



**Commitment
to Becoming an
Anti-Racist
Organization**

**Our Journey,
Learning &
Call to Action**

October 2020

CRE 
Community Resource
Exchange

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CRE ENVISIONS A WORLD WHERE...

Racial equity and anti-racism are, by design, universally endorsed and deeply embedded into the very fabric of our societal DNA...

In the U.S. and beyond, racism and anti-Blackness have been uprooted as drivers of “deservedness” in how people live, work, study, play, earn, achieve, love...

The dignity and humanity of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) are recognized, valued, uplifted...

The social sector holds a deep unwavering trust of BIPOC leaders, built on alignment between the message of equity and the act of equity. And boards, funders, leadership and decision-makers are represented by, and deeply united with, the communities they serve...

All social justice organizations credibly live out anti-racist values by engaging in continual internal examination and practice, coupled with a conscious undoing of racist and anti-Black policies, beliefs, and behaviors...

ALL organizations that hope for social change first hold themselves and their stakeholders accountable for sustaining a racially just society—a society in which all communities thrive equally; a society in which Black, Indigenous and POC communities are assured a path and supports for restorative, generational repair and healing; a society in which truly, all lives matter.



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For more than 40 years, CRE has prepared leaders and strengthened organizations to drive social change.

As a nonprofit consulting firm, we provide the strategies and tools needed to build equitable and sustainable, high-performing organizations, working with 500 nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies each year.

Our team comprises dynamic, diverse mission-aligned thought-partners, deeply invested in advancing social change. Because current and historical racial inequities drive outcomes across all issues that are core to CRE's mission to reduce poverty, promote equity and increase opportunity, we lead with an unapologetic commitment to racial equity.

As such, we incorporate a racial equity lens in all of our internal work and external client engagements to ensure that we are truly delivering on our promise.

We maintain this commitment especially in times of crisis and uncertainty from a shared understanding that:

- Reinforcement and modeling of racial equity from the inside-out allows our team to authentically and credibly contribute to our racial equity commitments.
- Ongoing, anti-racist practice ensures that CRE can authentically and credibly manifest our mission.
- Equity-centered field leadership helps build the sector's capacity to authentically and credibly embrace and integrate racial equity and anti-racism approaches.

OUR JOURNEY

The July 5 and July 6, 2016 murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile sparked a team conversation to process these senseless, racially-biased killings. It was the first all-staff conversation about race—eye-opening and alarming. There was an obvious unevenness in comments, questions, and musings; those who had directly experienced racism and anti-Blackness in America had very different views on the state of race and race relations in America—including their disproportionate impacts—than those who had not.

It was evident that our team had a lot of learning and undoing ahead of us. This included a conscious effort to develop a shared understanding of the historical and contemporary context of systemic racism, and, although not named as such at that time, anti-Black sentiment in America. We recognized that while we seemed united in commitment to our mission, we were splintered on the connection between our mission and our need to focus on racial justice; our mission and our need to name and dismantle CRE's own inequitable policies and norms; our mission and opportunities to lead the sector, in thought and in action, by confronting and addressing internal and external patterns and systems of oppression.

And so began our journey of dialogue, policy audits and changes, personal reflection, ownership, and accountability for doing this work—as an essential aspect of our mission.

We have just begun our fifth year of internal racial equity learning and integration. It has been a tough, uncomfortable, rewarding, bountiful ride. In the midst of the current societal crises, we continue to push through on the work—taking our team's Racial Equity Activation and Learning (R.E.A.L.) community virtual, and holding each other accountable for behaviors and norms that support racial equity and help to dismantle racism. This has been a powerful reckoning of how racial inequity and anti-Blackness have historically shown up in CRE's systems and decisions, in complete misalignment with our mission, values, and intentions.

And yet...

We have at times struggled to fully name and counter real examples of CRE policies and actions that have favored white people and those who conform to dominant white cultural norms. We have at times been negligent in anticipating unintentional harms to those from communities that have historically been oppressed and marginalized, and who continue to be so even as invaluable contributors to the social sector. We have at times avoided doing this work in “real time” because of convenient “more pressing” matters. In groups self-identified by race, we have uncovered

underlying fears and resentments, and a sense of hurt and loss. We have at times deprioritized, failed to pause, and sought to run for cover.

Throughout these challenges, year after year, our commitments, evolution, and work have expanded.

