PRACTICE GUIDE SERIES

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity

Debunk Myths

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Contents

To our readers

From our earliest days, our founder W.K. Kellogg articulated a formula for change that relies on the leadership and authentic engagement of local community members. As he wrote, "...it is only through cooperative planning, intelligent study, and group action – activities on the part of the entire community – that lasting result can be achieved." This formula paired with a resolute commitment to eliminate racism's enduring effect on the lives of children, families and communities, guides how we support and work alongside grantees.

Although this commitment to racial equity began decades ago, it was not until 2007 that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) board of trustees committed us to becoming an anti-racist organization. That explicit directive accelerated efforts to examine every aspect of operations and grantmaking from that perspective. In that effort under the leadership of WKKF President and CEO, La June Montgomery Tabron, we identified and named racial equity and racial healing, leadership development and community engagement as our "DNA"–approaches so essential that they are embedded in every aspect of the Kellogg Foundation's work.

In evaluation, the seeds for that were planted decades ago. For example, the Kellogg Foundation funded the American Evaluation Association's Building Diversity Initiative in 1999, explicitly focusing on diversifying the evaluator pipeline and promoting culturally competent evaluation practices. Today, the foundation again finds ourselves leading the field in moving beyond culturally competent evaluations to equitable evaluation (i.e., using evaluation as a tool to shine light on racial inequity and social injustice, and to improve solutions that create a world in which every child thrives).

Practicing equitable evaluation is not, cannot and should not be only for evaluators of color. As a group of professionals, we all bear the responsibility and obligation to do so. In May 2020, the world witnessed George Floyd's appalling murder. Together, people worldwide joined throngs of demonstrators marching in solidarity for a common humanity and calling for leadership and justice on behalf of one man and many others senselessly taken by police violence. As an evaluator, I believe evaluation can be a tool to promote democracy and advance equity. Equitable evaluation can render power to the powerless, offer voice to the silenced and give presence to those treated as invisible. The tools we employ–authentic data collection, analysis, reporting, learning and reflection–can debunk false narratives, challenge biases, expose disparities, raise awareness, level the playing field and reveal truths for measurable positive progress in our society.

As evaluators of color, we have been grappling with how to go beyond the rhetoric of why evaluation currently is not helping to advance racial equity to actual practice. We struggle with questions such as: "Should evaluation be value-free and agenda-free?" "Do our own lived experiences, values and cultures have a place in our evaluation practice?" "How do we bring our whole selves to our work – our intellect, our passion and our histories?" Moreover, we wonder how evaluation can authentically facilitate the advancement of racial equity–so the stories of communities of color are fully told and understood, so the solutions emerge as truly their own.

Every day, we find ourselves asking more questions, pivoting our thinking, wrestling to demystify technical jargon and quite honestly, sometimes wishing we were doing something else, especially on days when we must defend our stance, expertise and identities. "How to" is emerging as something we need to develop so the community of evaluation professionals and evaluation consumers will review, peruse, use, critique, refine, revise and enhance the content of practice guides, all in service of achieving racial equity. With such context and background, this series is produced.

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity consists of 3 practical guides for evaluation professionals who want to do this important work and/or who want to better understand it. Rather than debating the value of evaluation in service of racial equity, we are offering a way forward. We do not pretend to have all the answers. However, we hope this series takes some of the mystery out of evaluation practice and shows how to authentically use evaluation to advance racial equity. There is no single tool, framework or checklist that will transform someone into a practitioner of this type of evaluation. It requires lifelong commitment to self-reflection and learning, as well as racially equitable solutions to change deep-rooted racist systems. This guide aims to show **how** to incorporate this core value and alignment into the evaluation practice.

There are three guides in this series, and this is **Guide #1:**

Guide #1:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

Guide #2:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Guide #3:
Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

We are grateful for Kien Lee, Principal Associate of Community Science, for her leadership in developing and writing this series of practice guides, with support from other Community Science staff. We would like to thank the following individuals for their insightful reviews and feedback in revising the content: Holly Avey, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Nicole Bowman, Bowman Performance Consulting; Elvis Fraser, Sankofa Consulting; Melvin Hall, Northern Arizona University; Cynthia Silva Parker, Interactions Institute for Social Change; Daniela Pineda, Informed Insight; and Courtney Ricci, The Colorado Trust.

We would also like to thank WKKF colleagues on the evaluation, communications and racial equity teams for their roles in fine-tuning and finalizing the guides.

We welcome you, our readers, to share your comments and suggestions in making the guides the most useful for evaluation practitioners in our collective pursuit of **Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity.**

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Evaluation and racial equity: How did we get here?

What was happening in our country and in the world when we began writing this series?

When we started writing this series of guides about evaluation in service of racial equity, the world was experiencing a major public health crisis and much of the United States was facing civil unrest in response to police brutality. These events highlighted the existing cracks in our communities and in our country along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, making them visible to many White Americans who had previously ignored, dismissed, minimized or denied their existence. The unrest, coupled with the disproportional impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans, Blacks and Latinos made it more difficult for people to remain ignorant or tolerant of racism. It became clear that certain groups of people, because of their skin color, limited education, immigration status or other traits, are still subject to a kind of oppression that denies them fair and just access to opportunities and resources that enable them to thrive. In certain cases, the opportunity to simply survive is not even available.

Suddenly, organizations and corporations were in search of strategies for increasing their own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Age-old symbols of white supremacy (e.g., Confederate flags, public statues of Confederate generals and sports team mascots that promote harmful stereotypes of Native people) were being eliminated. Terms such as “white fragility,” “white privilege,” “anti-Blackness,” “unconscious bias,” “allies” and even “systemic racism,” exploded into mainstream news. We recognize these issues have existed for generations. However, many people were recognizing them for the first time as they were no longer able to remain ignorant of their presence.

This context is relevant to evaluation. Evaluation at its best should generate knowledge, and knowledge—when made accessible to people who have been oppressed—contributes to their ability to make change. Evaluation also is used to:

- Judge the merit of an intervention.
- Determine whether the intervention deserves continued funding and support.
- Affirm or dispute the assumptions on which the intervention is based.
- Hold leaders and organizations accountable to the communities they serve.

