

CENTER FOR SURVIVOR
AGENCY & JUSTICE

Mapping Equity in Domestic Violence Advocacy at the State-Level

*Data Collection &
Exploratory Research on
How Domestic Violence
Coalitions Practice
Economic & Racial Justice*

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1. Executive Summary

Racial inequity is real. There is overwhelming evidence and real-life experience to show that one's race, more often than not, predicts their outcomes in life -- from neighborhood quality, risk of violence, poverty, and even life expectancy.

There is also ample evidence that racial inequities and other barriers (often called "structural inequities" or "structural barriers")¹ show up and impact survivors of domestic and sexual violence in unique ways.

Today, the advocacy field has placed renewed emphasis on addressing the economic barriers to safety and on uplifting the leadership and advocacy approaches of culturally- and population-specific programs. And yet, economic advocacy is often reduced to individualistic ideals of "self-sufficiency"² that do not (and cannot) fix issues of poverty. Further, culturally-specific advocates and programs deal with the brunt of the issues that stem from poverty, while not receiving ample funding and resources for this work.

Racial equity work is often described as both a process and an outcome.³ To change outcomes that are the product of historical and structural racism requires a process of disruption - meaning, the purposeful rethinking of power, leadership, and engagement.

The Center for Survivor Agency and Justice (CSAJ) is a national organization that seeks to remove systemic barriers for survivors of sexual violence in an attempt to meet survivors' self-defined needs. CSAJ has worked with partners over the past several years to create and engage in dialogue with the domestic violence field in a shared imperative to work towards equitable outcomes for survivors, and recognize and mitigate on-the-ground challenges. First, via a collaborative project, the Racial & Economic Equity for Survivors Project responded to calls for more open struggle, dialogue, and action toward equity. This report resulted in a racial equity process of

CSAJ's mission is to develop and promote advocacy approaches that **remove systemic barriers, enhance organizational responses, and improve professional practices** to meet the self-defined needs of domestic and sexual violence survivors.

We lead **three national technical assistance projects**: Consumer Rights for Domestic & Sexual Violence Survivors Initiative, the Racial & Economic Equity for Survivors Project (REEP), and Access to Justice Project.

In this study, CSAJ sought to expand REEP to better understand the equity landscapes survivors face in states across the country, and how coalitions are or could be targeting inequities. **To do this, we enlisted the partnership of organizations and advocates willing to engage in courageous conversations about their state and organizational context, as well as where they are and how they might improve their work.** Conversations and work for equity is hard work. We are grateful for the partnerships of coalitions on this project, and honored to amplifying the mindset of advocates who make themselves vulnerable and continue to ask the hard questions.

¹ See concept definitions in the appendix.

² Financial or economic programs for survivors are called economic or financial literacy programs, economic empowerment, or financial education, or similar and often used interchangeably. The goal of such programs is often to provide education or training with the goal of achieving economic or financial "self-sufficiency," which can mean having the income or means necessary to not have to rely on an abusive partner, and can sometimes include a goal of not having to rely on public assistance or other safety nets.

³ <https://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/our-work/what-is-racial-equity/>



Margins to Center Listening Sessions that produced a report about [“doing the inward and outward work for equity.”](#)

Findings from these projects emerged at the same time that the political landscape shifted, underscoring concerns for the root causes of inequity. This led to new questions that this project sought to examine:

- What's the “equity landscape” facing survivors across the country? Meaning, how do issues of safety, poverty, and racial inequity relate to one another and produce challenging environments for survivors?
- Similarly, what is the philosophy and practice in the domestic violence field regarding economic and racial justice? Where are the gaps between equity philosophy and practice and what are promising practices?

This report shares back data, stories, and strategies from five statewide domestic violence coalitions, focusing in particular on challenging and inequitable contexts. This project was part of an exploration to better understand the equity landscape across the country and what state-level systems change is possible.

Throughout this report, multiple equity definitions are referenced. Please refer to the Appendix at the end of the report for definitions of frequently used concepts.

Mapping Equity: Project Overview

Building upon past work and research in racial and economic equity for survivors, in 2019 CSAJ conducted an exploratory study with five coalitions with two major aims:

- 1) Better understand the “equity landscape” across the country (or how issues of violence, poverty, and racial inequity intersect), and
- 2) Identify and describe the range of ways that statewide coalitions “practice equity” (or, how they navigate and address inequities facing survivors).

Additional objectives of the work, included 1) examining the usefulness of state and national data to help coalitions identify disparities and needs, 2) exploring ways CSAJ could partner with coalitions to enhance equity, and 3) gathering and sharing innovative practices in racial and economic equity with the field.

Given these goals, we approached the study in three phases: 1) Equity Mapping: Creating maps to illustrate economic and racial inequity from a range of national data sets; 2) Content Analysis: Examining the



websites of 21 statewide domestic violence coalitions to assess whether different features of economic and racial equity philosophy and practice were present; and 3) Conversations in Equity: Interviewing five coalitions on their racial and economic equity approach, practices, and how they navigate inequitable landscapes.

Key themes & Promising Practices

We identified four major themes that captured important findings about the ways coalitions approach and engage racial and economic equity work⁴:

- Use data & story to build an **Oppression Consciousness & Equity Analysis**.
- Establish **Equity Commitments** that help translate organizational and program goals and values into practice.
- Organizational structure, leadership, & culture matter in **Transforming Internal Organizational Context**.
- Funding, member engagement, & partnerships matter in **Navigating External Context**.

We also learned about some key racial and economic justice practices from all phases of research that support coalitions' **internal work** toward equity (ways they shape and structure their organizations to reflect equity from within), and the **external work** toward equity (ways coalitions develop, steer, and enhance equity projects and advocacy to address key disparities facing survivors).

Internal Work

- Creating long-term organizational goals that demonstrate a commitment to racial and economic justice both in theory and practice
- Creating hiring strategies to diversify staff and better represent the population being served
- Holding regular meetings to hear the needs of diverse groups (including survivors, people of color, people living in poverty)
- Partnering with organizations addressing racial injustices (tribal organizations, women of color organizations, immigration organizations, etc.)

External Work

- Collecting data to see who is experiencing violence and inequities
- Providing services that target individuals and populations who experience heightened levels of oppression (people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ folks, folks experiencing poverty)
- Offering programs that address systemic poverty (housing, economic empowerment, etc.)
- Creating policy agendas that address systemic racial and economic issues (criminal justice reform, gentrification and housing, etc.)
- Offering financial assistance and education programs to survivors

⁴ See concept definitions in the appendix, p28.



