



To: President Joseph R. Biden, Vice President Kamala D. Harris, Ambassador Susan Rice, Catherine Lhamon, Deputy Director, Domestic Policy Council

From: The Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative (Anchors): Advancement Project, National Office; Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Demos; Faith In Action; NAACP; National Urban League, Race Forward and UnidosUS

Re: Implementation and Positive Practices¹ for the Equitable Data and Data Working Group

Date: May 3, 2021

The Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative—the foremost diverse coalition of national racial justice and civil rights organizations representing and serving more than 53 million people in the United States—applauds President Joseph R. Biden’s January 20, 2021 [Executive Order on Racial Equity](#). This Executive Order represents a firm commitment by his administration to champion racial equity and to advance equitable practices and outcomes across federal agencies. This has been one of the most central concerns of our Collaborative, and during the transition period, we wrote a [memo](#) advocating for a White House Office of Racial Equity to be established and accordingly, met with transition staffers on January 12, 2021. As leading racial equity institutions, with a vested interest in “doing good data,” we are writing now to provide guidance on implementation of one crucial piece of the January Executive Order, the establishment of an Equitable Data Working Group (“Working Group”).

To effectively create an Equitable Data Working Group, we recommend that the Equitable Data Working Group enact and employ the full authority provided by this Executive Order to:

- Affirm the White House’s role to establish the below affirmative equitable data practices, including data collection and provision, and to streamline and standardize these practices across federal agencies with full cooperation [and allocated resources to ensure meaningful implementation].

¹ We are using Positive Practices in lieu of Best Practices, as in this field of ever-evolving practice, we shouldn’t tout as best, since we don’t know what best is yet.

Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative Data Recommendations

- Set forth bold recommendations for policy cohesion; and delineate the working group's remit.

To that end, here are some positive practices:

1) Data Measures (e.g., how to collect Race/ethnicity data)

- a. Data Measures and data structures should be defined in alignment with community perspectives and experiences.
- b. Standardize categorization of race and ethnicity data across federal agencies
- c. Ensure the inclusion of a specific category for Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) (and XXX that this is not included in white)
- d. Include separate categories for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (not combined with Asian)²
- e. Include a separate category for American Indian/Alaska Native (not included in Other)
- f. Greater inclusivity of unaccounted groups
 - i. Including shoring up and improving the census and other instruments used by the federal government
 - ii. Capture gender, trans identity and sexual orientation
- g. Where possible, capture location information
- h. Capturing temporal data and manage data in a way that reflects change over time,

2) Data Collection

- a. Data collection should be handled in a manner that empowers and uplifts communities and not burden communities.
- b. Ensure data is collected in a manner that will account for intersectionality (including race and ethnicity, disability, LGBTQ+, language, nationality, gender, etc.)
- c. Use positive practices in how to structure and use data collected for response options such as "other" or multi-race
 - i. For example, some survey tools allow respondents to select "all that apply" for race categories, but then lump anyone who responded with more than one answer together in a multi-race category, masking which racial/ethnic groups make up that group.
 - ii. Replace "other" with phrases like "Racial identity not listed" or "Gender Identity not listed"
 - iii. Work with communities to ascertain preferred approaches to aggregating data where multiple racial or ethnic identities are selected
- d. Standardize Data collection at the federal level, building on positive practices being employed by local governments
 - i. If national data cannot talk to one another, then our capacity to come up with policy solutions that cross multiple authorities will be minimized. Data needs to be standardized across federal agencies, so that data can be shared across them
 - ii. Leverage existing laws and federal agency guidelines as examples for data standardization and modernization at the federal level. For example, Section 4302 of the Affordable Care Act requires all federal health data collection efforts collect information on race, ethnicity, sex, primary language, and disability status.
- e. Collect data looking at the impact of federal policies, interventions, who is served, who is left behind

² This builds on established practices, see [here](#) and [here](#)

Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative Data Recommendations

- f. Collect data to illuminate trends for agencies to act on (i.e. data that would justify Justice Department interventions, EEOC etc. etc.)
 - i. Collect key demographic and geographic data along with process, policy, and intervention data for more impactful impact assessment.
 - ii. Collect sentiment data along with key demographic and geographic data for more comprehensive assessment of quality and government performance.
- 3) Data Analysis (e.g., disaggregate data)
 - a. Disaggregate data by intersections of key socio-demographic and geographic variables
 - b. Ensure that there are resources to support data analysis of the data that has been collected, for transparency, reporting and tracking purposes
 - i. This includes resourcing state and local jurisdictions, and community based organizations to collect this data. We hear consistently from many state agencies that they don't have the staffing resources or data infrastructure to analyze and report out on anything that isn't required
- 4) Ethical Use of Data
 - a. Make community engagement part of the process (i.e., if communities are to be the focus of greater research and data collection they need to be engaged in the process)
 - b. Include impacted communities in decisions about how to ensure privacy for small data sets.
 - i. Do not automatically suppress the release of data unless communities represented by this data agree that is what they want- which happens in data releases such as the Census
 - c. Allow for better sharing of data from federal agencies to groups in community for planning and decision making
 - d. Make sure that any decisions based on funding / resource allocation / policy priorities / etc. are not executed unless all groups have data to represent and assess their needs (or actions are simultaneously taken to set aside resources for groups without data and also establish greater data infrastructure)
 - e. Streamline data sharing and collection within the federal government with the equitable purpose of improved services and protections for communities of color (but creating firewalls that guard against potential privacy and civil rights violations)
 - f. Consider extending ownership of data to community organizations and/or community members
 - g. The federal government should formally consult with Tribal Nations on any draft recommendations from the Equitable Data Working Group.