All these functions make evaluation an instrument of power, especially because organizations turn to evaluators to help them determine if and how their services, programs and practices truly contribute to racial equity and how they can be improved. Evaluators—as well as funders, program managers, advocates and community leaders—have started considering the role of evaluation in creating a more equitable and just world, contesting the canons of science and positioning evaluation as part of a larger movement for racial equity and social justice. Evaluation, a field that has already revised approaches to ensure *responsive* evaluation, *democratic* evaluation and *transformative* evaluation, is now undertaking efforts to ensure *culturally responsive* evaluation and *equitable* evaluation.

Debates inside and outside the profession are often reduced to whether evaluation should be value-free and impartial, or whether evaluation should intentionally promote racial equity through its methodologies, as if they are mutually exclusive.

This debate creates a false dichotomy, wasting precious time that we can use to hone the practice of evaluation that is in service of racial equity and scientifically rigorous. We can also use the time to educate people who direct nonprofits, advocate for social justice and lead community change—who are not immersed in the study and practice of evaluation—about what they can expect from such evaluations, and not be confused about rhetoric, philosophies and the like. Simply put, they need to know how to do evaluation that supports their racial equity agenda. It is time for us to shift our focus to how we practice in a way that facilitates racial equity, learn from our experiences and keep pushing the practice forward.

Evaluation in service of racial equity is a practice, not an aside, a checklist, a course or something you do only if the funder wants it. We must engage in a real dialogue about the myths of evaluation that stand in our way, our own biases, our understanding about systems that perpetuate racial inequity and poor community engagement and our actions as evaluators to help create healthy, just and equitable communities.

How do we get there?

As a field, evaluation practitioners need to focus on intentionally breaking down and changing several evaluation-related practices that are especially relevant to racial equity goals. In essence, evaluators have to:

- Go beyond technical tasks and have the knowledge and skills to challenge strategies intended to end disparities in education, health, housing and other areas.
- Engage early in the development and improvement of a strategy so they can raise questions and concerns about *who* is driving the strategy, *with* whom and *for* whom. Funders and organizations typically do not engage evaluators until after their strategies have been developed or are ready for implementation.
- Compel funders and organizations to take the time to define and understand the "community" and be clear about who in that community is supposed to benefit from their strategies.
- Meaningfully and authentically engage the community most impacted by the initiative to learn about their lived experiences and community knowledge, which can guide the practice and use of evaluation.
- Learn about the history of the country, as well as the communities in which they are working to understand—with humility and a systems lens—how past and current institutional structures and policies contribute to power differences and the racial oppression and disparities experienced by people and communities of color today.
- Self-reflect and transform their own thinking and practices. They should also bring in partners with complementary competencies to help respond to the issues and needs that will inevitably arise during the process. This can help them become more connected to relevant fields (e.g., racial justice, organizational development, group facilitation, conflict resolution) to be able to tap into those resources.
- Create an evaluation process to confront and deal with power issues, including differences in power between funders and grantees, between leaders and staff in organizations, between large established and small grassroots organizations and last but not least, among the evaluator, participants and the sponsor or client.

- Design evaluation to use multiple methodologies and studies to assess different types of changes—individual, organization, system and community. Different methods must be used to understand and map complex relationships and connections, identify emerging developments that could facilitate or hinder change and call out intended and unintended outcomes and consequences. This rigorous approach is necessary to assess systems change that can move us toward racial equity. It has to become a *primary* practice in evaluations in service of racial equity. This also means there must be sufficient time, resources and thoughtfulness to coordinate, integrate and make sense of the findings across studies, and use them effectively to improve and move the needle toward racial equity. Too often, funders and organizations don't do this and the knowledge generated by the studies becomes fragmented, diminishing the true value.

- Maximize the use of evaluation by incorporating evaluation into other capacity-building activities. Funders to social justice organizations have to continuously test, improve and learn from strategies to achieve racial equity. Evaluation is often viewed as a threat or something "off to the side." Evaluators alone cannot advocate for use of evaluation findings. Evaluation has to be part of technical assistance, trainings and other capacity-building activities to help communities *and* funders transform findings into usable knowledge. Too often, funders don't invest sufficient resources for the evaluator and other partners to coordinate their efforts or simply leave it to them to "work it out among themselves." This oversight undermines the potential of the evaluation.

None of the above can occur in a vacuum. Evaluations and evaluators are part of an ecosystem of philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, scientist establishments, public agencies, professional associations and the consulting industry—all of which have to do business differently if the practice of evaluation can aid in progress toward racial equity.

How can this series of guides help you as evaluators?

This series of guides, ***Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity,*** is designed to help you exercise your own agency to better use your expertise to achieve racial equity and improve the services you provide your clients and the communities they support. It integrates and further expands on the work of many evaluators who have pushed the envelope through developing new concepts such as multicultural validity, culturally responsive evaluation and equitable evaluation. It also incorporates ideas from systems thinking, organizational development and other fields to help you put evaluation that is in service of racial equity into practice. The series is split into three guides and while they are all connected, they do not need to be read in order, or in full, to be valuable.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths

The beliefs and ideas funders, advocates, community leaders, evaluators and others carry that can make everyone anxious and apprehensive about practicing evaluations for this purpose.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Diagnose Biases and Systems

Implicit biases that influence evaluation practice and evaluators' understanding of systems and the use of a systems lens in evaluations.

PRACTICE GUIDE

Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement

Responsible, responsive and genuine engagement of communities in the evaluation process and as an outcome in evaluation.

For some the background may seem obvious or rudimentary, especially if you understand structural racism and/or you have experienced racial discrimination. For others, there might be new information and suggestions that can lead to different insights, especially if you have limited understanding about structural racism and/or have never experienced racial discrimination.