2. Overview & Methods

Overview

The Mapping Equity in Domestic Violence Advocacy Project sought to better understand the racial and economic equity landscape of states across the country and to identify and share the practices that coalitions engage in to navigate and address these inequities.

CSAJ's Primary Research Questions

- 1) What is the landscape of domestic violence, poverty and racial inequality across the country?
- 2) How do coalitions conceive of and talk about racial and economic equity? How is racial and economic equity being defined?
- 3) In what ways are coalitions integrating racial and economic equity within their work?

The work was carried out in three phases over the course of 12 months

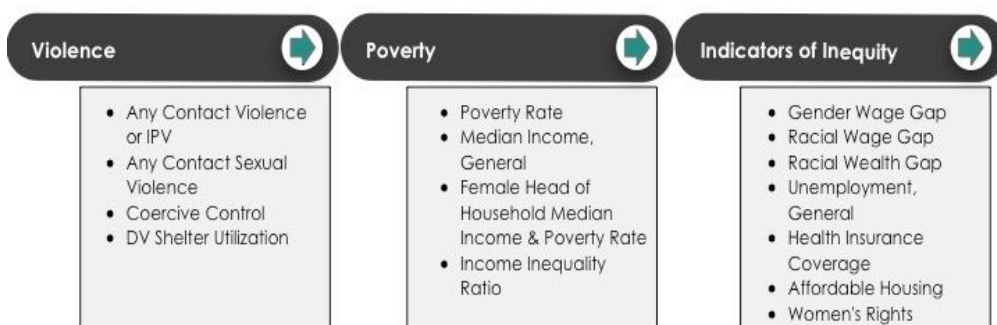
- 1) **Equity Mapping:** Building an "Equity Index" that compiles national data illustrating the connections between violence, poverty, and other indicators of inequity.
- 2) **Website Content Analysis:** Reviewing the web content of 21 state domestic violence coalitions, sampled from the Equity Mapping phase, to analyze the presence and meaning of racial and economic equity work.
- 3) **Conversations in Equity:** In-depth interviews with a small and geographically representative sample of coalitions (in inequitable or challenging states) to better understand how they approach and practices equity work, and how they navigate inequitable landscapes.

Methods

Equity Mapping:

National data are available on a range of issues and outcomes that impact survivors, yet they often are not examined together or

presented in ways that are helpful to programs. Therefore, we drew from other studies to identify indicators and other factors that are associated with intimate partner violence. We pulled data on the prevalence and extent of intimate partner violence across the country (i.e. National Survey on Domestic and Sexual Violence), poverty and



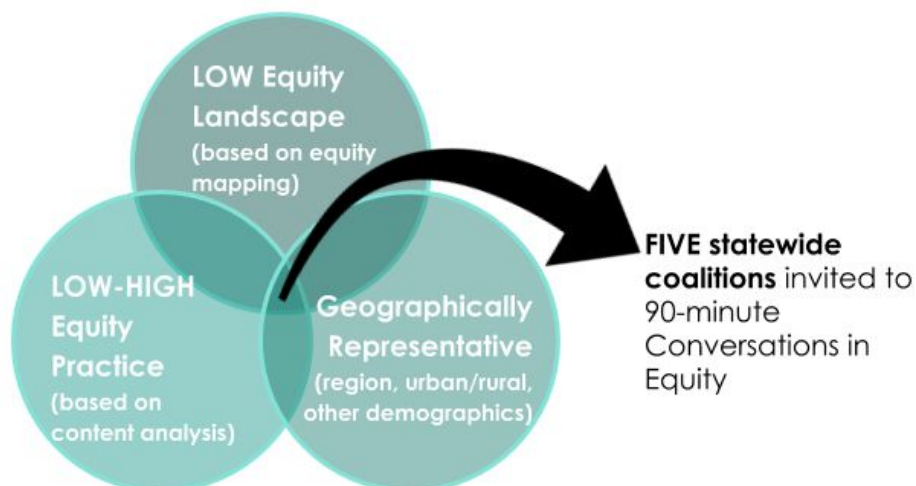


other economic statistics (i.e. Census Bureau), and a range of health and social outcomes (including racial disparities in wealth, housing, employment, health, etc.). We searched for and pulled together national datasets on 15 key indicators in the categories of violence, poverty, and other forms of inequity. Then we visualized these data together in maps to illuminate possible connection points and identify a broad range of needs.

Content Analysis: Based on these data, we selected a sample of states for further assessment. Because of our aim to understand how coalitions navigate inequitable landscapes, we selected states that appeared in the bottom 10 (were the worst off) in at least 4 different indicators and across two categories referenced in the above section. This resulted in a sample of 21 states. We examined each of their websites to identify whether and to what extent racial and economic equity appeared. We looked at vision/mission statements, the focus of key programs, and other news, resources, or commentary to see whether they were attuned to issues of race and poverty. Specific features we assessed are listed in the graphic to the right. We tracked all information in an Excel spreadsheet where we could quantify and aggregate different features (see sections below for findings).



Conversations in Equity: Based on the content analysis we selected 5 states for in-depth interviews to gather richer context on organizational history, structure, and work in areas of racial and economic equity. We selected states that represented a range of engagement or work in these issues based on the content analysis, while ensuring the selected states were geographically representative. We held 90-minute, in-depth interviews with economic justice, legal and/or policy staff.



3. Equity Maps: The Landscape of Violence, Poverty, & Inequity



Maps and visual representations can make the link between multiple complex issues clearer. Examining different measures of one issue (like poverty) also helps build a more nuanced understanding of it, as well as identify specific gaps. Here, we present data and maps, generated from the “equity index,” that were used during in-depth interviews to explore how these issues inform coalitions’ work.