Recently, we took a look back as a way to refresh our purpose and re-energize our drive to move forward; in January 2020, we reflected on what, in December 2018, we said we would be most proud of in twelve months. The net success of our efforts was evident:

Achieved or Actively In Progress	Started, with Much Work Still to Be Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRE says it’s an anti-racist organization explicitly. • As an organization we talk more about anti-Blackness. • More Black people on staff, including in leadership positions. • White folks leaning into discomfort and naming things that are unnamed. • Everyone joins and participates in internal racial equity meetings. • More accountability for behaviors such as not centering the expertise of colleagues of color, using images that could be hurtful to POC, remaining silent when something is going unnamed, etc. • Explicit expectations for racial equity competencies, and staff members accountable for them. • More “feeling” that we are doing the work, and doing it well. • No obvious difference in positive outcomes for BIPOC staff and White staff. • More space for self-care, especially for Black colleagues. • More self-care for doing external DEI work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board involved in racial equity training. • Leadership constantly thinks of racial equity impact and brings a racial equity lens to all matters and decisions. • Positive rewards and acknowledgement for productive behaviors that add to racial equity work. • All staff bring a racial equity lens to all work. • Shift in culture from “nice” to courageous care. • All staff feel safe to be themselves. • Decrease in responses like “Sorry, I’ll be more mindful”—it’s not enough. • All staff are excited to contribute and facilitate this work. • All staff able to say why RE is critical to our work at CRE—and <i>this is part of every project explicitly.</i> • All images and content in our external communications—including our website—reflect our racial equity values.

This look back renewed our collective sense of purpose and confirmed that this work in fact does yield the very outcomes we seek to achieve—when we keep doing the work.



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And so, our work and our progress continued... And then the bottom fell out...

As COVID-19 spread like a scourge in our city, region, and country, we quickly understood, like many in the sector, that communities that have been historically marginalized—the very communities CRE ultimately exists to serve—were once again disproportionately and in some cases, irreversibly, impacted. In whiplash succession, the savage murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery upheaved societal ire and awareness, and compounded the disproportionate impact on Black people specifically. In response, CRE publicly affirmed our support for the Black community and called for sustained action.

But we knew: there is much more we must do to clarify our leadership in thought and in action on racial equity and dismantling anti-Blackness.

So we invited our staff to envisage a world in which racial equity is the norm, and to consider ways in which CRE could amplify not only our own efforts to embrace and enact race-based change, but also to call on our peers, clients, board, full staff, funders, and others to undergo this critical examination and demonstrative commitment.





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OUR LEARNING

We were struck deeply by our colleagues' under-recognized wealth of knowledge about the insidious pervasiveness of racial inequities, including anti-Blackness in the U.S.—the history, impact, and need for change. We felt a warm appreciation for the team's thoughtful, action oriented contributions, signaling that our four-year journey of mistakes, successes, commitments, and results demands that we go above and beyond a statement. Buoyed and inspired by these realizations:

1. We avowed an even bolder racial equity stance, one backed by specific assurances and answerability.
2. We asserted our effort to become an anti-racist organization as non-negotiable.
3. We confirmed that becoming anti-racist AND working to dismantle anti-Blackness are mission-critical.

An upswell in client demand for offerings from our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practice is further evidence that the social sector is more fully awakening to the harmful realities of racial inequity, and desires to more deeply understand, to challenge the status quo, and to move towards action.

It is now crystal clear: CRE must embrace a broader, deeper undertaking—one that backs our words of understanding and intent with transformative, replicable actions that are rooted in impact and accountability.

More than ever, we feel purposeful in thinking bigger, bolder, and out loud about ways to create lasting racial equity change. Over the next year, we will deepen and accelerate our efforts, and hold ourselves accountable to our team, organization, and sector as follows:

- Move CRE to a more **clearly articulated, embraced, and lived racial equity position**, including dismantling anti-Blackness and its intersectionalities with gender, sexual identity, and other aspects of identity that compound the effects of systemic oppression.
- **Integrate a defined racial equity lens** in each of our departments, areas of work, and staff levels.
- Design, test, and roll out revamped and newly-established organizational systems, norms, and policies that **assure the highest levels of effort and intention toward becoming anti-racist.**

- In collaboration with our own external DEI consultant, regularly **refine and confirm our racial equity plan of action** and set measures of accountability at all levels.
- Do the individual work to **deepen our collective racial equity analyses**, model collaboration across race, and strengthen our own capacity to understand and carry this work. This includes formally asking each other, “How can I show up even better in this effort?”
- **Spark racial equity learning and action in the sector** through discussion and documentation of our journey, lessons learned, and active engagement in racial equity learning communities for mutual support, checks, and knowledge exchange.