This series as a whole:

- Presupposes that evaluation can be used to advance racial equity without diminishing scientific merit.
    - If you don't believe you have a responsibility to use evaluation to promote racial equity and social justice, you could undermine and even harm communities.
- Represents work in progress while reflecting the current state of the field.
    - Evaluation continues to evolve in response to the U.S. political and social climate.
    - Evaluators continue to exercise their agency, work to embed evaluation into strategy and be honest with themselves, their peers and their clients about how everyone can change the way they go about the business of evaluation.
- Uses the term people and communities of color for consistency to refer to the collective of people who identify as African Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous, Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
    - This term, along with others such as BIPOC (Blacks, Indigenous and Other People of Color) and Latinx have their own meaning in specific contexts, and it is not the task of this guide to determine which term is correct in which instance.
- Is written by real people who bring their expertise, passion and lived experiences to their work.
    - You'll find technical information as well as expressions of the writers' convictions about evaluation along with personal accounts of their experiences. .

The time to act is now, while individuals and organizations are eager to learn and open to making positive changes toward racial equity, and while our country works toward healing and recovering from the pandemic and civil unrest.

Practice Guide
Doing evaluation in service of racial equity: Debunk myths

Why focus on myths?

Myths are popular beliefs or traditions that are not true, but because these beliefs or traditions are passed along unchallenged, people start to believe they are true. Myths about key concepts in evaluation such as rigor and objectivity are shaped by our mental models—frames of how something works that guide our perceptions, behaviors and how we approach and relate to both other people and our surroundings. These mental models tint and narrow our view of the world we encounter. They can weigh into how we answer questions like:

- What do we think is right or wrong?
- What do we think other people are capable of?
- Can people of color be racist?
- If a program achieves its goals, does this mean the evaluation must be positive?

These mental models can be so deeply ingrained that we may not even recognize them if they are pointed out. Nevertheless, we depend on them to help make sense of everything around us. For context, mental models may be incomplete, evolving, not necessarily accurate or based on facts, and are often simplified versions of complex situations (Gentner & Stevens, 1983; Holland et al., 1986; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Newcomb, 2008). This means our mental models can contribute to perpetuating myths—consciously and unconsciously.

As evaluators, our mental models about evaluation and the world guide our practice, decision-making and problem-solving. They shape how we relate to other people involved in the evaluation—from the funder who commissioned the work to the people from whom we collect data. These mental models all come from somewhere: from the way we are trained, from our professional and personal experiences and histories and from our current contexts. Mental models about what makes a good or bad evaluation and everything in between influence how we think about, design and implement evaluations—even those that could contribute to racial equity.

Evaluators, funders, advocates, program managers, community leaders and others who use evaluation must become aware of their own mental models and the myths they might perpetuate. Only then can they identify how they need to shift to support evaluations that contribute to racial equity. These shifts can help change personal behaviors and professional practices.

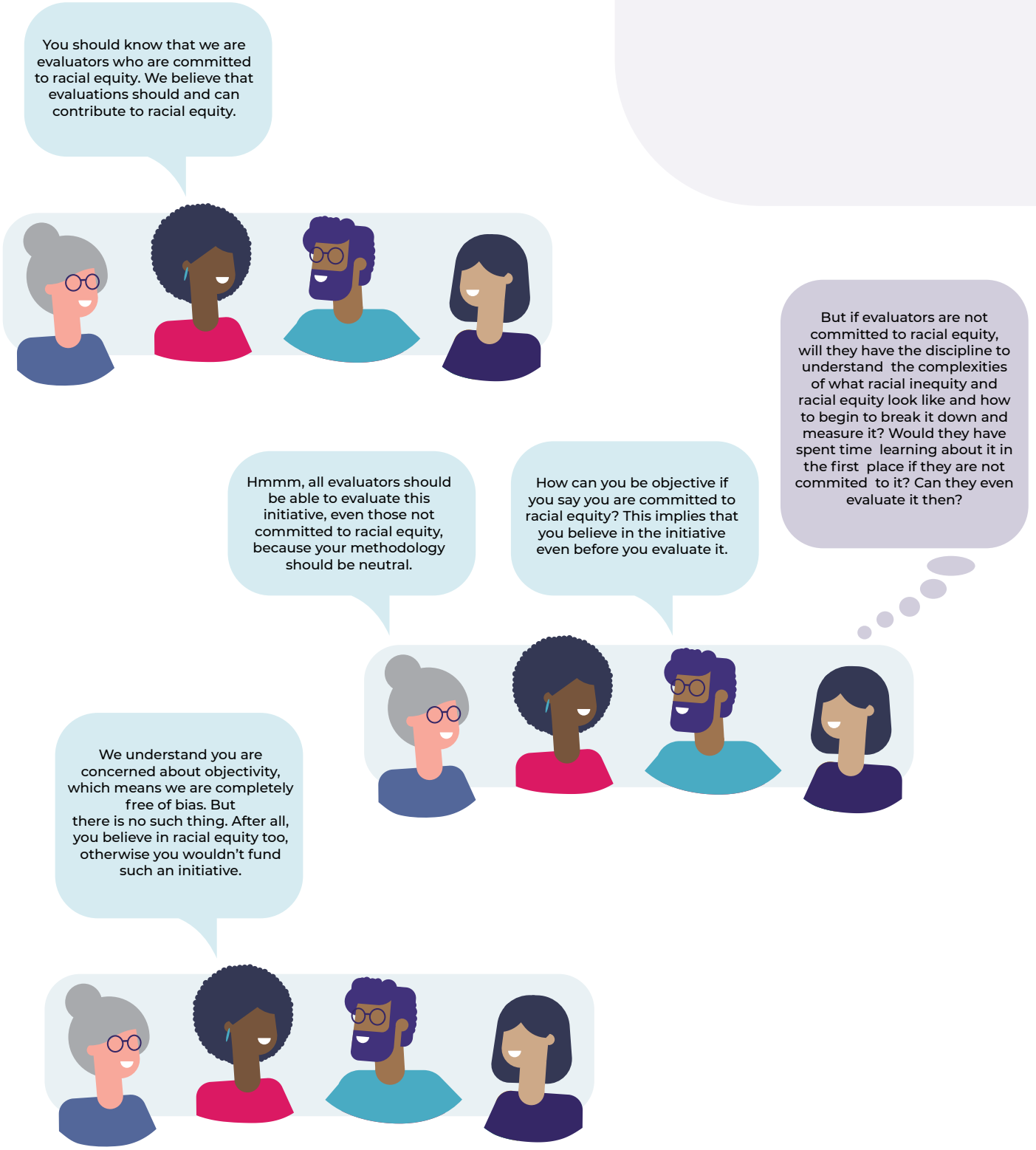
In this practice guide, we explore some common, but unhelpful, myths about evaluation and racial equity. We hope this provides prompts to rethink your own mental models or tips to shift people's thinking so we can all be better aligned with the mission to achieve racial equity.

