p>Structural racism</p>	<p>This refers to the many factors that work to produce and maintain racial inequities in America today. It identifies aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privileges associated with “whiteness” and the disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt within the political economy over time. It also points out the ways in which public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations reproduce racially inequitable outcomes.</p>
<p>Theory of change</p>	<p>A document, or set of documents, that explains the logic underlying a chain of interrelated conditions that are understood as necessary precursors to attainment of a specified long-term change. The term “theory” suggests that there are embedded assumptions and expectations about cause-effect relationships in the pathway of change that connects one set of conditions to the next in the chain. It also suggests that these cause-effect relationships are generally understood to exist, but could be proven wrong in practice.</p>