



"Our Lives Matter" by CeCe Capiro

Checking In with our Humanity

A resource on embedding racial equity in your day-to-day work

Table of Contents

Overview	2
Discussion Topics and Questions	3
Poems and Short Reads	4
Activities for Employee Resource Groups	5

Overview

Embedding racial equity into an organizational culture requires intentional work every single day. On a personal level, it can require a lifetime of studying, learning and unlearning which can seem daunting. There are many ways to incorporate thoughtful reflection and “racial equity pauses” into your processes in your day-to-day. At Living Cities, we have, for example, compiled songs with lyrics about race, identity, and justice; or that reminded staff of their culture. We have made time in meetings to reflect on current events as they relate to race. And, we have opened meetings with artistic and imaginative activities and check-in questions.

Through these small pauses, we have been able to reflect on our personal identities and individual processes and how they show up in our racial equity work.

White institutional culture and the norms of white supremacy have socialized us to not center humanity in our work. This can cause harm to the communities we serve. These questions and activities help us unlearn these norms and move us toward centering all people and honoring their full selves before jumping into work. Some of these questions directly speak to racial equity and accountability, while others ask you to reflect on the self--your identities and culture. We hope you can use these questions and activities to start your own conversations and adapt them to your particular setting.

This list is not exhaustive but includes just a few of the ways that we’ve been able to have meaningful conversations with each other and to build relationships

If you have any questions or want to share your story on your racial equity journey, please email racialequity@livingcities.org

Discussion Topics and Questions

- Thoughts, reactions to [Accountability: A Critical Anti-Racism Practice](#)? What can we do to make sure we're being accountable?
- Review the exhibition notes for [ICA Philadelphia's Colored People Time: Mundane Futures](#) (pay attention to p.5-7)
 - How can we bring into our space this idea of “the challenge continues to be how to reconcile an “in time” philosophy with the “on time” demands of mainstream America”?
- Who is the first person in your life you would identify as a “mentor”? What does a mentor mean to you and how did that person show up in that role?
- What are 1-2 approaches, interventions, conversations, and/or resources that have been the most impactful in helping you move in your own REI journey.
- What 1-2 approaches, interventions, conversations, and/or resources have you observed as most helpful to other colleagues?
- What have you watched or read recently that has impacted your REI journey?
- Please share a story of a woman of color entrepreneur in your city who is ...making a difference, a changemaker, scaling her business.
- Share a story about your name.
- What are some examples of Black joy that you've seen in media recently?
- Highlight some positive depictions of Black communities in media that you've recently seen.
- Who are some women working internationally who you admire?
- Who are some women artists you appreciate and are listening to or enjoying?
- What are some examples in dealing with being stuck in the middle of dualities such as code switching?



Poems and Short Reads

Poems and stories are hyperlinked below.

- [‘If they should come for us’](#) by Fatimah Ashgar
 - Who are your people? When you think about communities you’re accountable to, who are they?
- [Ancient parts of you will be summoned by some freak nasty beat](#) by Amaris Diaz
 - Consider your own ancient parts, what are some of those parts you still carry and when do they come out?
- [The Contract Says: We’d Like the Conversation to be bilingual](#)
 - Think about the line “Will you tell us the stories that make us uncomfortable, but not complicit?” and how does that show up in our work?
- Flash Fiction from László Krasznahorkai:
<https://www.newyorker.com/books/flash-fiction/i-dont-need-anything-from-here>
 - Looking at what’s coming in the next month, what are you leaving behind this month?
- [Introduction to Quantum Theory by Franny Choi](#)
 - What does this poem say about accountability?
- [My Brothers Are Notorious, Claudia Rankine](#)
 - We are people who live in the world. The world changes us, breaks our hearts and heals it. We strive to change the world. We hope for the better. Rankine writes "our hearts are broken. This is not a secret though there are secrets. And as yet I do not understand how my own sorrow has turned into my brothers’ hearts." What is a secret or a sorrow you believe must be named in order for our work as a team to progress?
- [Indicent](#) by Destiny Birdsong
- [Convention Centers of the World](#) by Raymond McDaniel
- [Flames of History/Rivers of Song](#) by Tyehimba Jess
- [Uptown, Minneapolis](#) by Hieu Minh Nguyen
- [alternate names for black boys](#) by Danez Smith
- [Guthrie Theater](#) by Gerald Vizenor
- [Wild Women](#) by Sunni Patterson
- [Alternative Heaven for Black Boys](#) by Danez Smith
- [What the dead know by heart](#) by Donte Collins
- [For my nieces over North](#) by Donte Collins
- [Get Free](#) by Jay Ward
- [Bus Stop](#) by Donald Justice
- [Clint Smith & Patricia Smith poems about Hurricane Katrina](#)