Common myths about evaluation that challenge its use in service of racial equity

Myths, and the mental models that allow them to persist, affect our perceptions, behaviors and how we approach and relate to both other people and our surroundings. They affect how we think about our work and our colleagues. Some myths support misconceptions and oversimplify the issues underlying the connection between evaluation and racial inequity. Here, we explore some prevalent myths that need to be re-examined to improve the use of evaluation in service of racial equity.

Myth 1:

Rigorous science is objective and value-free. Evaluators who are committed to racial equity are no longer objective and value-free.



Evaluators of racial equity strategies are often committed to social change. They want the strategy to succeed so there can be progress. However, this wishful outlook can lead funders and strategy designers to perceive evaluators as biased, not objective and incapable of conducting a scientifically rigorous study. Some funders and designers prefer (or think they prefer) value-free evaluators.

Consider the decisions made in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, the use of Henrietta Lack's cells and the Cincinnati Radiation Experiments, as well as state-run eugenics programs in North Carolina and Puerto Rico and among Native American communities (Nittle, 2020). Those decisions were all made by scientists who perceived people in their experiments to be inferior because of their race and lack of money and power to make their own choices. The experiments were based on racist mental models and without acknowledgement or interrogation of these mental models. Rather, they were viewed as good science by the scientific community which was dominated by White men, and the experiments executed racist outcomes and perpetuated racism. They reflected prevailing societal values at the time and also the pattern of devaluing Black and Brown people and their bodies (Deb Roy, 2018). Their history underscores questions raised earlier: *Who gets to define the research question and scientific rigor and who gets their research funded?* Buying into the notion that science should be value-free and objective influences which scientists and practices we consider "effective" at the cost of racial equity.

Debunk the myth: the false pursuit of completely objective research

Separating us as evaluators from our values and experiences is not possible or desirable, just as it is not possible for funders to separate their own values and worldviews from their grantmaking strategies and decisions. As evaluators, we make decisions all the time, including:

- Who we engage and listen to.
- Which questions to ask.
- What data to collect, how and from whom.
- How to analyze the data.
- How to communicate the findings and to whom.

Each of these decisions is influenced by our expertise and informed opinions about what is best in a given context. This is all shaped by our professional training, life experiences and worldviews. Plus the funder and other stakeholders approach these decisions through their own lens.

The pursuit of "completely objective" research is bound to lead to incorrect conclusions, and is broadly harmful because it promotes the myth of an absolute truth to be uncovered by a (nonexistent) perfectly rigorous science. Instead of objectivity, we can practice and demand *honesty, transparency* and *integrity* in the evaluation process. We can state clearly that while we are committed to the intent of the strategy, we are not partial to the strategy itself. This statement helps highlight the power dynamics at play in an evaluation and among stakeholders. **As evaluators, we have to be mindful, honest with ourselves and transparent with the people involved about the logic and chain of evidence that led to our conclusions and recommendations.** This allows others to be informed consumers of information and builds confidence in our findings.

When considering a new evaluation project and negotiating the terms and conditions, we should ask ourselves these questions and be honest about our values, beliefs, biases and perceptions.

- Do I think the strategy will work and for who? Why do I think this? Am I open to being wrong?
- How do I perceive the people funding the strategy, managing and implementing it, providing technical assistance and other support and receiving the funds and doing the work? Why do I perceive them this way (e.g., is it their race and ethnicity, gender, privilege, etc.)? Am I open to changing my perceptions?
- Do I have the lived experiences and the competencies to be an effective partner for the strategy? How much good or harm can I do? Am I okay with that?
- What am I willing to risk if I have to confront, question or disagree with the people involved in order to push for and advance racial equity as the impact of my evaluation effort?

