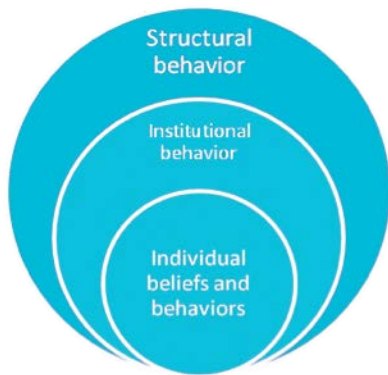


How to Identify Structural Problems

When asked to identify problems, we usually first see the obstacles directly in front of us – often someone’s behavior or belief systems (e.g., a discriminatory boss, bad teachers). Sometimes we see a particular institution or policy that stands in our way. These obstacles are real, but to develop racial equity strategies we need to go further. The structural race lens



asks us to look at systems and structures – the range of institutions, policies and actors that are part of the problems and the solutions. This helps us find strategic entry points to create transformation that is racially equitable.

The Center for Social Inclusion has developed a series of questions to help find strategic entry points or to review strategies already underway.

ASKING STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY STRUCTURAL ENTRY POINTS

Address these questions in the following general order (*with food system examples*):

- ✓ What problem are we trying to solve? (*e.g., Lack of access to healthy foods, more funding for farmers of color, fair wages for food system workers.*)
- ✓ Who is most marginalized by the problem and where are they, if geography is relevant? Note: Pay attention to race, gender and class. (*e.g., Urban communities of color are more likely to lack access to healthy foods.*)
- ✓ Who is doing well despite the problem, if anyone, and where are they? Note: Pay attention to race, gender and class. (*e.g., Wealthy White suburban communities can pay for farmers markets and have abundant grocery stores offering healthy foods.*)
- ✓ Name at least three (and no more than six) institutions impacting the problem we are trying to solve. Note: These institutions may be impacting the problem by doing something wrong, doing something right, doing nothing or some combination of all three. (*e.g., Large companies like Monsanto, public schools, USDA, restaurant industry*)
- ✓ Name at least three policies that are impacting the problem (if not obvious or redundant from the institutions named). (*e.g., Farm bill, immigration, minimum wage*)

- ✓ Which of the institutions and policies impact the **root causes** of the problem (*e.g., Low wages do not allow for low-income individuals to afford healthy foods; farm bill policies are not sufficient to invest in infrastructure needed to provide healthy foods to communities lacking access.*)
- ✓ What do we know about the history of the problem that must be addressed to solve it? Note: Context matters. (*e.g., January farm bill extension renewed commodity payments that both political parties agreed should be cut; this creates an opportunity.*)
- ✓ What are the possible starting points? Which institution or policy seems more likely to have a big impact on the root cause of the problem we are trying to solve? (*e.g., USDA, farm bill, local food, restaurant industry*)
- ✓ Would addressing it successfully create a positive and helpful reaction in any of the other institutions we identified as important?
- ✓ Would addressing it make sense to those impacted?
- ✓ Would it engage new and different allies?
- ✓ Does it take advantage of the current political climate?
- ✓ Is there some capacity (resources and interest) among us to work on it?

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Phone: +1.212.248.2785

Fax: +1.212.248.6409

Email: info@thecsi.org

www.centerforsocialinclusion.org