- [“From Whence I Enter”](#) by Jaki Shelton Green

Activities for Employee Resource Groups

These tools have been designed for our internal [Employee Resource Groups \(ERGs\)](#). ERGs at Living Cities (sometimes also called caucuses or affinity groups) are groups of people within an organization who share a common background, interest, or identity and who come together to support each other, process, and strategize about how to advance Living Cities’ work to operationalize racial equity and inclusion, strengthen our intersectional analysis, and celebrate our diversity. Feel free to adapt them to your own affinity groups or ERG or as individual check-in activities within other agendas, etc.

Organizational Journey Map to Pro-Blackness

ERG Activity

Check-In:

“To be pro-Black doesn’t mean to be anti-white. It means to be anti-white supremacy.” -Arielle Newton

We will not achieve economic equity for all people without addressing anti-Black racism. In other words, in America, anti-Black racism is the foundational architecture for the strategies, tactics, tools, and cultural worldviews that created and maintain racial oppression, repression, and exclusion. It is also true that these same strategies, tactics, tools, and cultural worldviews are being used against other communities of color, LGBTQ communities, people with disabilities, and women. So, it is important to start with an understanding of anti-Blackness, and to then apply an intersectional analysis to ensure that the unique experiences of other communities, and of individuals, are not being erased. People and organizations that are pro-Black might work to address anti-Black racism by, for example (this list is not exhaustive):

- Reckon with the history of anti-Black racism globally and seek to deeply understand its effects—how it affects us all
- Supporting the economic growth and development of the black people as a whole with a purpose of increasing the wealth and well-being of black people



around the world with the understanding that what helps Black people will also help other people of color.

- Spending money with black-owned business in your communities or online.
- Promoting love for black people and encouraging black youth
- Recognizing, believing, and affirming the lived experiences of Black people, particularly the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people, including but not limited to those who are women, queer, trans, femmes, gender nonconforming, Muslim, formerly and currently incarcerated, cash poor and working class, disabled, undocumented, and immigrant
 - Growing competencies and personal investments in Black communities. And, caring deeply about and seeking to actively partner with other people of color
 - Uplifting the leadership and voices of Black people
- Rooting grant-making and investment in Black communities, but recognizing Black people have a shared struggle with all oppressed people and that collective liberation will be a product of all of our work
- Holding government accountable for repairing the harms that have been done to Black communities in the form of targeted long-term investments.

Overview:

Your ERG will be creating a visual “Organizational Journey Map.” This will be a visual expression of Living Cities journey to, first operationalize racial equity and inclusion, and now move towards addressing anti-Blackness and becoming pro-Black. Your map might include where you are now, where you've been, and what were some of the notable challenges, successes and failures have been/might be along the way. Your map can be as simple or complex and you can be as creative as you'd like! You will be sharing these maps with all-staff when we bring the ERGs together to make meaning in late November.

Pre-work Reflection Questions:

- Where did our REI journey begin? What need do you think we are trying to address?
Who was there and why were they inspired to do this work?
- What were the moments in our history where we made interesting changes in direction, scope, or focus related to REI and addressing anti-Blackness/Being pro-Black? What were the factors that led us to make those decisions at that time?



- What has come up for you since our all-staff conversation about anti-Blackness/Pro-Blackness?
- What do you think it might mean to be a Pro-Black organization?
- How are we as an ERG (group of people with one or more shared identities/experiences) impacted by anti-Blackness?
- How are we as an ERG (group of people with one or more shared identities/experiences) impacted by other forms of racism and discrimination?
- What do you wish others could understand about the collective experience of participants in your ERG?
- How has anti-Blackness shown up at Living Cities?
- What can we as an ERG or as individuals do to address anti-Blackness or to move towards pro-Blackness?
- What have been some of the most surprising challenges we have faced as an organization related to REI and anti-Blackness/Pro-Blackness? How did we respond to those challenges and what were the results? What did we learn by moving through those challenges? How has it changed who we are as an organization?
- What have been our biggest successes along this journey? How did they come about?

Debrief:

Drawing from your pre-work reflections, work as a team to map out the key moments of your organization’s journey to date. Use the questions below as prompts if they are useful to you.