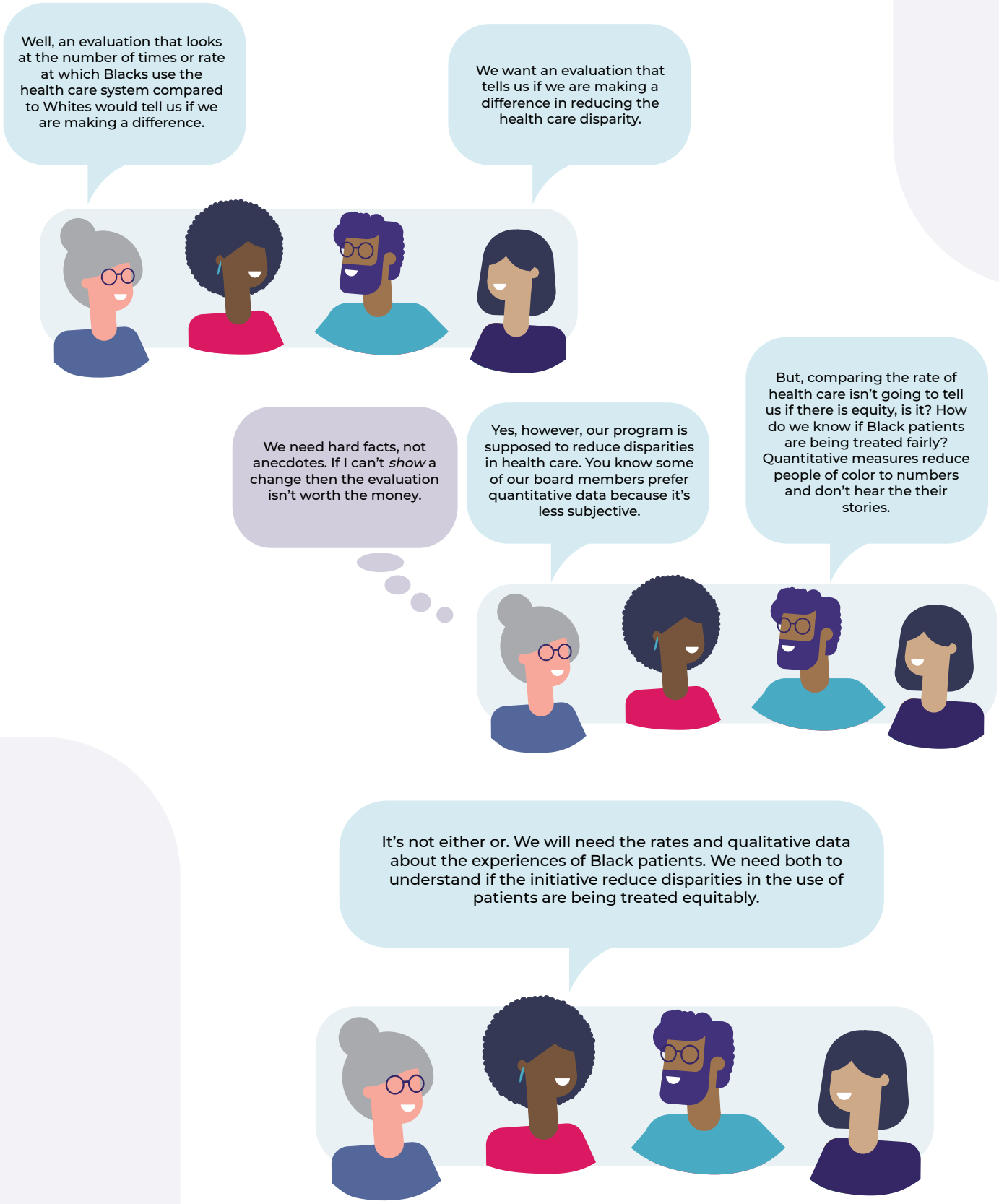
Where is the line?

As evaluators committed to racial equity, we have to ask ourselves where the boundary lies between our desire to see a racial equity strategy succeed and our discomfort with what happens should the strategy not succeed and therefore risk being defunded? Sometimes our blinders prevent us from seeing how we are about to cross the line between our personal and professional commitments. It can be helpful to build a community of trusted peers who can support us in our challenges to assert our agency while being scientifically rigorous, and alert us when we are about to cross the line.

The reverse is also possible. Where is the boundary between our own skepticism that the strategy can advance racial equity and our focus on the strategy's actual potential? How do we avoid letting our skepticism get in the way? Will we challenge our client who is paying for our services—and what happens if we do?

Myth 2:

Some methods are better than others for evaluating racial equity strategies because they promote authenticity or are more scientifically rigorous.



Qualitative inquiry and methods that promote storytelling are generally preferred by funders, evaluators, advocates and community leaders who are involved in racial equity efforts, as compared with quantitative methods that rely on numerical data. These individuals believe that highlighting the lived experiences of historically silenced groups is important, and qualitative data in the form of stories are more effective at doing this—especially in identifying shifts in power, changes in community conditions, the quality of people's interactions with systems such as law enforcement and other signs of progress toward racial equity. In fact, some anti-racist advocates would assert that quantitative data and statistics are reflective of the dominant culture and therefore should not be used in evaluations of racial equity work.

Debunk the myth: both quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary and each has its unique strengths and limitations

Highlighting lived experiences is important. However, qualitative methods alone are often not sufficient when using evaluation as a tool for racial equity. Both numbers *and* stories are needed to understand the full picture. For instance, indicators of racial inequity include racial disparities in health, education, housing, wealth and other life conditions. Quantitative data are most helpful in illustrating these disparities and bringing attention to the unequal access of people of color to services and resources. For example, we know that there is a health crisis experienced by Black mothers because we can quantitatively track mortality rates from childbirth across race and ethnicity. And we know there is a criminal justice crisis for young Black, Latino and Native American men and women because we can enumerate the proportion of inmates, police-involved shootings and sentencing practices across race and ethnicity. We are also able to quantify positive behaviors and social constructs, like volunteerism and sense of community, among different racial and ethnic groups through the use of surveys. All of these quantitative data—in addition to qualitative data about changes in systems and community conditions—are important to understand and address racial inequity.

Also, some funders, policymakers and evaluators prefer that any strategy be evaluated through quantitative inquiry, such as experimental designs and randomized control trials (RCTs), because they allow for validity and objectivity. These methodologies are perceived as the gold standard for scientific rigor, assumed to ensure an unbiased and objective evaluation. Indeed, their use has historically been advantageous in securing funding and having results "taken seriously," illustrating the use of science as a tool of power. However, their strengths, such as helping to prove causation, are useful only for answering certain evaluation questions, and only if you can select two groups that are identical on the characteristics central to the intervention being evaluated and determine if the intervention caused any differences in outcomes between the two groups. Proof of causation, however, is not enough to fully understand and address racial inequity.

Racial equity strategies are complex undertakings because of the multiple levels of change they need to effect, the compounding root causes and the natural conflicts that can arise. Anyone who has embraced such complexity in a strategy's design and implementation ought to embrace a similar complexity in its evaluation. Yet funders and evaluators tend to want a single answer, based on a single method, under a single framework, and they tend to want a single study to evaluate all this complexity. Evaluation methodologies and quantitative and qualitative methods are merely tools. The key—and the hallmark of scientific rigor—is how we put them together to answer the evaluation questions, implement them in a way that highlights racial inequity and use the answers to scrutinize the assumptions underlying the strategy and to improve the theory behind it and its implementation.

