

Racial Equity & Inclusion:

Suggested Competencies for Leaders & Change Agents

Developed by Kathy Obear, Ed.D. www.drkathyobear.com

There is a wide range of competencies that I believe leaders and change agents can deepen on their own or in community with others. While this is not a comprehensive list, my hope is that it is a useful tool to spark conversation, assess your current level of demonstrated competence, and identify goals for professional development. It may also be a good resource in cohorts & learning communities as participants plan their discussion topics and skill practice sessions.

Directions: Use the following scale as you reflect on the following competencies (knowledge, self-awareness, and skill) and rate how often you effectively demonstrate each of these:

1 = Rarely 2 = Occasionally 3 = Often 4 = Most of the time 5 = Almost Always

A. Knowledge about race, racism, dominant white culture, white privilege, etc.

- _____ 1. I recognize how I was socialized related to dynamics of race and how these experiences still impact me today.
- _____ 2. I understand the common, often different, patterns of racialized socialization and life experiences of People of Color, Indigenous peoples, people who identify as Multiracial or Biracial, and white people.
- _____ 3. I understand how the history of racism, colonization, and immigration in the U.S. and around the world impacts current dynamics and experiences.
- _____ 4. I understand the damage and devastation white people have perpetuated on People of Color and Indigenous peoples over the centuries and currently.
- _____ 5. I understand how the cumulative impact of multiple, persistent racist microaggressions and institutional racism negatively impact People of Color and the quality of their lives.
- _____ 6. I recognize how institutional racism permeates societal institutions, including the legal, policing, and justice system, housing, health care, education, employment, the military, politics, the media, entertainment, etc.
- _____ 7. I identify the common racist attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and implicit biases of white people that perpetuate the status quo (internalized dominance).

- _____ 8. I identify the common attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs of People of Color that support the status quo (internalized racism).
- _____ 9. I recognize the common daily indignities and racist microaggressions that People of Color experience.
- _____ 10. I understand multiple ways to effectively facilitate change and create greater racial equity and inclusion in organizations.
- _____ 11. I am aware of how people may experience and interpret comments and nonverbal behaviors differently based upon their cultural perspective and their racial identity.
- _____ 12. I understand how white privilege, and white cultural values and norms are infused into formal expectations and workplace culture as well as informal, unwritten rules for success.
- _____ 13. I understand how white privilege and white culture is infused into organizational policies, practices, programs, and services.
- _____ 14. I recognize how white people most often get the privilege of being seen at the Individual Level and not viewed as a representative of all white people.
- _____ 15. I recognize that People of Color are generally viewed at the Group Level and their attitudes and behaviors are assumed to be reflective of all members of their racial group(s).
- _____ 16. I recognize the full breadth of unearned white privileges that white people receive in society and in organizations.
- _____ 17. (For white people) I understand the pervasive white privileges that I still receive, even as I work for racial equity and inclusion.
- _____ 18. (For white people) I understand I am seen and experienced as white, at the Group Level, even if I actively work for racial equity and inclusion.

B. Use a Race Lens to notice and respond effectively to interpersonal dynamics

- _____ 19. I intentionally notice/track the full range of common racist dynamics that occur during meetings, conversations, workshops, etc.
- _____ 20. I describe the details or “facts” of what I observe without judgments, assumptions, interpretations, or conclusions (Panning).

- _____ 21. I recognize and effectively respond to racist microaggressions that occur in my presence, included racially coded terms and phrases.
- _____ 22. I consistently recognize and respond to racial implicit bias.
- _____ 23. I recognize and intervene when white people are expecting or demanding that People of Color educate them or take care of them.
- _____ 24. I effectively bring up and discuss issues of race and racism. I “keep race on the table” as one of the factors to be considered.
- _____ 25. I notice and effectively intervene when people try to change the subject to avoid talking about issues of race and racism.

