

Racial Justice Working Group

Our Roadmap: Values, Vocabulary, and Our Commitment to Action



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The Co-Sheltering Collaborative is a national network of homeless service and animal welfare providers who gather to advance the practice of co-sheltering people and their animals together at the same facility. As this coalition of organizations and individuals work to create a more equitable world for people and their pets, we also see a need to look internally to create equity within our own operations and our professional fields.

The Racial Justice Working Group has been developed to advance racial justice and to uphold the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- **Internally, within the Co-Sheltering Collaborative.**
- **Externally, within the broader fields of the animal and veterinary care sector; the homeless services sector; and the interdisciplinary fields which encompass both human and animal welfare.**



Language has power. As a group, we have spent time reflecting on words as they contribute to a framework for thinking, understanding, and talking about race. To be clear about where we stand as a working group, we agreed to this shared vocabulary as a part of the process for crafting our internal statement.

This vocabulary is meant to capture contemporary conversations on race, as these words apply to the United States in 2020. We fully recognize that language is dynamic and will vary or evolve depending on location, culture, and time.

RACE

A social construct based on physical expressions, largely framed by meaningless distinctions in color of skin. A social identity which is projected onto you because of the color of your skin. Individuals may personally identify with a certain race or ethnicity, but it is not outwardly accepted by the larger society which can cause conflict. Race can also be fluid depending on political and social climate / advantages.

RACISM

Not only active prejudice, discrimination, or hatred towards a specific racial group, but unequal access to resources based on membership of a specific racial or ethnic group. The ideological underpinning that one racial group is more worthy, moral, or upstanding than another. A different application of law according to race.

ANTI-RACIST

Opposed to racism, racist behavior, and inequitable distribution of resources, including social service delivery and access to resources. Taking steps to un-do racism rather than simply being against racism in theory. To be critical and work towards consciousness to see racism in all its adaptations, both blatant and subtle.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Racism that is perpetuated by larger systems and societal constructs such as distribution of access to resources, power, and opportunity to people who are white, and to the exclusion of BIPOC communities. Institutional racism can exist even in the absence of individual acts or manifestations of racism.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Individual manifestations of racist attitudes and stereotypes that are not driven by conscious decisions.

WHITE SUPREMACY

Overarching political, economic and social system of domination of white people above others.

WHITE PRIVILEGE

A direct and individual result of white supremacy. The passive attainment of benefits from being white and living in a system of white supremacy.

PEOPLE OF COLOR

People who are racialized as non-white or non-European. Currently embraced by racial minorities as a term of empowerment.

BIPOC (BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOR)

Expansion of “People of Color.” By highlighting Black and Indigenous people, this phrase references the historic and systemic oppression (including slavery and genocide) that were used to build the foundational wealth and colonization of the United States.

BLACK

We recognize the vast African diaspora throughout the world, and that not all Black people are African American, including within the United States. We also recognize that Black is a racial category, not an ethnicity or a term that should be used to erase cultural differences. However, racial constructs in the United States do lead to a shared experience of oppression. Black is also capitalized in our vocabulary to honor the decades of struggle for dignity and empowerment.

COLOR BLINDNESS

The perspective that one can interact with others in society without regard to one’s own race or other people’s race. Explicitly naming races recognizes the harm of color blindness, which can be mistaken as being anti-racist. Color blindness can also be a tool for deflection in recognizing one’s own racism.

ETHNICITY

Tied to culture. Ethnicity can be displayed, hidden, and/or adopted or a chosen identity.

EQUITY

The proportional distribution of resources according to need. Equity recognizes that not everyone will get the same outcome from the same input and that some communities and individuals have been historically disadvantaged. Thus, opportunities and resources should be tailored to the needs of the person or community in order to achieve an equitable outcome.

EQUALITY

Distribution of resources, power, and opportunity that are the same for everyone, not taking into account different lived experiences or needs. Equality is often tied to ideas of a “post-racial” or color blind society.