What does it mean to implement evaluations in a way that facilitates racial equity—to ensure that people who have been historically excluded because of their race, ethnicity and other intersecting identities have equitable access to the opportunities and resources offered by evaluators and by the evaluation? Let's consider this for a popular quantitative-focused approach—experimental and quasi-experimental designs—and for qualitative inquiries.

Managing funders' expectations

Funders often don't embrace complexity because it can be too much of a risk (i.e., it will make their board uncomfortable, it will take too many years, it is not how things have been done). They tend to be disappointed if evaluations do not show the results they had hoped to see. When this happens, funders may abruptly stop the strategy or the evaluation.

In the end, the communities of color that might have benefitted from the strategy are negatively impacted. This is why evaluators have to be involved in the strategy's development from the start. By doing so, they can help funders and others manage expectations about what is measurable within the timeframe for the strategy and within the budget available.

In **experimental and quasi-experimental designs,** for instance, we as evaluators can:

- Provide options for improvement (e.g., extra after-school tutoring, financial literacy assistance, substance abuse treatment, etc.) to both the control and treatment groups, or use a wait-list tactic and not withhold those options from the treatment group. Withholding an intervention option (as opposed to wait-listing) is an acceptable practice, but it creates unequal treatment of different groups and it gives the evaluator too much power over the participants.
- Be transparent about the sampling and randomization strategy with the people involved and weigh the pros, cons, risks and benefits for them.
- Be intentional about using accessible language and don't rely on technical jargon (e.g., "randomization," "attrition," "external validity," "intervention fidelity," "p value") to communicate the scientific rigor of the evaluation. Using technical jargon is one way the evaluator maintains power and control and continues to mystify evaluation.
- Draw on and relate participants' real-world knowledge about their lives and communities to the scientific findings produced through the experimental design or RCT conclusions. This practice values the experiences of people in communities—especially people of color—and helps place them in a position to drive change, instead of valuing only the evaluators' perspective and continuing to treat the people most affected by the initiative as subjects. Also, the evaluator should not try to oversell the findings by extrapolating or generalizing them to other "similar" populations and communities. This dismisses, ignores and devalues differences across racial groups and how they have been impacted by structural racism.
- Consider the implications that group differences (regardless of statistical significance) may have for the strategy or program, rather than diminishing the findings' impact because there was no statistical significance. Statistical significance is useful, but it is only one tool to understand the strategy or program's effects, and by emphasizing statistical significance, participants' real-world experiences with the strategy or program are undervalued.
- Have upfront discussions with the funder about what it takes to oversample for racial and ethnic groups that tend to be underrepresented in the variables of interest. Oversampling can be time- and resource-intensive. Yet, having a sufficient sample size is necessary to fully understand the problem and properly inform the solution to benefit the underrepresented groups.

In **qualitative inquiry**:

- Be clear and transparent about the rules of evidence used to derive themes, and not focus on the loudest or most opinionated voice. By giving a primary voice to the loudest person, the evaluator could be perpetuating power differences during data collection and in reporting.
- Pay deliberate attention to—and further explore—responses that suggest a disregard for the needs, histories, cultures, experiences and contexts of particular racial groups by the funder, strategy manager or a relevant third party, such as a technical assistance provider. This is important even if such responses represent only a small percentage of the sample. The evaluator should also ask the respondents' permission to share the information because their confidentiality could be compromised if they represent a small number in the sample.
- Balance thematic analysis and use of quotes. Quotes alone are insufficient and their use is not an indicator of authenticity or lifting up "the community's voices." Neither is the use of thematic analysis and synthesis sufficient. Lack of transparency about the way themes are derived diminishes the authenticity and granularity of community voices. So does an evaluator's lack of understanding about structural racism, lack of attention to the granularity of people's responses and failure to contextualize responses.
- Be attentive to power differences in group interviews or focus groups. Evaluators should not set up groups so that the person, or people, with the most power dominates the discussion or influences the responses of others. Doing so can affect the quality of the data, perpetuate power differences, and cause missed opportunities to address racist attitudes.

In the end, neither quantitative inquiry nor qualitative inquiry alone are "gold standards" regardless of the evaluation question being asked. It is more important that the evaluation questions, data collection practices, analysis and conclusion follow a logic that is reasonable and transparent, generate knowledge that serves the needs of the people most affected by the intervention and evaluation and don't perpetuate racial inequity. the use of evaluation in service of racial equity.

Myth 3:

Asking community members their opinions on the evaluation is enough to help equalize the power between them and evaluators and gives them power.

When asked about practicing evaluations that contribute to racial equity, funders, strategy designers and implementers, technical assistance providers and evaluators often emphasize community engagement—involving community members in designing the evaluation and co-interpreting the results, or "lifting up the community's voice." In their minds, being intentional about who needs to be involved in the conversation, and assuming that everyone has something to say regardless of whether or not they are in a position of power, will reduce power differences.

Debunk the myth: community engagement is about shifting power, not just lifting up voices

The power difference between evaluators and community members is important to address. However, the most important power difference lies between the community and the funder and other people who make unilateral decisions that impact the community. Evaluations in service of racial equity must be implemented in a way that helps identify and shift that power difference. To do this, we as evaluators can:

- Create evaluation and learning questions that, when answered, will provide community members with data and opportunities they can use to advocate for change.
- Include the voice and presence of the community in telling the story and not diminish negative feedback from the community about the funder, process and other support received (or not) from the funder and partners.
- Involve community members to make sure the evaluation uses appropriate and reasonable measures of change and explains the outcomes in a way that doesn't harm the community.
- Work with community members to understand the systems maintaining the status quo and identify the levers of change (and who controls them). Then, design an evaluation that will hold the decision-makers accountable and facilitate the community members' use of the findings to advocate for their priorities and drive change.

We must be clear about two things in the evaluation:

1. *Who the "community" is.* Frequently there is not one community but multiple communities, and each one has a different stake in the strategy and the evaluation.