Key Indicators Collected:

Indicators of Poverty:	Indicators of Inequity:	Indicators of Violence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty Rate • Median Household Income • Median Income of Female Head of Household • Poverty Rate of Female Head of Household • Households Led by Single Mom • Unemployment Rate • Food Insecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Inequality Ratio • Gender Wage Gap • Racial Income Gap • Racial Wealth Gap • Health Insurance Coverage • Affordable housing • Eviction Rate • Overall LGBT Policy Tally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence of Coercive Control • Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence • Contact Sexual Violence • Homicide Rate • Female Homicide Rate • Physical Violence

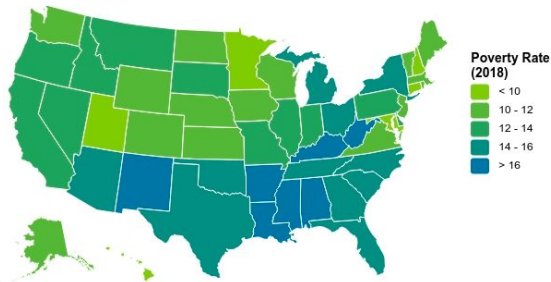
Sample State Rankings Across Poverty, Racial Inequity & Violence:

Rank	States with the highest poverty rates		States with the biggest racial income gap		States with highest rates of IPV	
	State	%	State	%	State	%
1	Mississippi	19.8%	District of Columbia	35.1%	Kentucky	45.3%
2	Louisiana & New Mexico	19.7%	Rhode Island	40.85%	Nevada	43.8%
3	West Virginia	19.1%	Nebraska	46.72%	Alaska	43.3%
4	Kentucky	17.2%	Maine	47.06%	Arizona	42.6%
5	Alabama	16.9%	Minnesota	47.41%	Indiana	42.5%
6	District of Columbia	16.6%	New Jersey	47.54%	South Carolina	42.3%
7	Arkansas	16.4%	South Dakota	49.56%	Missouri	41.8%
8	Oklahoma	15.8%	Wisconsin	48.47%	Illinois	41.5%
9	South Carolina	15.4%	North Dakota	49.56%	Arkansas	40.8%
10	Tennessee	15.4%	Louisiana	50.49%	Texas & Oklahoma	40.1%

Poverty Maps & Data: What does economic insecurity look like for survivors? What keeps survivors in poverty? How do you learn about the economic realities of survivors you work with?

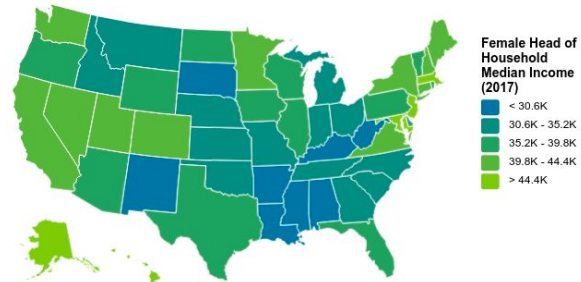


Poverty Rate (%)



Percent of the population living below the poverty line. In 2017, this was \$24,860 for a family of four.

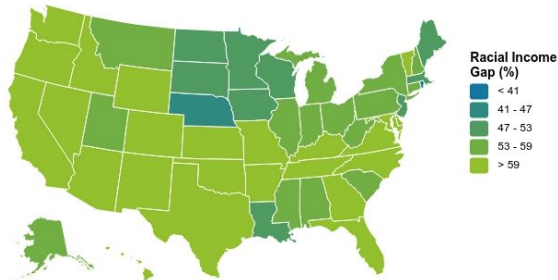
Female Head of Household, Median Income (\$)



The median income for a household led by a single female with no husband present.

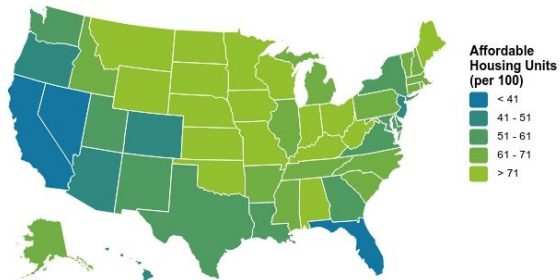
Racial & Systemic Inequity Maps: What factors pose the biggest barriers or create the most harm to survivors' economic security in your community/state? Who do they impact the most?

Racial Income Gap (%)



The gap between the median household income for the most disadvantaged racial group compared to whites. For example, 41% means the most disadvantaged racial group in that state makes 41% of the white median income (or less than half).

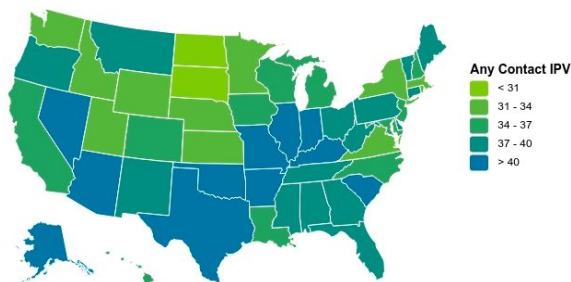
Affordable Housing Units (per 100)



The number of apartments or other units that were affordable and available for every 100 renter households with very low incomes in 2016.

Violence: Who do you serve? Which populations are under- or – un-served in your community? What unique barriers to economic security do they face?

Any Contact IPV (%)



The prevalence (%) of individuals who experienced any contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner across the lifespan (2010-2012).

Number of Unmet Requests for Service (#)



The number of individuals who were turned away from domestic violence services in a single 24-hour period (2017).



4. Building an Oppression Consciousness & Equity Analysis: Identifying Needs & Priorities Through Data & Story

Based on the data mapping, content analysis, and interviews, we found that the level of “oppression consciousness” and the practice of “equity analysis”⁵ are foundational to whether and how coalitions engage in equity work.

We saw variations in the ways coalitions gather stories and data, and how coalitions understand and respond to data to drive mission and practice. In order to know who needs services the most, a coalition must first know the realities of violence, poverty, and inequity within their state context.

We asked: In what ways do coalitions work to understand their state's equity landscape? And what populations and what issues do coalitions center (or believe should be centered) in their work?

Note: Throughout this report, **graphics in blue** represent findings from the content analysis of the 21 coalitions. **Graphics in purple** represent findings from in-depth interviews with 5 coalitions.

Landscape of Findings

Understanding the Landscape (Equity Maps)

Having a broad understanding of economic and racial issues across the state corresponded with the coalition's level of engagement on race and economic equity. The maps illustrated above, along with state specific data, were used during coalition interviews, with consensus around the usefulness in seeing the big picture. Coalitions can supplement with more specific state, county, and local data, and one coalition noted the power of pairing survivor stories with data to fuel change – programmatically and legislatively. More work could be done to provide state with data and visualizations to both unpack and strategize around issues of equity.