- What point might you select as the beginning of your organization’s journey into your current work around equity?
- Where would you place our focus on anti-Blackness/pro-Blackness in our journey timeline? What do you see as the starting point to that conversation?
- When were moments and events when your team or the broader organization made commitments or made mistakes, and what unfolded after those?
- In your reflection, did you name times when interpersonal connections yielded organizational insights or commitments, or when conflict pushed forward productive change? Notice the moments of resilience and breakthrough as well as times of frustration and feeling “stuck.”



- Pay attention to the comings and goings of individuals along the way, as well as decisions made, structures or policies adjusted, and patterns of behavior that changed or evolved.
- What events outside the organization propelled or stalled your progress?
- Knowing that this journey is an ongoing one, how would you describe where you are at this moment?
- How can your ERG specifically address anti-Blackness or work towards pro-Blackness as a team?
- Among your ERG participants, are there shared experiences of discrimination or shared experiences of complicity that your team would like other people in the org to know about to help us all acknowledge where we have been and move forward together?

Mapping Art Activity:

Organizational Journey Map Creation

Gather art materials needed to create your map. Use a combination of timelines, images, metaphors, or words. This is not about fine art, but rather a way to visually experience elements of your journey to date. Be creative!

What image or metaphor represents the story you are uncovering? Lift up what feels most critical about Living Cities' journey so far to include it on the map. Make sure to include your ERG's particular experiences in our REI journey/our conversations about anti-Blackness and pro-Blackness. Include a visual expression of where you are as of today, as an ERG and/or as an organization in terms of REI and moving towards being a pro-Black organization. End your map with a visual expression of an idea your ERG has for a next step, or a vision for the future.

Credit: [CompassPoint](#)

How Might We Questions

ERG Activity

Questions Exercise:

HOW = suggests a solution is possible

MIGHT = suggests that we don't yet know the perfect answer

WE = suggests that we will come up with better solutions together

Questions (or come up with your own!):

- How might we support our Black colleagues as allies?
- How might we change our ways of working to create more room for imagination and creativity?
- How might we deepen relationships within our ERG so that we can surface our own experiences and challenges as a group and support the racial equity work of the organization?
- How might we tell the story of our ERG's learning journey around anti-Blackness and pro-Blackness in a way that builds community with people inside and outside of [insert organization name]?
- How might we promote a culture of healing at [insert Organization name]?

Credit: [CompassPoint](#)

Rock, River Tree Activity

ERG Activity

Check-In:

Establish group ground rules. For examples of ground rules, see here:

[http://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-CircleOfTrust-Touchstones-stones-\(c\)2016-web.pdf](http://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-CircleOfTrust-Touchstones-stones-(c)2016-web.pdf)

Writing Exercise:

1. Watch Maya Angelou read her poem "On the Pulse of Morning":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=59xGmHzxtZ4

2. Instruct your group to write down their own thoughts about how the Rock, River, and Tree represent their notions of History, Identity, and Culture.



3. Ask participants to journal about the Rock, River, and Tree metaphors and questions with the following notes (Write these on the whiteboard):
 - A. *Rock represents ancestors (history)*: What rocks do I stand on? How am I informed by my history?
 - B. *River represents song (identity)*: What songs do I sing that express my identity (i.e., race, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, nationality)?
 - C. *Tree represents what grows from you (cultural values, beliefs, strengths, customs, languages, and attitudes)*: What values, beliefs, strengths, customs, languages, and attitudes inform the culture that is my own?

4. Prepare 3 easel sheets of paper—one for each line of the poem—to create a synthesis of the whole group’s experience. Labels for the top of each page are:
 - A. We stand on the Rocks of (history)...
 - B. We sing the Songs of (identity)...
 - C. We grow the Trees of (culture)...

5. Hand out a short stack of sticky notes, each person will need three. Each person chooses one word for each category, writes that word, legibly, on a sticky note and places that note on the corresponding sheet of easel paper. After everyone has posted their words, they sit as part of a circle. The group poem is said aloud and is comprised of one word from each category from each person: E.g. Person #1 says “I stand on the Rocks of [word they choose]“, Person #2 says “We sing the Songs of [word they choose]“, etc. This process is repeated around the circle. Please encourage people to stand as they say their line and feel free to sing it, act it, or express it in any way they see fit. This exercise represents a reflective process that moves the activity from the individual, to the group, and to the larger community

Credit: [World Trust Educational Services](#)

Unpacking Our Identities: Individual and Collective

ERG Activity

Check-In:

Establish ground rules for the group. For examples of ground rules, see here: [http://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-CircleOfTrust-Touchstones-stones-\(c\)2016-web.pdf](http://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-CircleOfTrust-Touchstones-stones-(c)2016-web.pdf)

Identity Exercise:

Write the following prompts on butcher paper or sections of a whiteboard (each prompt on a different piece of paper) and post them around the room:

- The collective identity around which you are organizing your ERG (e.g. Asian, Black women, Immigrant, etc.)