2. *What "engagement" really means.* Informing community members about the evaluation and consulting them about different aspects of the evaluation (which don't facilitate a shift in power to affect racial equity) or partnering with them to build their capacity to make joint decisions about the evaluation and the strategy or initiative (which facilitates a shift in power to affect racial equity).

Evaluators and funders often favor participatory approaches and training, and using community residents to collect, analyze and interpret data. They think these approaches share power and control with community members. While commendable, the resources, time and effort that go into supporting the residents' training, coaching and quality control of the data are usually not sufficient (Gommerman & Monroe, 2012) or focused on putting community residents in the position to lead, drive change and shift power so they can have more control over decisions and processes that impact them. Consequently, community engagement like this turns out to be more tokenistic than meaningful.

The third guide in this series, ***Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Deepen Community Engagement,*** provides guidance about how evaluators can meaningfully involve community members in evaluation, as well as help ensure that community members' knowledge and leadership are prioritized in the initiative.

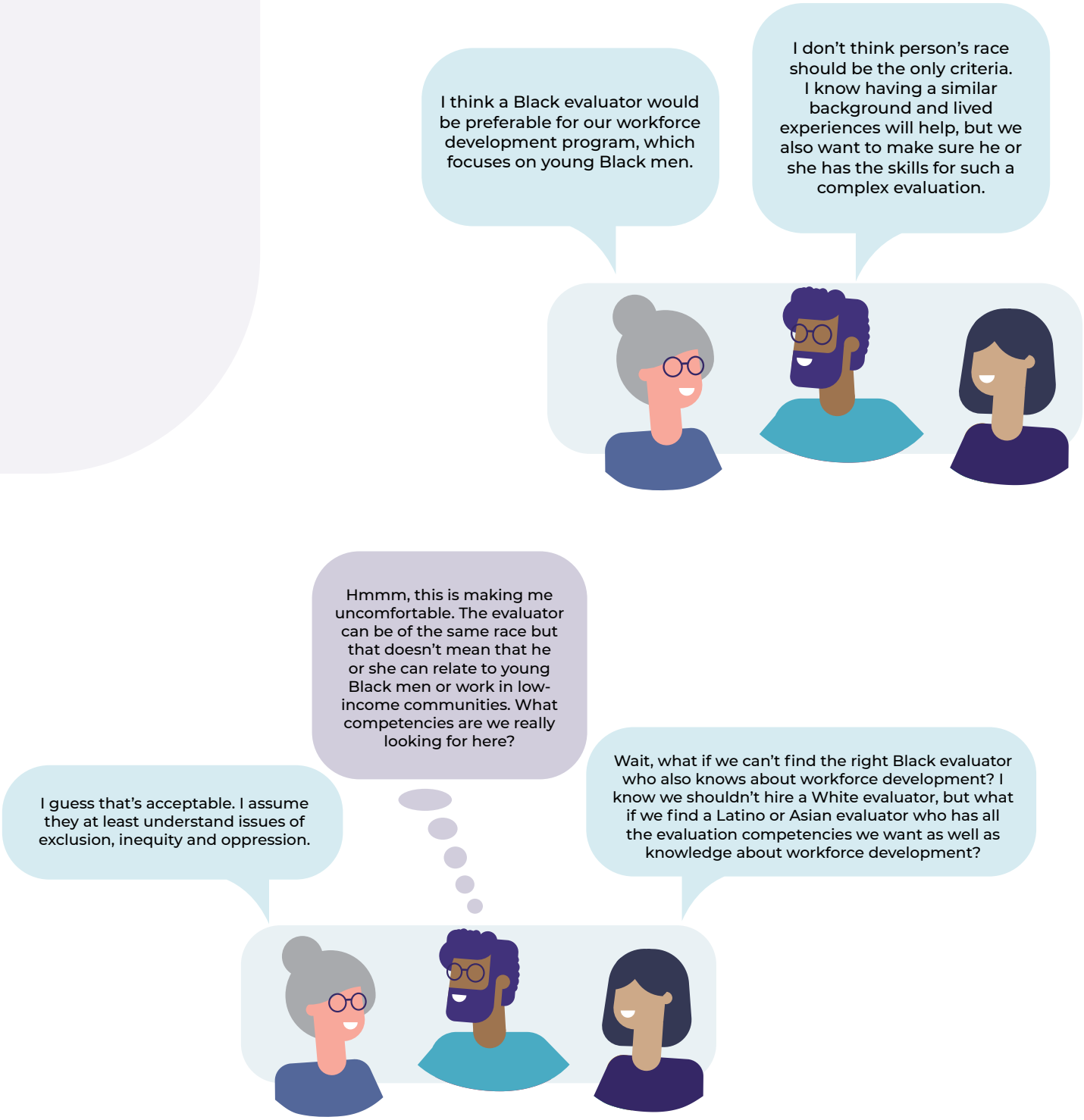
Engaging the community: How?

Funders like the idea of "centering" community residents of color in their strategies and placing these residents in the "driver's seat," but at the same time not "overburdening" them.

However, rarely do we ask what funders mean by "centering," and we also rarely ask community members if they want to be involved, and how, when, and in which decisions they want to have a say. Authentically engaging community starts with the funder and evaluator being honest about both the power and the limits of community engagement. Are the funder, evaluator or strategy manager truly ready to share power with community residents? What are the parameters of the power they are willing to share or give up?

Myth 4:

We should hire evaluators of the same race as the people of color most affected by the intervention. If this is not possible, it is better to hire any evaluator of color than a White evaluator because they understand what it's like to be excluded and oppressed. Also, evaluators of color are naturally anti-racist because of their lived experiences.



Evaluators who share the same or similar race or ethnicity as the people who are affected by the intervention will do a better job because they are naturally able to relate to the people, which also means that the people will tell them the truth. As such, the quality of the data will be better and the findings will be more accurate. White evaluators are less likely to successfully engage and relate to the people who are affected by the intervention because they don't share a history of oppression; on the contrary, White evaluators are perceived as representing the oppressor.