Populations & Issues Centered in the Work

Based on content analysis we found that about half of the coalition websites examined identified specific populations that were particularly impacted by violence, un- or underserved, or on which to focus their efforts. And by examining available program priorities and content, we saw that the top areas of programming were violence prevention (17), general member and service provider support (16), legislative/policy advocacy (10), and programs for specific racial or ethnic groups (i.e. immigrant) (10).

⁵ See concept definitions in the appendix, p28.



Populations to Center

CSAJ examined the websites of 21 coalitions and found that about half (12) identify key, marginalized, or underserved populations:

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Issues to Center

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Programs for Specific Populations or Economic Issues	General Advocacy Work	Capacity Building Efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">10 focus programs on specific racial and ethnic groups (ie: Immigrants, Black folks)5 focus on housing programs or survivors experiencing homelessness4 focus on programs supporting deaf/hard of hearing survivors and/or people with disabilities4 focus on programs supporting LGBTQ+ people3 focus on economic empowerment projects2 focus on programs targeting men (either as victims or perpetrators)1 focuses on sex trafficking education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">17 focus on violence prevention or youth programs10 focus on legislative and policy advocacy programs6 focus on legal advocacy and service programs3 focus on immediate support programs (ie: 24-hour hotlines, shelters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">16 focus on member/service provider support, referrals, training and outreach (ie: member support and community education and initiatives)7 focus on social change and public awareness programs6 focus on networking, collaboration, or capacity building programs

Of the five coalitions interviewed, common issues of focus included: housing, employment and job development, access to services (especially for rural, Native, and Black survivors), coalition capacity (staffing and leadership), transportation and technology (especially in rural areas), and racial equity (both in programs and in policy).



From interviews with 5 coalitions, CSAJ heard **common issue areas** that need to be centered when doing racial and economic work.



Unique or context-specific issue areas that were discussed, include:



Road Bumps: Challenges & Gaps in Practice

All coalitions collected data and stories at some level, but many expressed limitations of data collection, including barriers such as rurality of state, gentrification and housing issues, and even the limitations of national poverty and other datasets. Similarly, all coalitions appreciated the supplemental data that CSAJ provided, expanding on their understanding of inequity in their own state.

Some key gaps to identifying key populations/issues and understanding one's state landscape include:

- **“There is a lot of work to be done.”** Staff and organizational capacity mattered a lot for some coalitions who recognized the need but expressed there was only so much they could take on. Large, rural states tend to have smaller staff. As a result, they have focused their efforts in very specific areas.
- **“Feels right, but I don’t know specifics.”** For some coalitions the data presented in the equity maps resonated or spoke to issues they see and feel in their work, but there was no evidence that the coalition was engaged in gathering or sharing such information as part of their work.

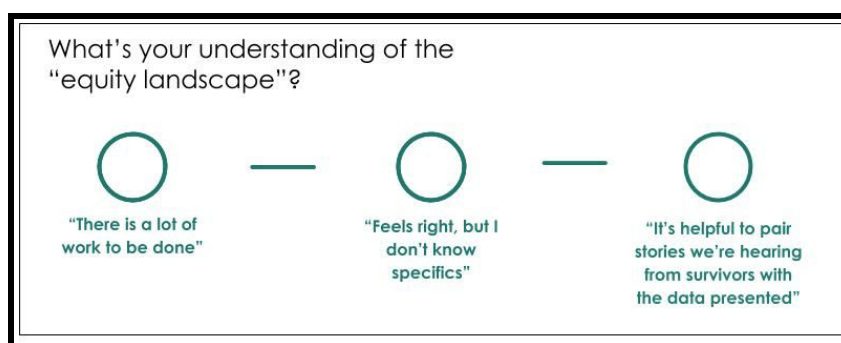


- **“We’re working on ourselves...and then how to be leaders in the coalition.”** Leadership also matters. While nearly all the coalitions interviewed noted the role internal conversations about racial and economic equity can play in building broader capacity to do the work, only two had institutionalized practices for this. One had no formal practices and another noted that most conversations were amongst staff – primarily staff of color - and had not risen as an organizational priority⁶.

On Ramps: Promising Practices

There were also some promising practices that demonstrated how coalitions can build an oppression consciousness by enhancing current practices:

- **“It’s helpful to pair stories we’re hearing from survivors with the data presented.”** The maps we shared were a helpful tool for coalition staff to think about and identify the most impacted (and underserved) populations as well as key issue.
- **Question & look beyond the statistics.** One coalition holds regular focus groups in which they ask folks about their issues and barriers. They also mentioned that the federal poverty line is not a good baseline in their state. Instead, they use economic self-sufficiency standards to make economic inequality for survivors more real. (Self-sufficiency standards measure the income needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in a given region).
- **Stay current on local issues then expand the lens.** When presented with the data, one coalition was not surprised. Located in a large metropolitan area, with high transience and tourism, they contextualized the data by noting the role of gentrification, and government jobs and law firms as key gentrifying forces, which has led to disparities in income, access to resources, health care, and employment. Being aware of local issues allows them to bring an intersectional gender-based violence perspective to issues that are already at the crux of race and economics.



⁶ See concept definitions in the appendix, p28.



5. Establish Equity Commitments: Translating Goals and Values into Practice

Equity commitments⁷ reflect coalitions' philosophies and fuel their outward-facing priorities for economic and racial equity. In general, while the vast majority of coalitions mentioned social justice or other root causes in their mission statements (17 or 21 reviewed), less than half (10) were specific about economics and racial justice as goals. Among the five coalitions interviewed, those most engaged in racial and economic equity work had either recently revised mission statements or established organizational values, had ensured staff were on the same page about the meaning and practice of certain concepts, or could describe specific and targeted programming (even if small or pilot).

We asked: What do coalition vision and mission statements say about their approach to economic and racial justice or equity? How do coalitions move from having goals and values around equity to putting them into practice?

Landscape of Findings

Economic and racial justice in mission/vision statements. In a review of 21 coalition websites, 17 mention social justice and/or root causes in their mission statements, but only 10 makes specific mention of racial AND economic work being a specific part of projects, legal services, policy, training, and/or resources; and only 6 mention racial/economic work in their missions, project work, AND populations of focus.

Of the 21 coalitions, 15 mentioned economic justice, and 10 mentioned racial justice on their websites.