- American
- A hyphenate of the collective identity you are organizing your group around and ‘American’ (e.g. Asian-American, Black-American, Immigrant-American)
- “Your ethnic/cultural/national identity” (You are leaving this one open so that people can self-identify within the collective identity you are organizing your group around (e.g. Trinidadian as a part of the Black experience, Chinese as a part of the Asian experience, Colombian as a part of the Latinx experience , Congolese as a part of the immigrant experience)

Credit: [Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit](#)

Words on the Wall

ERG Activity

This activity will give participants an opportunity to reflect on their own assumptions and experiences with their collective identity (the one you are organizing your group around).

Writing/Drawing Exercise:

Have each person take a marker and walk around to each butcher paper or whiteboard section. They should write down the words, images, or thoughts about the titles on each butcher paper. On the “Your ethnic/cultural/national identity” section, invite participants to first write any sub-groups within your group’s collective identity that are part of who they are and to include reflections about those sub groups (e.g. Trinidadian, Chinese, Colombian, Congolese)

Debrief:

Take a moment and look at what people wrote on these butchers:

- What do you notice?
- Which was the easiest butcher to fill out? Which was hardest? Why?
- What similarities or differences did you notice between the hyphenated category (e.g. “Asian-American) and the other categories?
- What does that tell us about the hyphenated experience? About being both American and something else? About being othered? About being a community?

Share Quote:



Writing in 1974, activists Frank Chin, Shawn Wong, Lawson Inada, and Jeffery Chan declared: “Asian Americans are not one people but several.”

- What did they mean by this quote?
- How does this relate to the identity we are organizing around? How does it make you think about collective identities and the ways in which they are defined?
- How do other people view people who belong to our collective identity?
- What do other people miss about our collective identity?
- How do we think about ourselves in terms of being one people and also several peoples?

Credit: [Asian American Racial Justice Toolkit](#)

Intersectionality

ERG Activity

Intersectionality is the complex and cumulative way that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and yes, intersect—especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups.

Reading and Reflection Exercise:

These poems are shared to help us look at aspects of identity through an intersectional lens—that is, seeing multiplicities of identities as inextricably linked within a person and their lived, narrative experiences.

In the texts provided, by Audre Lorde and Danez Smith, both authors occupy multiple identity spaces. Lorde is Black, lesbian, and deaf (among other identities)). Smith is Black, gay, and young (among other identities). And each work is informed by the experiences of multiple identities. When viewing the texts through an intersectional lens, there’s no way to simplify or reduce the experience of the speakers to just one aspect of identity.

A. 10 Minutes of Silent Sustained Reading (2 Poems):

[Who Said It Was Simple BY AUDRE LORDE](#)



Tonight, in Oakland BY DANEZ SMITH

B. In a journal, take 5 minutes to write about one of the following prompts.

- Talk about a time when you noticed that something about you was different from those around you. Begin with this line: “I first noticed that I was ____ when ____.”
- Draw a line down the middle of a page. On the left side, make a list of your identities. On the right side, write about times when you are aware of being one of those identities more than another.
- Have you ever felt both privileged and disadvantaged in a situation or place because of some unchangeable aspects of who you are?

Debrief:

A. Select a group of three with whom to share the response to the prompt. Each person in the group share for 5 minutes. After your partner shares, practice “I resonated with you when.”

B. Come back together as a full staff to discuss the following questions. Harvest key takeaways from your small group discussions toward this discussion:

- The poems by Lorde and Smith address the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race. Consider each poem as an argument and a conversation. What does each poem say to you, the reader, as its argument? How does this relate or not to the substance of your own reflection and small group conversation?
- Why might it be problematic to focus on one aspect of a person’s identity at the expense of the others? For example, why is it problematic to read Audre Lorde as either a lesbian or African American? Have there been times when people have viewed you through the lens of only one identity and how did this affect you?
- What do these poems and your experience of being a person with multiple identities teach you about how we might need to consider intersectionality in our work?

Credit: [PBS News Hour](#)

Gender

ERG Activity



Reflection Exercise:

- A. Read the following excerpt from the essay [“How Trees Complicate Our Understanding of Gender”](#) by Miranda Schmidt.

