



## Q&A FROM THE 'RACIAL EQUITY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN FOOD SYSTEMS, POLICY, AND PROGRAM DELIVERY' SESSION

### 2020 Rural Child Hunger Summit

#### **1. How do you avoid tokenism in trying to include more non-white voices in decision making processes when the vast majority of a given population is white?**

*Marlysa Gamblin:*

The best way to do this is to ensure that there is no “token” person of color on staff. If the staff is racially representative (not just diverse). This means that staff of color are represented at the rate of either (1) the population they represent in that area or (2) of the food insecurity levels present within each community of color. The second factor to ensure this does not take place is that staff of color are racially representative in all levels of power within the organization. Oftentimes, when we think of racially diversifying staff, we don't think about racial representation nor do we think about this in a concerted effort to ensure that this representative representation takes place at the executive levels, management levels, administrative levels, and staff levels. Of course, many organizations are not yet at this stage, but should be working toward this. As majority white organizations are working toward this, they can avoid engaging in the practice of tokenism by doing the following:

- Do not place the burden of “knowing all about communities of color” on the person, or few people, of color.
- Take time to “hear” them, “respect” them, and “honor” their expertise. Just merely allowing them to work there and singing their praise without truly respecting them will only result in tokenism. Part of honoring their expertise means having decision making power, and the authority to veto a decision (and not be ostracized by other white staff because of it).
- Do not view them as the “exception” to the rule. Placing people of color on a higher standard only further reinforces the stereotype for the masses, and adds an additional burden in an already very difficult situation where there are unequal power dynamics.



- White staff must commit to “doing the work.” This means that white staff, individually, and collectively, commit to undoing the racism that they have been socialized to internalize. Without doing this, there will be many unconscious “micro-aggressions” (which, for the record, are not “micro” in its impact on people of color).
- White staff need to commit to being humble and open to course correction, without getting fragile or defensive. This will only maintain power dynamics, which will make it easier for a culture of tokenism to take place and not be checked.
- Do not monolithize people of color. We are not all the same, even when we may come from the same racial group.
- Do not place the burden of “all things people of color” on the person, or persons, of color. Staff of color have other expertise other than this. White staff must take responsibility in also educating themselves on racism and engaging in anti-racist work internally to make the office culture different (and help educate other white staff).
- Ask your colleague of color how you can support this work from the beginning. They shouldn't have to feel like they are alone, isolated, or holding the bulk of this work. This is another form of tokenism, whereby white staff will likely praise the work of this colleague of color for all they are doing, meanwhile not engaging in a meaningful way in anti-racist work themselves.

Read this blog, on the nature of tokenism, when people of color come on board and are treated like “pets.” And then, they are seen as “threats” when they speak up about the unseen racial injustices present within the organization. The blog’s title is “[When Black Women Go From Office Pet to Office Threat - ZORA](#)”, is written by Erika Stalings, and was published in the Medium.

## 2. How is the coronavirus affecting African-American and other minority farmers?

*Dr. Monica White:*

The current crisis illuminates the ways that the food system, food production, distribution and preparation differentially impact communities on a number of levels. The fact that the virus occurs in the U.S. at the critical planting season, means that farmers are struggling to access resources such as labor, equipment, seeds and other agricultural inputs that are needed to ensure a successful season. There are many ways that under-resourced farmers are impacted.



<https://civileats.com/2020/03/25/farmworkers-are-in-the-coronavirus-crosshairs/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/04/farmworkers-risk-coronavirus-infection-keep-us-fed/>

Here are a few ways to support farmers:

- I would find a local CSA and offer to pay my membership in advance to allow them to purchase what they need for the growing season.
- I would locate my closest farmers' market, some may be in the winter off-season but will have some information and resources available, to see what value-added products
- I can purchase and support them.