Debunk the myth: evaluators' understanding of systems and their competencies in mixed methods, in addition to their lived experiences, are what matters

All evaluators, regardless of their race and ethnicity, should be trained and equipped to evaluate racial equity strategies and to conduct evaluations in service of racial equity. This is essential because:

- Evaluating racial equity strategies is a complex undertaking. It can be helpful to use evaluators with life experiences that can help them relate to the people who are supposed to benefit from the strategy (i.e., people of color). However, equally important is having evaluators with a deep understanding about how systems maintain the status quo of racial inequity, the technical skills to use mixed methods to answer the evaluation questions, facilitative skills to support the use of evaluation to advocate for change, a capacity for empathy and the courage to take risks toward the end goal of racial equity.
- No race is monolithic, and someone's race does not make them an expert in someone else's racial experience, even if they can empathize with the person's experience.
- Being a person of color doesn't make someone non-racist or anti-racist. People of color can have power and can use power inappropriately.
- Achieving racial equity requires both people of color and White people to work together and shift power.

The issue is not the evaluator's race—that is individual. The real issue is that we tend to assume and treat each racial group as homogenous and believe that racism is perpetuated through individuals and not systems. We behave as if every person in one racial group will have the same experiences and views as every other person in that group. Racial homogeneity is often substituted for the recognition that people can have multiple identities and belong to more than one community and social group at a time.

It cannot just be about evaluators' personal transformation

Personal transformation is only part of the work to achieve structural and systems-level change. Focusing on the evaluator's race and lived experiences, and requiring evaluators to deal with their own personal transformation to be able to evaluate racial equity strategies, keeps the problem of evaluation in service of racial equity at the individual level rather than the structural and systemic level. It's not an "either or" solution, but we can't put all our attention and energy into transforming individual evaluators at the expense of systemic change in philanthropy, the evaluation profession and in the communities we serve.

Myth 5: Evaluation and data are neutral.

Numbers and other types of data don't lie. In fact, all numbers and non-numerical content are data, all data are information and all information is evidence. Good evaluation is objective and value-free because it is based on data and, as such, it is neutral.

Debunk the myth: data and evaluation can be weapons of oppression or guardians of racial equity; it depends on who is using them and how

Evaluations have historically been used as a weapon of oppression against people of color to "prove" white racial superiority. Data have been used to justify movements like the wars on crime and drugs, as well as negative narratives like the "welfare queen," the "lazy immigrant" and the "super-predator." Foundations, which employ evaluators and fund evaluations, are historically established by wealthy White people and represent the dominant culture. As such, communities of color tend to view evaluation as a punitive tool (and evaluators as implementers of that tool), often on behalf of foundations that wield their power through money similar to how a government wields its power through policies.

It is a myth that all numbers and non-numerical content are data, all data are information and all information is evidence. When *any* data are turned into evidence without meeting the criteria for evidence, the evaluation becomes something harmful. The *harmful use* of data and evaluation is symptomatic of structural racism—patterns of oppression over the course of history perpetuated (primarily) by White men who have accumulated wealth and power, using them to create policies, practices and norms that would guarantee their continued success. Yet, a typical response to the controversy about evaluation reflecting and supporting the dominant white culture is to encourage White evaluators to explore their white privilege and whiteness, while for evaluators of color it is to explore their privilege as educated and middle- to upper-income professionals. This focus on the individual evaluator—while it can be informative— is simply insufficient for dismantling structural racism. It keeps the emphasis at the individual level, not at the systems level. It also continues to privilege the individual evaluator rather than helping the evaluator develop the skills to be an ally and advocate to communities of color in order to disrupt the systems that perpetuate the status quo.

Data and evaluation can indeed be used as weapons of oppression. However, they can also be used as guardians and defenders of racial equity if the data meet the criteria for evidence and if the evaluation is used properly to understand, explicate and challenge symptoms of structural racism—and hold the perpetrators accountable. By removing evaluation from your toolbox, you lose the opportunities to combat the history of harm it has helped create and change the narratives of communities that are overlooked in data or oppressed by the toxic use of data.

In sum, we can train evaluators all we want. We can help White evaluators understand their white privilege and discuss how evaluation reflects the dominant white culture. However, if we don't learn to deliberately use evaluation to highlight unfairness and injustice and to identify the possible levers of systemic change, regardless of our racial and ethnic background and preferred methodologies, then evaluation can indeed act as a weapon of oppression. The ultimate question remains:

As evaluators, what are we willing to do to be anti-racist and dismantle racism, regardless of our race and ethnicity?

Conclusion

This first **Practice Guide – Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths** shared a few common myths that get in the way of practicing evaluation that contributes to racial equity. These are not the only myths to consider, there are many more. The other guides in this series, ***Diagnose Biases and Systems*** and ***Deepen Community Engagement***, focus on operationalizing the practice of evaluation in service of racial equity—the *how* we work to make this happen. It is important to remember that such practices can only be successful if we explore the unspoken myths that tend to go unchallenged, in the hope that a more honest conversation—no matter how difficult—can occur in philanthropy and in the evaluation profession. If you'd like to explore these common myths further, you can complete the exercises at the end of this guide.

Exercises

Find someone you trust to be honest with you, no matter how hard the conversation might get. Ask them to listen and probe your thinking. Then you can switch roles. If you're not sure of what questions to ask to help dig deeper, asking "why" after several answers can help get to that next layer of information.

EXERCISE 1.

Consider a mental model that you have about evaluation. Ask your partner to listen and identify anything that might help facilitate or hurt efforts to dismantle structural racism and advance racial equity.

EXERCISE 2.

Consider a time when you were really excited about the potential of a racial equity strategy. What made you excited about it? What were your assumptions about its potential effectiveness? If you were to evaluate it, what would make you excited and why? Then consider the reverse: Think about a time when you were skeptical about the potential of a racial equity strategy. Why? What were your assumptions about its lack of effectiveness? If you were to evaluate it, what would make you concerned and why?

EXERCISE 3.

Consider a time when you used data and evaluation successfully to affect change as a step toward racial equity. What were the conditions and capacities that had to be in place for that to happen? How could you ensure the same conditions and capacities in another evaluation?

Resources

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