C. Engage whites effectively

- _____ 26. I encourage white people to participate in conversations about race and engage them in the process.
- _____ 27. I ask questions and listen deeply to increase understanding, especially if I initially disagree.
- _____ 28. I use effective listening and communication techniques, including clarifying, paraphrasing, open-ended questions, silence, “connecting language,” etc.
- _____ 29. (For white people) I am able to “relate in” and “see myself” in other white people to find compassion and make a connection with them, rather than judging them or distancing from them.
- _____ 30. I effectively share stories and personal experiences to relate in and build connections with others.
- _____ 31. I effectively use self-disclosure to authentically share my feelings, thoughts, and beliefs.
- _____ 32. I minimize how much I intellectualize or use the “telling” style; instead, I maximize how often I pose questions or dilemmas to facilitate dialogue.
- _____ 33. I demonstrate compassionate, empathetic accountability when engaging with white people.
- _____ 34. I effectively “leave no one behind” and find ways to include everyone in the discussion.

- _____ 35. If a white colleague tries to shift the focus to one of their marginalized groups, I effectively acknowledge the dynamic and redirect the conversation back to race and racism.
- _____ 36. I “meet people where they are” without judgment, and do not demand or expect them to be farther along in their understanding or skill development.
- _____ 37. I effectively name common dominant white cultural dynamics and use these as “teachable moments” to facilitate deeper understanding and learning.
- _____ 38. I can let go of my planned agenda, “trust the process,” and effectively engage what is happening in the moment.
- _____ 39. I consistently demonstrate respect, compassion, and empathy for all participants.
- _____ 40. I effectively navigate discussions where participants are feeling and expressing deep emotions, including anger, sadness, fear, frustration, guilt, shame, overwhelm, hopelessness, etc.
- _____ 41. I am able to be “in the moment” ~ fully present and focused on what is happening in the group and in myself during difficult dialogues.
- _____ 42. I acknowledge comments which sound inappropriate or triggering.
- _____ 43. I speak up and interrupt racist microaggressions and exclusionary behaviors.
- _____ 44. I engage people in meaningful dialogue when I experience one of their comments as inappropriate, racist, and/or triggering.
- _____ 45. I consistently communicate clear guidelines for expected behaviors that promote racial equity and inclusion as well as clear consequences for exclusionary practices and inappropriate or racist behavior.
- _____ 46. I recognize that “resistance” and challenges are often doorways to deeper understanding and learning for individuals and the group.
- _____ 47. I respond effectively to challenges and resistance without taking it personally or feeling deeply triggered.
- _____ 48. I effectively navigate conflict and disagreement in discussions about race and racism.
- _____ 49. I can use triggering events as “teachable moments” for the group.

- _____ 50. I respond effectively to feedback without taking it personally or feeling deeply triggered.
- _____ 51. I effectively explore the unintended impact of racist comments and behaviors while also holding space to explore the person's intentions and possible implicit bias.
- _____ 52. I facilitate productive dialogue when there is a mismatch between the intent and the impact of someone's behavior, a policy, a practice, a decision, etc.
- _____ 53. I recognize effective behaviors that further learning and community building.
- _____ 54. I give effective feedback to others about the impact of their attitudes and behaviors.
- _____ 55. I support and coach others to deepen their capacity as effective leaders and change agents as they develop racially inclusive organizations.

D. Recognize and engage organizational dynamics

- _____ 56. I communicate why racial equity and inclusion are some of my core values and why I am committed to creating racial equity in everything I do.
- _____ 57. I effectively discuss a wide range of compelling reasons that position racial equity as a critical factor in the organization's success.
- _____ 58. I effectively create work environments that support the success and full participation of all People of Color and whites.
- _____ 59. I create fair and equitable selection and hiring processes that consistently identify racially diverse, culturally competent pools of final candidates.
- _____ 60. I effectively intervene to shift dominant white cultural norms and dynamics of white privilege, to create greater racial equity and inclusion.
- _____ 61. I consistently use a Race Lens to analyze policies, practices, programs, norms, and services to identify institutional racism and any negative differential impact on People of Color as well as any inequitable advantages, privilege, and access for white people.
- _____ 62. I continuously engage with others to revise any policy, practice, program, norm or service to ensure they meet the needs of People of Color as well as whites.
- _____ 63. I ensure that all planning processes intentionally include equitable participation and full consideration of input from People of Color and whites.

- _____ 64. I effectively collect and analyze disaggregated data about the experiences and perceptions of People of Color and whites in the organization.
- _____ 65. I use these data to effectively analyze, evaluate and revise current policies, programs, services, practices, procedures, norms, facilities, etc., to ensure racial equity.
- _____ 66. I continually research and share national/international trends and promising practices to help organizations achieve greater racial equity and inclusion.