In addition to the guidance we've detailed below, we request a meeting to discuss this document and the overall implementation of the Executive Order on Racial Equity.

Setting the Working Group's Precedent is Imperative

Timing is imperative. We are in the midst of a debilitating pandemic, the impact of which was profoundly misunderstood due to inadequate, low quality or missing disaggregated racial and ethnic data [during the early months and continues today](#). Absent this data, localities, states and even the federal government are less able and less accountable for responding appropriately to the full scope of the problem and the communities devastated by this pandemic, at a time when response is literally life or death for hundreds of thousands of people. In fact, the Department of Justice recently [issued a statement](#) affirming the federal government's responsibility to the communities we serve, and extends from the federal to state and local governments that receive federal funding. The statement frames data equity as a civil rights issue: "COVID-19 requires accountability and action to address longstanding disparities for Black, Indigenous, Latino, AAPI, and other people of color, as well as people with

Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative Data Recommendations

disabilities. Complete, consistent, and accurate data collection and reporting on race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficient status are essential to our ability to recognize and address disparities and inequality."

Comprehensive data by racial and ethnic subgroups must be openly and transparently reported, collected, analyzed, and shared in order to fully understand and effectively address the pandemic, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

Setting Precedent

The Biden administration sits on the cusp of possibility. Setting historical precedent, this could be the first federal administration to establish a set of equitable data standards and affirmative data practices through whole of government coordination. This represents a crucial opportunity for the Biden administration to emerge as a data practices pioneer, and embody promises to dismantle white supremacy and to uplift and center racial equity in all practices, including *data collection and data provision*. Therefore, the mandate of this Working Group becomes all the more imperative to be bold in setting and envisioning standards for data practices nationwide.

One of the biggest benefits the Biden administration could establish is a more comprehensive and inclusive data infrastructure, including the resources needed to implement and build out this data infrastructure. For example, the creation of infrastructure to allow for multiple data sources to talk to one another, standardized systems, datasets that can be utilized nationally, systems for governmental entities and multiple levels of government to communicate using comprehensive data policies and practices for assessing/analyzing and benchmarking equity qualitatively and quantitatively, etc.

Additionally, we recommend adapting positive practices from localities that are innovating on comprehensive data collection and dissemination, and mirror these practices at the federal level whenever possible. One of the biggest barriers we hear at the regional / local level is that no matter what data people collect at the local level, if it doesn't roll up to federal standards, they don't feel like it's worth collecting. So even when the local/regional level is a great place to start, in this case the federal is disincentivizing innovation.

Uplifting Positive Practices on Data Collection and Dissemination:

The Working Group's mandate will be integral to creating robust positive practices and setting a racially equitable data agenda for the federal government. To that aim, our collaborative recalls your attention to positive practices around data collection, including those upheld previously by civil society, to be considered by this Working Group.

As part of our work, the organizations in our collaborative have developed and refined equitable data practices which are also being utilized by civil society and some local and state governments. Specifically, the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF), National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), National Urban League (NUL), and UnidosUS – four members of our collaborative -- have been working together on a health equity data disaggregation pilot in several states and have salient policy, legislative, and programmatic [recommendations](#) to ensure racially equitable data practices. In addition, collaborative member Race Forward (RF) runs the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), which works with municipal, county, and state governments across the nation to advance racial equity. GARE's local government tools, including [Getting to Results](#), provide scalable models of positive practices in use.

We provide the above considerations for Data collection and dissemination practices. To pursue racial justice, correct systemic racism and advance an equity agenda, utilizing the gold standard of data science is imperative.

The Collaborative is available to discuss these recommendations, become an active part of the Equitable Data Working Group, and to serve as an outside advisor to the Domestic Policy Council, and to generally advise on implementation. As such, we request a meeting with Ambassador Rice to follow up on our letter. Please contact, Elana Needle, enedle@unidosus.org to set up a meeting.

Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative Data Recommendations

In thanks and solidarity,

The Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative

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The Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative includes the following leading national racial equity anchor organizations (the Anchors): Advancement Project National Office, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, Demos, Faith in Action, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Congress of American Indians, National Urban League, Race Forward, and UnidosUS. Supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, we work together to promote racial equity, advance racial healing, and ensure that all children, families, and communities have opportunities to reach their full potential.