EXAMPLE OF EQUITY VS EQUALITY:

Access to NYC public transportation costs \$2.75 for each ride. All people pay \$2.75, whether you make \$15 minimum wage, or if you make \$1M a day. This is an equal distribution of a public service, or a simplified example of equality. Recently, the NYC Fair Fares program launched, giving people with annual household incomes below certain limits access to public transit at a 50% reduced rate. This is a simplified example of equity.





Recognizing Privilege in Group Participation:

The Racial Justice Working Group is composed of individuals from various professional backgrounds and roles, but primarily from animal welfare organizations. Most participants are white cisgender women. We recognize the overall privilege of the group, of which we attempt to be reflective, and that our identities may impact the deliverables of this working group. Our process for reflection commences every meeting wherein we introduce ourselves to each other and reflect on how our social identities may impact the way we think about these issues. We aim to be transparent, honest, and reflective.

THE RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP HOLDS DISCUSSIONS, DEVELOPS WORK PRODUCT PLANS, AND PRODUCES DELIVERABLES USING THE FOLLOWING VALUES AS A LAUNCHING PAD:

- Black Lives Matter.
- Systemic racism has caused intergenerational, compounded trauma in BIPOC communities.
- Government sanctioned policies throughout history have systematically withheld property, wealth, and homeownership from BIPOC communities.
- BIPOC communities disproportionately experience homelessness, poverty, poor health outcomes, over policing, unequal enforcement of the laws, and police brutality.
- BIPOC communities experience harsher treatment by the criminal justice system.
- We all hold bias.
- Unless we are conscious of our racism, we as individuals and as systems perpetuate racism.
- People who hold power in nonprofits and animal welfare organizations are disproportionately white.
- There is a need to uplift BIPOC voices.
- All economic and health crises in the United States disproportionately affect BIPOC communities through loss of housing, income, and employment.
- Homelessness and animal welfare services are affected by systemic racism. Resources are not equitably distributed to all communities.
- Approximately two million people with mental illness are incarcerated annually, and a quarter of people killed by police have a mental illness. Mental illness is not a crime. We need to end racial and socioeconomic disparities in behavioral healthcare and use better tools to support people with mental illness.
- All people, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or other identities and social locations are entitled to loving relationships with their animal companions.



action steps

The Racial Justice Working Group will meet our two goals by accomplishing the following objectives:

Internally, within the Co-Sheltering Collaborative

- Developing resources to remove barriers to participation in the Collaborative from more diverse stakeholders.
- Developing a reflection process for acknowledging the level of diversity in working groups and who is participating.
- Recruiting a more diverse and inclusive membership base, including people with lived experience and organization staff with varied job functions.
- Consistently re-evaluating the areas of the Collaborative's focus using interviews or surveys across stakeholder groups.
- Providing educational opportunities and resources for our members on the intersections between mental health, the human-animal bond, race, housing, and policing.

Externally, within the broader fields of the animal and veterinary care sector; the homeless services sector; and the interdisciplinary fields which encompass both human and animal welfare

- Facilitating discussions of how systemic racial injustice disproportionately impacts BIPOC communities at large and in the homelessness, animal welfare, and co-sheltering fields.
- Issuing a call to action to Collaborative participating organizations to:
 - Adopt leadership or advisory models that include people with lived experience.
 - Create workforces that are racially reflective of the communities you serve by hiring BIPOC professionals across all levels of staffing and leadership.
 - Consult BIPOC professionals on how to make organizations more racially equitable for both workers and people who receive services.
 - Amplify BIPOC worker and client voices within your organizations.
- Adding race as a lens to co-sheltering research to understand the impact of the "no pets allowed" rule on BIPOC communities.
- Developing or promoting staff training and resources (such as a reflection process or assessment tools) that highlight systemic racism, mental health and their connection to homelessness and animal welfare.