E. Self-work and healing

- _____ 67. I continuously use a Race Lens to self-reflect and examine my behaviors, thoughts, feelings, biases, and attitudes as well as my impact on others.
- _____ 68. I am aware of the racist biases, assumptions, and stereotypes that impact my thoughts, judgments, decisions, and actions.
- _____ 69. I am aware of how my beliefs about what is “effective” or “professional” _____ has been influenced by my racist socialization and dominant white culture, (i.e., leadership; communication styles; decision-making practices; dress, attire, and appearance; dialogue; conflict styles; meeting management; supervision; etc.)
- _____ 70. I continually interrupt, reframe, and unlearn these racist biases, stereotypes, and assumptions.
- _____ 71. I recognize and honestly talk about the racist attitudes I still hold and how they have fueled racist behaviors.
- _____ 72. I understand how my racialized identity (how I identify or assumed) impacts how I am perceived, experienced, and treated by others.
- _____ 73. I effectively listen to, receive, and appreciate feedback from others and utilize this input to improve my practice.
- _____ 74. I continually seek out feedback about my behaviors and attitudes from others and utilize their input to improve my practice.
- _____ 75. I am aware of my common hot buttons/triggers and their intrapersonal roots.
- _____ 76. I am aware of my “early warning signals” that I am beginning to feel triggered.
- _____ 77. I recognize when I am reacting out of alignment with my core values.

- _____ 78. I recognize when I am operating out of guilt and shame.
- _____ 79. I am able to effectively navigate my own triggered feelings of anger, fear, stress, grief, guilt, shame. etc., so that I do not “work my issues on others.”
- _____ 80. When I react unproductively, I effectively navigate that moment, apologize, acknowledge the impact of my actions, and commit to changing my behavior in the future.
- _____ 81. I actively do my healing work around my hot buttons/triggers in the moment: explore the intrapersonal roots; acknowledge/feel my feelings, shift unproductive thoughts, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, etc.
- _____ 82. I regularly do my ongoing deep healing work to release and heal old issues, wounds and trauma, resentment, fear, guilt, shame, etc.

F. Deepen partnerships with People of Color

- _____ 83. I effectively listen to and believe People of Color when they tell me about the dynamics of racism they experience.
- _____ 84. I notice and effectively respond when white people interrupt People of Color, take over the conversation, and re-center whiteness or white issues.
- _____ 85. I effectively partner with People of Color to create change.
- _____ 86. I effectively follow the leadership of People of Color.
- _____ 87. If I am called racist, I effectively listen to the feedback, ask questions to deepen my understanding, and acknowledge the person’s perspective.
- _____ 88. If I realize I have acted out of racial bias, I readily acknowledge my behavior and apologize for the impact.
- _____ 89. I strategically consider how and when to engage in order to optimize the chances for meaningful change. I don't “win the battle, but lose the war,” especially if that puts People of Color at greater risk.

G. (For white people) Learn with a community of white allies and change agents

- _____ 90. I intentionally build a community of white allies for support and to accelerate my learning, growth and healing.
- _____ 91. I use other white allies to create greater accountability for my actions as a change agent.
- _____ 92. I actively create space to support other white people in their development and healing processes.
- _____ 93. I help other white people recognize and release the fears, guilt, shame, and racist biases that are fueling their behaviors.
- _____ 94. I effectively partner with other white people and People of Color to create change.
- _____ 95. I hold other white people accountable for their behaviors and efforts to create change.
- _____ 96. I am committed to “staying in it”; I am committed to racial equity and inclusion for the long haul.

After rating your current demonstrated competence, go back through the list and:

- 1. Identify 8-10 of your greatest strengths.**
- 2. Identify 5-8 areas you want to develop further; note ways you might increase your competence in each of these areas.**
- 3. Check-off* which competencies are an explicit part of your unit’s hiring, training/development, and accountability processes.
- 4. Star (*)* which additional competencies you believe are necessary for people in your unit to demonstrate as they intentionally create greater racial justice and inclusion in the organization.

We must be vigilant and persistent as leaders and change agents as we continually deepen our capacity to create greater racial equity and inclusion. Unlearning racism is a lifelong process of healing and re-education. I hope you choose to stay in it for the long haul. If you do, I guarantee that when you wake up each day and look in the mirror, you will realize you are closer to living a life of integrity and purpose.