Economic Justice

- 15 mention economic justice at some level
- 4 mention economic justice in projects
- 7 mention economic justice in trainings
- 2 mention economic justice in resources
- 1 mention economic justice in legal services
- 0 mention economic justice in news
- 2 mention in economic justice policy work

Racial Justice

- 10 mention racial justice at some level
- 1 mention racial justice in projects
- 2 mention racial justice in trainings
- 2 mention racial justice in resources
- 0 mention racial justice in legal services
- 1 mention racial justice in news
- 4 mention racial justice in policy work

Some coalitions have mission statements with detailed descriptions of “domestic violence” that include a social/structural analysis, others supplement mission statements with “value statements” that specify

⁷ See concept definitions in the appendix, p29.

links to and a focus on economic and racial justice, and still others supplement broad mission statements with a description of organizational priorities or strategic plans.



From goals to practice. We also examined coalition websites for evidence of racial and/or economic equity taking place within their programming. Economic work tends to take place via projects or training, which makes sense given the heavy emphasis on financial education and economic empowerment programs. Racial justice or equity focused work is much less common (or explicit) and tends to show up at the policy level. Examples of racial and/or economic justice practices, include:



Key policy issues/priorities. From coalition interviews we learned that **policy agendas and advocacy as well as partnerships** are important and unique functions of coalitions that can support equity commitments. Online, 4 out of 5 of the coalitions mentioned policy work on their website. The top policy issues of focus were:

- **Legal protections and education for vulnerable populations,** including people of color and LGBTQ+ folks. For example, one urban coalition mentioned that their policy agenda prioritized legal protections for immigrant and undocumented survivors.
- **Educating or collaborating with legislators.** For example, one coalition noted on their web page that they create partnerships with state and federal policy makers to strengthen legal protections for survivors and families. Another spoke of tracking and analyzing legislative activity specific vulnerable populations, including LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors.



- **Partnership or coalition building**, specifically with state and federal organizations, legal advocates, community-based organizations, and member programs to ensure that policies are meeting the needs of survivors.

Some coalitions also do the following:

- **Provide webinars and trainings that describe how policy issues affecting survivors.** Issues include confidentiality, domestic violence laws, and barriers to safety for vulnerable populations (ie: LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors)
- **Advocate for funding levels of domestic violence programs** and services at a state level.
- **Seek financial protections for survivors**, specifically providing a safety-net fund that is available to survivors needing immediate cash assistance.
- Focus on **housing discrimination and homelessness**.



1 of 5 coalitions focuses policy work on:

webinars and trainings that describe how policy issues affecting survivors
advocating for funding levels of domestic violence programs
financial protections for survivors
housing discrimination and homelessness

2 of 5 coalitions focus policy work on:

legal protections and education for vulnerable populations
education of and collaboration with legislation
Partnership & coalition building

Partnerships

Partnerships across the five coalitions demonstrated similarities and differences in the ways that collaboration across the field is approached. Common themes in partnerships included:

- **Direct partnerships with specific organizations working with survivors of color.** For example, one urban coalition is housed with an organization that focuses on violence within the Black community. Another rural coalition spoke of having 19 partnerships across the state, including with tribal domestic violence coalitions and immigrant justice groups
- **Partnerships with religious groups.** One rural coalition spoke specifically of the importance of partnering with churches in order to reach survivors in small, isolated communities.
- **Partnerships with financial and economic literacy programs.** Many of the coalitions spoke of having financial literacy consultants come and train survivors on economic literacy and self-sufficiency. Although limited and individualistic in its approach, this can still provide opportunities to partner with organizations that can help advance economic justice. Another coalition spoke of partnering with the Department of Health and Social Services to help survivors receive economic and employment support while receiving social services.

- **Partnerships with government agencies and policy makers:** Some of the coalitions talked about having direct relationships with local courts, state-level TANF programming, and policy-makers to improve services for survivors.
- **Partnerships with academic institutions:** One rural coalition spoke of partnering with the state university to gather violence and demographic data. They also spoke of working with local schools to reduce violence and expand services.
- **Partnerships with local health advocacy organizations:** One rural coalition discussed teaming up with health aids to reach remote areas of the state.



Road Bumps: Challenges & Gaps in Practice

Most coalitions expressed a commitment to economic and/or racial justice on their websites, but this was not always translated into the programs being offered. From coalition interviews, the most common challenges to bringing a racial/economic equity lens to program design and implementation include financial, political, and staffing issues:

- **Equity issues are viewed as individual rather than systemic problems.** Financial management skills are often seen as solutions to survivors' economic barriers to safety, putting the responsibility on the skills of survivors rather than on systemic issues. Similarly, solutions to race-based barriers often involve dealing with a few bad actors, rather than changing the whole system. This translates into where and how coalitions focus their programming, technical assistance, and policy.
- **Funding, scope of services, and staffing influence the ways commitments are translated into action.** Smaller coalitions mentioned difficulty creating a policy agenda because they do not have funds or resources for a policy director. Some noted that a lack of funding and capacity at the coalition level also had a ripple effect into hiring. Job descriptions often demand a high level of varied responsibilities but pay levels don't match, and, due to historic inequity within a state, applicants interested in positions may come with limited experience or education, and coalitions do not have the capacity to train, mentor, and develop staff. All to say, coalitions deal with the effects of inequity within their state.
- **Coalition core functions.** Some coalitions take on the functions of partnership building, providing technical assistance, and leading



state/territory policy efforts (sometimes including national projects). Other coalitions provide direct services or are primarily set up to set and monitor standards of service. Funding, political mandates, and organizational structure all matter in a coalition's leeway and capacity to integrate and pursue a racial and economic equity agenda.

- **Other organizational road blocks include:** difficulty addressing race because of a reluctant staff (usually due to leadership being predominantly white), limitations of advancing equity commitments due to staffing shortages, and women of color leading the justice initiative movements and conversations within the organization.

On Ramps: Promising Practices

- **Revise mission statements** and/or take time to identify organization values or program priorities. This can take place during regular strategic planning processes.
- **Use your state culture and history to help frame issues of inequity** you want to play a role in addressing – create your “theory of change.” For example, one coalition used imagery and stories about orchards and farming to frame their mission and work: “We need to think about all the hands that touch the apple that gets to our tables.” They used a major economic industry in their state to hold themselves accountable to people on the margins, asking: how the farmers, farm-hands, factory workers, restaurant workers, and everyone else who touches the apple – all who experience violence and oppression in unique ways - are impacted by and treated in our system.
- **Use statewide needs assessment, ongoing data-collection, or focus groups as opportunities** to ask member programs about the economic and race-based barriers facing survivors. Then present the information to coalition staff and board as a way to demonstrate needs and identify ways to shift focus.
- **Build direct partnerships with state and/or national organizations who work with specific populations or on specific issues.** For example, many OVW-funded, national technical assistance providers can provide training, resources, and even intensive assistance to help integrate racial and economic equity issues in ways that fit within your current funding models. In addition, many states have advocacy organizations (i.e. on immigration, LGBTQ issues, race equity, or economic issues like housing or criminal justice reform) that can be everything from a sounding board to a formal partner.

