The RAND Center to Advance Racial Equity Policy DEIJ Statement

An Equity-Centered Approach

By Director Rhianna C. Rogers

Leaders are grappling with unprecedented challenges brought on by a racialized pandemic, including taking care of and retaining clients, employees, and intermediaries while maintaining organizational continuity and growth opportunities. At RAND, we believe that DEIJ is central to our ability to produce high-quality, objective, and well-contextualized research designs that aligns with our mission to support public good because without building DEIJ considerations into our research designs, our work runs the risk of not adhering to our commitment to the highest level of integrity and ethical behavior enabled through our core values of quality and objectivity.[i]

We accomplish this work via the CAREP Equity-Center Model, which centers equity studies.

<u>**What is Equity-Centered Design?**</u>

Equity-centered design is the practice of purposefully involving diverse communities throughout a design process with the goal of allowing their voice to directly affect how the solution will address the inequity at hand. Equitable design acknowledges that equity doesn't happen by chance but with intent and focus. While it is a broad practice applicable to all kinds of institutional environments, equity-centered design lends itself well to education and learning and so has applications for instructional design.

CAREP's Equity-centered design draws on some core component concepts:

- **Equity** generally refers to *fair and just access to opportunity.* Looking through an equity lens, we reposition Diversity (e.g., people) and Inclusion (e.g., opportunity) as supporting concepts that lead to Justice (see Table 1).

- **Anti-racism** is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.
- **Human-centered design** is an approach to problem solving that develops solutions through a strong, consistent focus on the human perspective by empathizing with the end user.

Table 1. The CAREP Equity-Center Model
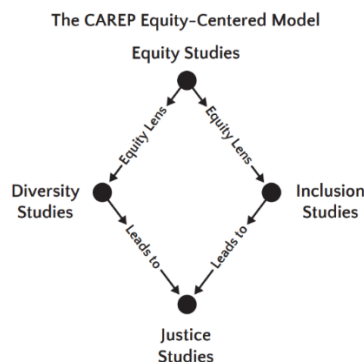
In RAND's Center to Advance Racial Equity Policy (CAREP), we take this approach one step further through the application of CAREP's equity-minded principles, as presented in Table 1. We utilize the principles to help construct diverse project team's composition, making inclusive choices around diverse stakeholder engagement experiences, and establishing procedures that guard against bias and actively promote access and equitable representation. These principles create opportunities for stakeholder growth and reflection throughout the DEI assessment process, center equity in organizational capacity building efforts and feedback loops, and use data-driven findings in creating a tailored DEIJ strategic approach that meets client development and strategic planning expectations. RAND researchers working within CAREP cross-functional teams apply an equity lens alongside their disciplinary backgrounds in order to center DEI in their research.[ii] This means all aspects of our work in CAREP center DEI principles throughout the research design process, from proposal development and study design to the disseminating of research findings and reporting.

Table 2. CAREP Equity Studies Principles

Reflexivity	Holistic Contextualization	Action-Oriented Outcomes
Reflexivity focuses on individually examining one's questions, assumptions, and worldview to understand one's own position. This allows people to orient themselves, reduce/be aware of bias, and to be active listeners. In a diverse environment, these skills can support more inclusive and equitable interactions.	Holistic contextualization encourages many entry points to the problem by engaging stakeholders from all parts of the organization in order to provide a holistic view. This can be done through selecting a space that is accessible to all, encouraging participation so that all voices are heard and respected, and empowering participants to continue conversations.	Action-oriented outcomes necessitate feedback loops as equity is an iterative process. Stakeholder feedback is vital because it also affects future conversations. Feedback allows for development and incorporation of benchmarks envisioned by the stakeholders.

DEI research at RAND and within CAREP has found that diversity on its own will not necessarily deliver positive results organizations are currently striving for; instead, we have found that the key ingredient which makes diversity (people) successful is the way it interacts with equity (access) and inclusion (opportunity). The combination of our equity-minded principles and CBPR approach assists organizations in developing and implementing a DEI vision, strategy and implementation plan and our analysis or practices provide additional services to advise and support organizations to ensure all aspects of DEI are taken into consideration. Centering stakeholder voices requires inclusive processes for engaging diverse stakeholders, with attention to equity in listening for and amplifying voices from stakeholders who have been previously underrepresented. For our collaborative work with client, we will utlize a *community-based participatory research* (CBPR) approach (Christopher et al., 2008; Isreal, et al., 2001; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). This approach enlists those who are most affected by a community issue – typically in collaboration or partnership with others who have research skills – to conduct research on and analyze that issue with the goal of devising strategies to resolve it (Christopher et al., 2008; Isreal, et al., 2001; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). The benefits of CBPR within organizations, like CLIENT, are many: 1) community members' needs can be better met through collaborative research that attends to issues they have identified as important; 2) the approach can build internal capacity; 3) and the approach helps ensure that any solutions that are generated are sustainable, appropriate and will likely be applied in practice. We will be attentive to the needs to adhere to organizational practices at USDA and CLIENT in engaging community members in the CBPR process, and RAND's Human Subjects Protection Committee will proactively monitor the plan and execution of this project to ensure that we appropriately safeguard information shared by community members.

REFERENCES

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Israel, B.A., Schulz, A.J., Parker, E.A., & Becker, A.B. (2001). Community-based participatory research: policy recommendations for promoting a partnership approach in health research. *Education for Health*, 14 (2): 182-97.

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[i] RAND, Institutional Principles https://www.rand.org/about/principles.html.
[ii] RAND, Racial equity as a research topic https://www.rand.org/topics/racial-equity.html.