In the rush to identify local food and farmers, please find ways to support farmers before the market:

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2020/04/csa-farmers-markets-coronavirus-demand-rise.html>

This document was created to support the needs of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous farmers:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1B66EvxSza8\\_zPdEqF0rYUXGJqA5vRBCqu7zPPPD RQlw/edit#gid=821769033](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1B66EvxSza8_zPdEqF0rYUXGJqA5vRBCqu7zPPPD RQlw/edit#gid=821769033)

This is also useful:

[https://www.arkrepublic.com/declaration-of-independence/black-farmers-index/?fbclid=IwAR0\\_fSrME0ACHvUsT7sA727nsizC9Jxi\\_Jtlc-P61tmZUudYYZsfDzbPdkk](https://www.arkrepublic.com/declaration-of-independence/black-farmers-index/?fbclid=IwAR0_fSrME0ACHvUsT7sA727nsizC9Jxi_Jtlc-P61tmZUudYYZsfDzbPdkk)

We're only beginning to understand this virus. It is difficult to project how different aspects of our community will experience the full impact.

*Marlysa:*

In response to your question of ways to support the general African American community, read these blogs, titled "[Race, Hunger, and COVID-19: The impact on African Americans](#)", and "[Race, Hunger, and COVID-19: The impact on Latino/a Communities](#)", recently authored by Marlysa D. Gamblin of Bread for the World Institute. In addition to this blog, here are some keys ways the virus is expected to impact the general population:

- **Early data releases shows African Americans are dying from COVID-19 AT LEAST 3 times the rate of their population size in various areas across the country.**



- African Americans [make up 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths](#) in Michigan, despite only making up 14 percent of the population. African Americans made up almost half of Milwaukee County's 945 cases and [81 percent of its deaths](#) while the total African American population is only 26 percent. Milwaukee is one of the few places in the United States that is tracking the racial breakdown of people. This reinforces the importance of collecting disaggregated data so we know who is being impacted the most, to help inform how the next stimulus package can apply a racial equity lens to specifically provide targeted support to African Americans, and the unique conditions they face.

**3. Can you point us to a community(s) that has done a good job of putting race equity at the center of their work?**

Visit the good work of [PolicyLink](#) and what they are doing locally.

**4. In addition to African Americans, what are some of the other communities of color that you are seeing in your work and how are they being included in the conversation?**

[Please read this report](#) to see other communities of color that Marlysa D. Gamblin is considering in her work, including Indigenous populations, Latino/as, Native Hawaiian, and Southeast Asian communities.

**5. Many of the people who work in food access in our community are white women. How can we encourage people of color to apply and work with our organizations?**

*Marlysa:*

To increase the number of people of color to work in these organizations, there needs to be a few things that take place. But please remember to avoid the itch to assume that it is just about encouraging people of color to apply--this problematically places the blame on people of color for not applying, instead of looking at the bigger picture entirely. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Change your culture.** People of color don't want to subject ourselves to internally racially problematic culture. This takes an honest look at "who we are." I would suggest reading [How To Be An Antiracist](#) to understand how people are individually carrying out racism, most of them unconsciously. This needs to take place before, during ,and after people of color are being hired (otherwise, you will not have a high retention rate). Also, engage in a concerted effort to connect your mission of ending hunger with prioritizing race. This should be reflected in ALL aspects of your organization, including website, theory of change, etc. Read more about culture shifts that are needed in the next bullet point.