Challenges my organization faces in putting equity goals into practice:

- ☐ Focus is primarily on individuals
- ☐ Funding
- ☐ Scope of services
- ☐ Staffing shortages
- ☐ Organizational structure or core functioning
- ☐ Reluctant white staff
- ☐ Advocates/staff of color tasked with leading the work
- ☐ Something else

Strengths of my organization or opportunities we could take:

- ☐ Revised mission statements
- ☐ Story-telling
- ☐ Regular data collection or needs assessments
- ☐ Partnerships
- ☐ Something else



6. Navigating Internal Organizational Context: Organizational Structure, Leadership, & Culture

Noted earlier, organizational structure mattered significantly in a coalition's capacity for and engagement in equity work. Commitments to and the practice of equity within the organization provide a safe space for staff and survivors of diverse identities to express their needs and concerns and help develop the organizational culture and structure required for equity work. The key organizational factors that played a role were: leadership, organizational structure/model, and internal training and conversations.

We asked: What does it take for you as an organization to do equity work – whether through programs, partnership building, or systems change? What are the challenges and how are they navigated?

Landscape of Findings

These findings are drawn from interviews only, as few details are available on websites about organizational structure, leadership, and culture.

Organizational Structure. The organizational structure of just the five coalitions interviewed varied greatly. Some had a large staff and were located in urban areas with lots of resources. Some were housed in buildings with other advocacy organizations creating a diffusion of information. Other were small staffed, with multiple offices across the state to reach rural areas, and staff who were often on the road providing services or conducting site visits. Some had traditional organization structures where the Executive Director was the primary expert, supervisor, and authority. Others had multiple departments and large mid-level leadership. Still others had smaller, but flatter hierarchies where communication and interdependency were prioritized. ***Overall, three of the five coalitions noted that they had undergone some level of restructuring – similar to the task of revising mission statements – and that process was necessary to help them shift to focus on issues of equity more directly.*** Restructuring is different than staff turnover, which was noted as a barrier to change for some coalitions.

Leadership. Formal leadership was frequently noted as the most important thing to begin shifts toward equity work. In these organizations, it was equally valued that ***Executive Directors help put issues of equity on the organization's agendas and then either step aside and appoint new, diverse leadership, or hire people of color*** and from diverse professional background. Leaders of color are essential to



bringing new models of management and sustaining partnerships required for equity work. Finally, informal leaders within the organization are necessary to carry out the work, hold colleagues accountable, and sustain and build an organizational culture of equity

Training & Conversation. Connected to both issues, **white leaders can help break tensions or defensiveness among other white staff by initiating hard conversations and prioritizing internal dialogue.** In addition, having regular and scheduled meetings on racial and economic justice with staff, and having listening sessions with people of color and people experiencing poverty help create “organizational space” to do equity work.

Road Bumps: Challenges & Gaps in Practice

- Coalitions mentioned the difficulties of having discussions on race due to **time constraints and hesitations from leadership.** Leaders do not always reflect on those being served and those experiencing violence and staff may not feel comfortable or safe approaching leaders about issues concerning race. Leadership does not always create space for or take seriously these hard but necessary conversations.
- **Other white staff might undercut efforts** with defensiveness or even when trying to intervene on behalf of colleagues of color but without regard for their safety or employment in doing so.
- **Conversations about race are hard, slow, and non-linear.** Some coalitions we spoke with started to have conversations about race and racial justice. They had hired outside facilitators, but many felt the conversation did not bear any concrete steps forward. Taking time to build relationships with outside facilitators as well as have internal mechanisms to carry the work forward may be helpful.
- **Impact of hierarchy and staff turnover.** High rates of turnover contribute to low capacity and/or effectiveness in engaging in equity work. At the same time, power concentrated with an Executive Director makes it difficult to expand staffing and roles.
- **Over-professionalization has separated some programs from deeper understanding and roots in the community.** One coalition spoke about the increasing need for staff members to have a master's degree, driver's license, and other impeding requirements.

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We've had some conversations on equity with an outside facilitator. It was hard and hasn't really gone anywhere...

— A rural coalition about the challenges of having formal conversations around race and equity.

In a movement that advocates for survivors of violence to be at the forefront of this work, how can we expect them, especially immigrant and lower socioeconomic status survivors, to be able to contribute to this work with requirements such as these?



On Ramps: Promising Practices

- **Build relationships** with organizations focused on specific communities and/or economic or racial issue areas. Offer support or resources when requesting their feedback or support on your organizational structure or practices. Ensure that the partnership is mutual and equitable.
- **Those not in leadership can consider collecting data** indicating on who is experiencing violence and present that to your coworkers, leadership, or board. This might help highlight the need to represent marginalized communities better within your organization. One coalition spoke of having many women of color in leadership, and how this has created a safe space and healthy work environment for everyone else within the organization. Others mentioned how race conversations often first happen amongst staff, which led to change at an organizational level.
- **Intentionally seek and place people of color in leadership positions** – especially within operations. Hire people from different spheres of influence to diversify team and skills.
- **Step up, step back.** Executive Directors – especially those who have been at the helm for a long time – can use their role to re-steer the work of the coalition. In one coalition, the ED first stepped up to support restructuring and then stepped-back and is now on the board to ensure sustainability and new leadership.
- **Participate in national trainings or summits** to build foundations to take home to your organization. For example, staff from one coalition went to a Women of Color Network, Inc. Regional Summit on Women of Color Leadership, then took on a formal role to institutionalize the practice within their coalition. Ensuring you have leadership support and autonomy to implement learning is essential.

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Having women of color in leadership – and strategic positions in leadership – has changed our entire approach.

– An urban coalition about the role of leadership

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Staff went to a Women of Color Network, Inc. Regional Summit on Women of Color Leadership. Now we're working on ourselves. Making it a practice within our coalition.

– A midsize coalition about the value of supporting training and laying foundations at home.