Have you ever done this writing exercise? Describe your gender identity without using images that are stereotypically associated with masculine or feminine things. Try it. See what you find. When I do this exercise, I always think of the crabapple tree in the yard of the house I grew up in. It was split down the middle, all the way to the ground. Its two halves grew away from each other, almost as if they were two separate trees. We never knew how it had split. The crack down the middle of its trunk was old, possibly as old as the tree itself. Perhaps it was made by the weight of its branches pulling in opposite directions. Perhaps it originated from some outside source: an axe, or lightning. I would look at that tree and I would imagine its roots, those parts I couldn't see, grown all together, tangled up and merging in a way its above ground parts couldn't. Underneath, I thought, the tree would be wholly undivided.

- B. Think about how the different identities (race, sexual orientation, immigration status, nationality, religion etc.) you hold complicate these images. You can do this as a writing exercise, or you can find images and make a collage, or find any way that you might want to express your gender identity. For further inspiration, you may consider these two (optional) poems as well:

- Cam Awkward Rich's [Essay on the Theory of Motion](#) series
- Shinji Moon's [Baby Girl's Got A Kiss Like Sparkle Sticks](#)

Debrief:

Once you do that, reflect on what came up for you from the exercise:

- How did it feel to move away from masculine and feminine binaries? Was it hard, or did it feel natural?
- How did it feel in your body when you do that?
- What about the identities that you hold came up when you did this exercise?

Affirm, Counter, Transform Activity



ERG Activity

To advance racial equity, it is critical that we are able to talk about race. Too frequently, race is a topic that is avoided, which means that we perpetuate inequitable outcomes. Other times, when race is talked about, but without an equity strategy, implicit bias is triggered and inequities exacerbated. How we talk about race matters. The good news is that there is a useful field of practice to inform effective communications about race.

For the research behind these insights, see the Center for Social Inclusion's [Talking About Race Toolkit](#). Please read about the framework below and then do an activity to practice using it:



- A. Affirm-** Start off the dialogue by mentioning phrases and images that speaks to audience’s values. The key is to hook and engage your audience.
- *Start with the heart:* Start your message with an emotional connector to engage your audience in the message (e.g., We work hard to support our families and all our contributions help make America great)
 - *Explain why we are all in this together:* Explain “shared fate” in racially-explicit terms (e.g., It hurts the same to lose a home or job, whether we are White or Black, male or female, a single parent or a two-parent family...)



- B. Counter-** Lead the audience into the discussion of race with a brief snapshot of the historical context. The key is to open audience’s minds to deeper explanations about racial inequities.
- *Explain why we have the problem:* Give a very brief explanation of what has happened in the past and explain why we have a problem today. (e.g., Public dollars for schools, bus service, health care and a hundred more things we need, helped create jobs in the past. Cutting them now is not the answer to our problems, it will be the cause of more pain and misery.)
 - *Take on race directly:* Take on the race wedge by declaring it and dismissing it by naming institutional opportunities and actions (e.g., This is not about immigrants or welfare. This is about whether Americans will see their children off to college...)



C. Transform- Leave the audience with an engaging solution. The key is to present a solution so that the audience feels committed and feel as though they are progressing forward.

- *Reframe “makers” and “takers”:* Change and define who the real good guys and bad guys are in this fight (e.g., And while oil company and bank CEOs are getting richer, some are laying off workers and fighting for tax loop holes to avoid paying taxes, instead of investing in our nation’s future...)
- *End with heart and solution:* Present solution in emotional terms (e.g., They [corporations] can and should do their fair share so we the people can invest in schools, health care, transit and services that help us all make a bright future for our country.)

Journaling Exercise:

Living Cities’ mission is focused on closing racial income and wealth gaps in U.S. cities. Common argument against an approach that specifically calls out race are:

- It’s not about race, it’s about class
- Outcomes are based on hard work and values
- Racism used to be a problem, but it’s over
- Racism is not about systems, it’s about individual racists

Using the Affirm-Counter-Transform framework and your own knowledge about the causes and effects of racial income and wealth gaps, draft a 6 sentence max response to one of these common arguments. There is no right or wrong answer here, and it doesn’t matter if you know a lot or a little! The point is to practice using the tool. We will continue building our shared knowledge about racial inequity over the next year and beyond.

Debrief:

- A. Find a partner and share your response:
 - What resonated? How might the response be improved?
- B. Share out: Quick round-robin reflections in full group on how it felt to reflect and practice using Affirm-Counter-Transform

Credit: The Center for Social Inclusion's [Talking About Race Toolkit](#)