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OUR CALL TO ACTION

We invite you to join us in this journey, and to step into an unwavering organizational commitment to racial equity, to help realize and uplift racial equity as integral to the mission, work, culture, and values of your organization. We call on you to invite all colleagues to help build momentum for achieving and sustaining equitable outcomes. Here are a few suggestions for what this might look like:

Organizations

- Ensure that **senior leadership models sustained engagement**, learning, and commitment to this effort.
- Conduct an **internal racial equity audit** to understand how embedded bias in org-wide systems, policies, and norms are disadvantaging BIPOC and other historically marginalized groups.
- Create and regularly refresh and evaluate a **racial equity plan of action**.
- Ensure that all of your **work is informed by a strong racial analysis**, and train every staff member to recognize and address this.
- Create a **brave space for staff** to reinforce racial equity commitments through learning, sharing, and an honest accounting of progress and setbacks.
- Understand who among your stakeholders—staff, board, vendors, partners, etc.—either have **positions of formal authority or proximity** or access to those who do. Understand also what groups are regularly excluded from critical conversations and decision-making.
- Ensure that all departments—not just individuals—have specific and measurable **racial equity goals**, and are **assessed and held accountable for them**.
- **Value the time and energy needed for this work**. Provide the resources needed so that the work is not put on the shoulders of BIPOC staff, is given a budget for funding critical external resources, and is given the time so that staff can do the work.

- Make the time to **focus on the process before rushing to create a “product.”** The organization will only be able to move at the speed of trust; building a muscle for engaging in courageous conversations and integrating racial equity requires time. It also requires an elevation of emotional intelligence work over academic intelligence.
- Build in time for care and create buffers along the way. Pay attention to spacing of race equity sessions so that staff have **opportunity to process and reflect** following the intensity of racial equity work.
- Build in time to **celebrate** with joyful, fun, creative moments that also help to connect people doing this work.



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Boards

- Clearly identify and express why a commitment to **racial equity is mission-critical**.
- **Adjust organizational charter, by-laws, etc.** to reflect DEI as an organizational value.
- Engage in an organizational racial equity journey to **shape a concrete set of deliverables** that advance the organization's racial equity goals.
- Uplift organizational **racial equity values** in board recruitment and onboarding; and **integrate racial equity goals** and expectations into core board responsibilities and decision-making.
- Ensure that the people on your board **reflect the racial and ethnic makeup** and lived experiences of the communities your organization serves.
- Create a board environment in which everyone who joins the board feels **welcome and valued** as a fully-authorized member of this important governing body.
- **Engage in a learning process** to get aligned on language, understanding and commitment.
- Ensure that the board **models sustained engagement**, learning, and commitment to this effort.



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Funders

- Commit to and act on the creation of a funding portfolio to **increase investment in BIPOC leadership**, and integrate investment in BIPOC leadership and BIPOC impact initiatives into the very fabric of investment strategy.
- **Partner with grantees to co-create** and augment funding priorities centered on community voices, experiences, and wisdom.
- **Work to understand, identify, and eliminate bias** in funding strategy, rationale, and guidelines.
- **Equalize proximity and access** to opportunities, power, and decision making.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We offer a tremendous thank you to staff members who specifically contributed to the content and construction of CRE's racial equity vision and broader construction of our journey, learning, and call to action:

Alla Farberova, Andrea J. Rogers, Asha Sekomo, Brad Luckhardt, Brittany Gilmore, Carlene Buccino, Chantal Kim, George Hsieh, Hannah Liot, Jason Peralta, Jeff Ballow, Katie Leonberger, Kim-Monique Johnson, Sherazade Langlade, Tracey Allard (primary author), Unique Brathwaite, and Zunairis Velazquez

We thank every member of our team for joining this journey in the many ways it has been represented. This includes participating in learning sessions, supporting implementation of our racial equity plan of action, pushing back, questioning, naming, calling in, centering this work, and sharing unpopular views. It also includes the thoughtful refinement of our delivery of DEI offerings—based in no small part on our lessons learned, and built overwhelmingly from the care, lived experience, sense of urgency, and expertise of women of color who have shouldered the heaviest loads:

Aisha Johnson, Alla Farberova, Andrea J. Rogers, Asha Sekomo, Brad Luckhardt, Brittany Gilmore, Carlene Buccino, Chantal Kim, Christine Boodie, Elan Joseph, George Hsieh, Hannah Liot, Jason Peralta, Jeff Ballow, Karina Jiménez, Kim-Monique Johnson, Millie Díaz, Oseloka Idigbe, Patty Denisse Guzmán, Randall Quan, Sherazade Langlade, Sudha Rajan, Tatiana Donaldson, Zunairis Velazquez, and CRE's Management Team: Katie Leonberger (CEO), Jean Lobell, Unique Brathwaite, and Tracey Allard

An extra special thanks to our former colleague, Fiona Kanagasingam, who activated this journey in July 2016 and courageously kept us pushing forward.

For questions about CRE's racial equity journey or information about our racial equity offerings, please contact communications@crenyc.org.



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