7. Navigating External Context: Funding, Member Engagement & Partnership, & State Geography, Politics and Culture

In addition to navigating their own organizational structures and cultures, coalitions must navigate the very landscapes they are tasked to change. The key factors discussed during interviews included: Funding & Funder Relations, Politics, Community, Geography, Member Engagement & Partnership

We asked: In what ways are coalitions influenced by and navigate their external contexts⁸ (funding, political, community, geography) to impact their capacity to do racial and economic equity work?

Landscape of Findings

Funding. Across the board, coalitions all stated that funding matters – and coalition funding sources varied based on structure and purpose. Scarce and competitive funding as well as funder priorities and requirements often shape the work of coalitions. In some cases, member or local programs are important allies to helping shift the objectives of major funding streams.

Member Engagement & Partnership. Partnerships varied across coalitions and geographical spread. Some unique partnerships included: churches, doula programs, tribal courts, and specific racial justice organizations (ie: Ujima and Women of Color Network). Conversely, some types of partners were shared by all or nearly all coalitions, including: organizations focusing on specific populations (ie: organizations targeting Native or Black folks), financial assistance programs (ie: TANF or financial literacy programs), health programs (ie: health aids), state and federal entities, legal groups, immigrant justice programs, and educational organizations.

State Geography, Politics and Culture. Factors such as being mostly rural, geographically large, the cultural and political differences of regions across the state, and the coalition's ability to engage in policy or legislative work stood out both as challenges and assets to equity work.

⁸ See concept definitions in the appendix, p28.

Road Bumps: Challenges & Gaps in Practice



Although all coalitions showed a commitment to equity, they also spoke of the difficulty in work for change when it seems that external policies and initiatives are slow to evolve. Key road bumps to equity include:

- **Grant compliance and funding volatility constrains programs.** Two coalitions shared critiques about grant compliance requirements that perpetuate misconceptions about survivors' economic realities and/or limit the scope of programming. For example, one coalition shared that mainstream financial literacy programs didn't make sense for meeting their clients where they're at – primarily immigrant, undocumented, with limited English. They had difficulties utilizing funding in ways that align with what their programs and survivors need rather than what funders believe they need. Another coalition noted that competitive and volatile funding sources for member programs were themselves a risk to equity work. They asked and consistently grapple with the questions: What happens when programs lose funding for certain programs or initiatives? Will positive changes still be made, or will we go back to where we were before we implemented these changes without the funding?
- **Funding matters in navigating internal context, too⁹.** For example, one coalition noted the desire to seek and hire new positions (including a Policy Director), but primarily receives funding from the state, thereby limiting many of their options in programs and services. This means they are less present at state policy- and legislation-making tables.
- **Regional difference in philosophy, approach, and community support for radical changes that equity work requires.** One coalition mentioned that a region in their state is “like little Texas” – it's more politically conservative. One example is in the area of expanding gun control, where the coalition heard from member programs that their boards would react negatively if they sought to join advocacy efforts. Another coalition mentioned that there are some issues with potential member programs not agreeing to newly established “principles of unity” that center issues of equity – a requirement to become a member. For example, one principle is that programs cannot push their religious beliefs, if any, on to survivors. As a result, many religiously affiliated organizations have not become member programs.

“It's hard to get everyone on board [for policy work]. There's a region in the state we call, 'little Texas.' Because of their boards, we couldn't get them to join on to gun control.”

– A midsized coalition about navigating regional differences across the state when doing policy work.

⁹ See concept definitions in the appendix, p28.



- **Coalitions are not immune from state economies.** The depressed economies and “stagnant legislatures” make engaging in policy work nearly impossible and, therefore, leave systemic issues or barriers facing survivors to be dealt with at the individual advocacy level.
- **State geography impacts the work that can be achieved.** Two coalitions identified rural communities as a key population however, access to these communities are difficult. One coalition has tried to turn to technology to better connect small towns and villages, however, many of those same small villages have not experienced the “technological break-throughs” that many others have – meaning that even online support is difficult for these people. Similarly, another coalition underscored transportation as a big barrier. With a small staff required to make multiple site visits, visiting these communities is difficult, let alone bringing emerging or critical issues to higher-level agendas.

On Ramps: Promising Practices

- **Leverage the Grass-roots.** In some cases, local programs can be more impactful in shifting funding or policy. For example, one coalition shared a story of how a local program was able to shift the scope of their grants by sharing the actual economic needs of Latinx immigrant survivors. Coalitions could play a powerful role in gathering these local-level insights and advocating for changes or flexibility in economic grants.
- **Find Windows of Opportunity in Policy Advocacy.** Because of restrictions 501c3s face in participating in legislative and policy change, some noted a strategy of riding the coat-tails of past major policy shifts in the state. Similarly, many are attuned to political climate and wait for opportunistic timing to bring in survivor experiences or join others in coalition. For example, one state had gone through criminal justice reform where the coalition was able to seize the opportunity to bring in survivor perspectives and enhance the statewide process and outcomes.
- **Assess and Engage.** Use ongoing focus groups, technical assistance, and interaction with member programs to assess local climate and culture about proposed policy changes, as well as to encourage authentic community engagement among member programs. One coalition creates “report cards” for their members on how their approaching issues of equity and offers peer coaching. Other coalitions seek and build broader partnerships in part to hold them accountable to their equity commitments, and in part to learn new strategies to move the dial across the state.

One rural coalition has prioritized partnerships with 19 organizations across the state. Including partnerships with Native coalitions, health aids, local courts, immigrant justice groups, legal and financial service programs, and others. It is especially important for rural organizations with less access to resources to build diverse networks to provide better services and reach more survivors.



8. Recommendations & Next Steps

The findings highlighted above are intended to be used as a tool to strengthen racial and economic equity commitments at a coalition level. Here is a summary of key recommendations as well as next steps CSAJ plans to engage coalition and other partners in to expand equity work.

Recommendations

Oppression Consciousness & Equity Analysis: Identifying Needs & Priorities Through Data & Story

Recommendations: If your coalition is just beginning to data collection process, think of which partnerships might be beneficial to strengthen equity analyses. One rural coalition mentioned they rely on state universities to collect demographic data. Additionally, think of some metrics you could begin collecting from members or survivors, such as race and gender/sexuality that might underscore who is being served versus who is experiencing violence. Or, if you are already collecting these metrics, compare them to the state data to ensure your coalition is reaching everyone who is experiencing violence.

Equity Commitments: Translating Equity Goals and Values into Practice

Recommendations: Have intentional conversations that communicate the importance of racial and economic justice across member programs. Some ways to initiate these conversations include: develop a member-based task force to consider and provide feedback on policy agendas; gather input during training and technical assistance activities; create space for dialogue among member programs; critically engage with state-wide needs assessments; rely on past practice; respond to the needs of member and non-member programs, and be transparent about decision-making processes. One coalition interviewed talked about how they try to reach the “last girl” – the girl facing oppression at every level (racism, homophobia, poverty, transphobia, etc.) – and how this framework drives their mission at reaching survivors experiencing extreme interpersonal and systemic violence. What changes would need to happen if your coalition were to apply this promising framework to your programming?

Navigating Internal Organizational Context: Organizational Structure, Leadership, & Culture

Recommendations: Coalitions mentioned the difficulties of having discussions on race, due to time constraints and hesitations from leadership. If you are a position in leadership, reflect on how you are approaching race within your organization. Does your staff reflect those being served and those experiencing violence? Does your staff



approach you about issues concerning race, and feel safe to approach you? Imagine ways of creating space for these conversations. One coalition spoke of partnering with organizations targeting survivors of color, and using their resources to begin conversations on race. If you are not in leadership, consider collecting data indicating who is experiencing violence and present that to your coworkers, which can help highlight the need to represent marginalized communities better within your organization. One coalition spoke of having many women of color in leadership, and how this has created a safe space and healthy work environment for everyone else within the organization. Others mentioned how race conversations often begin at an individual level, which can then lead to change at an organizational level. Be wary, however, of placing all the racial equity work at an individual level because it will often be left to staff of color to initiate these conversations and do the work.

Navigating External Context: Funding, Member Engagement, & Partnership

Recommendations: Stories from a broad range of stakeholders, including People of Color, LGBTQ+ folks, and survivors, supplemented with data, can be a promising practice to leverage ground when experiencing political and financial set-backs. Additionally, coalitions spoke of the importance of having regular meetings with external stakeholders to identify gaps in practice, and to discuss ways to overcome common barriers. Lastly, if your coalition has a personal connection at the policy or funding level, work on those one-on-one relationships to influence change. What framework and conversational changes might your organization need to implement to change your narrative in your external work?

Next Steps

From here, CSAJ anticipates to work with coalitions to:

- 1) **Develop a National Equity Agenda:** Our exploratory work revealed the need for a National Equity Agenda that would identify key populations and key racial and economic issues that should be centered in our work as a movement and help steer state and community specific systems change efforts. Using the qualitative findings from the current study, we will convene more conversations with state coalitions, and develop and disseminate a survey to build a shared Equity Agenda that's rooted in data and story.
- 2) **Build an Equity Index and Equity Maps:** During the project we gathered and shared maps with coalitions that illustrated how their state ranks across issues of violence, poverty, and other measures of inequity (e.g. eviction rates, racial income gap).



This created an “ah-ha” moment with all coalitions we interviewed, and demonstrated a great need to make data available, make it make sense, and share it in ways that can fuel coalitions’ policy and legislative agendas and advocacy. We will bring together practice, academic, and policy partners to build out our “Equity Index” and create an interactive, web-based mapping tool that’s publicly available.

- 3) **Create an Equity Check-list (self-assessment tool) and provide intensive technical assistance to coalitions.** From the current work, we’ve drafted an “Equity Checklist” that asks critical self-reflection questions paired with common challenges and promising practices observed from the study. The goal is to develop a tool that helps organizations identify key issues and populations (to practice building an equity framework) and then helps them assess the supports and impediments to prioritizing and working on these needs.
 - **Equity Checklist: A Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment ([Link to the check-list](#))**

This check-list draws from coalition interviews to provide key steps in 1) determining where a coalition sits on the equity commitment spectrum, recognizing that all organizations have room to grow in their commitments to justice and 2) suggesting practices anti-violence coalitions can implement to expand on their justice frameworks. The check-list provides promising examples from the interviews, and ways all coalitions can strengthen their equity commitments.
- 4) **Determine what types of trainings, projects, or tools are needed** to deepen racial and economic equity commitments within coalitions to advance equity at a local and national level.



Appendix: Definitions of Frequently Referenced Terminology

Equity

Equity is when all populations are being supported and empowered in ways they need to succeed.¹⁰ In other words, we would not see differential outcomes in health, socioeconomic status, or other social outcomes by race or other identity factors.

Equity Analysis

The practice of investigating, analyzing, and interpreting the racial and economic landscape as well as outcomes of organizational work.

Equity Commitments

An organization's articulated aims that link external goals or outcomes of their work to internal organizational objectives, practices, policies, and philosophies – especially in terms of racial and economic justice.

External Context

The external context involves the relationship of an organization with its outside stakeholders, including local, state, and national organizations, policy-makers, community members, etc. The external context also includes any outside variables that may influence an outcome, such as the political or social landscape.¹¹

Internal Context

The internal context involves the relationship of an organization with its internal stakeholders, including staff members, coalition members, and victims/survivors. Internal context also includes an organization's approach to governance, relationships, culture, competencies, and values.¹²

Oppression

¹⁰ [racialequitytools.org](https://www.racialequitytools.org)

¹¹ <https://www.praxiom.com/iso-31000-terms.htm>

¹² <https://www.praxiom.com/iso-31000-terms.htm>



Oppression is the use of violence by one group using structural and institutional forces to maintain control at the expense of another individual or people group.¹³

Oppression Consciousness

The level of awareness an organization has about how vulnerable/marginalized groups are structurally disadvantaged, both in general and in their specific context.

Organizational Practices

The application of ideas, beliefs, or methods in the organization's work. Focus on the programs and strategies as well the organization's legislative and policy advocacy.

Organizational Priorities

The organization's most important values, practices, activities, services, policies, and programs that the coalition has identified as foundational and that helps them make decisions. This is usually found within the structure and philosophies of the organization.

Structural Barriers

Hurdles put in place at an environmental, political, and social level that are out of one's individual control and limit one's ability to access safety and services. Examples include, transportation infrastructure and the ways government systems or programs are set up or operate.

Structural Inequities

Institutional and political efforts that reproduce and enforce social inequity; that is, social inequities are not just individual practices, but rather are ingrained into social orders and hierarchies. The practice of "redlining" is a key, historical example of imposing structural inequities via housing policies that disadvantaged African Americans.

¹³ https://reason.kzoo.edu/csji/assets/What_is_Oppression.pdf