- **Build authentic, genuine relationships.** After building solid relationships with the local community, or communities, of color, it will become more natural to have many conversations. This SHOULD NOT be the aim of developing relationships, but of course, one of the benefits of being in authentic, anti-racist relationships. Being able to ask what the barriers are and how your organization can be responsible for addressing those barriers should be among the first questions asked. Again don't put the onus on people of color. It is not our fault that systems have excluded us. It is the responsibility of white organizations to bear the responsibility to take the actions to address this. Is transit the issue? Pay? Not hearing about the job opportunity because it wasn't advertised in mediums that they frequent? Or maybe when it was, it was exclusive in the requirements? Or maybe the "way" in which it was advertised used language that was VERY disconnected from their community. Is it charity-focused work, and therefore charity-forward language being used, that promotes white saviorhood (often unconsciously)? Or, is it justice-oriented work where you are explicit that the only way to end hunger is by assertively, and not superficially, engaging in anti-racist service provision and advocacy work that focuses on achieving racial justice? These are all questions that you all need to ask yourselves as well as the communities you seek to engage. If you start changing your culture, then other things, like the website will change, office culture, priorities, will all change. If people see themselves in the work, and can see themselves shaping the work, then people of color will feel safer to engage with the organization.
- **Reorient the way you understand "expert" and value various experiences.** Change your hiring practices and reconsider requirements such as college education, internships, etc. Consider hiring directly from the community and make having lived experience with hunger and racism a requirement for the job. Choose passion, drive, and commitment rather than a college-forward resume that "seems" good, but may not be reflective of what the community needs and would benefit from the most.
- **Increase your salary and apply a racial equity lens to your salaries for people of color to account for the historical trauma with lower incomes and wealth levels.** Note that this isn't necessarily saying that ALL salaries need to increase. This is specifically to provide additional support to account for historical inequities for communities of color. This will also attract more people of color to apply, given the racial wealth divide and the racial debt divide among college students of color.
- **Be committed to offering onboarding opportunities and giving ongoing training.** Given the historical trauma in education and other institutions, there may need to be more targeted support for staff of color to receive the support they need. Again, this should be the responsibility of the organization.



- **Be real about where you want to go, and what you plan to do.** Be open in your hiring search that applying a racial equity lens is a top priority and you realize your staff is mainly white women and you want to fix it. People of color will respect your ability to be frank about your racial shortcomings, as opposed to hiding what they already know is the reality. This will increase trust, as well as openness to going along the journey with you.
- 6. Question to panelists: I think it's fair to say that our media has failed in educating the public on racial inequity in the food system. Can you think of any publications/media that have not failed on this end? Where would you direct people to gain the knowledge they need to make a difference especially in regard to current events?**

*Marlysa:*

Good question. Not sure that there has been a good example of this that is widespread. Of course, this would be great. I would suggest going to [bread.org/racialequity](https://bread.org/racialequity) to see more of the connection between racial equity and hunger. Marlysa D. Gamblin will be authoring a series on race, COVID-19 and hunger. Here is the first of the series, [on African Americans](#). The next two will focus on Latino/as and Indigenous communities, followed by explicit recommendations of how the response for COVID-19 can apply a racial equity lens.

*Monica:*

Mainstream media has left a lot to be desired in capturing the depth and breadth of food insecurity and the failures of our current food system. While we look for alternative perspectives, it is important to appreciate alternative forms of media to help us understand what is happening and how people are organizing and working on these issues.

Here are a few sources that offer thoughtful analysis on food access:

<https://civileats.com/>

<https://grist.org/food/>

<https://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj>



**7. I have an issue when I'm told hunger is a bipartisan issue but we don't address how nonprofits perpetuate the idea (through print and media) of who actually benefits most from the programs we support. How can we address that?**

*Marlysa:*

Great question. The communications departments of these nonprofits need to apply a racial equity lens into their work. If they were to use [this methodology](#) in their decisions to market certain ideas or send certain emails, or write certain blogs, then this could help shift the narrative. Most times, we don't understand how we are maintaining the same narratives that preserve racism and racist ideas. To this point, a second factor that must be addressed is staff understanding how they learned racist ideas, and how they can actively engage in anti-racist work. I suggest reading [How To Be An Antiracist](#) and receiving racial equity training for communication. It is also important to note a third reality. These departments typically are not racially diverse, or racially representative. The hiring needs to change, the hiring practices need to change. These three realities increase the likelihood that nonprofits will continue to perpetuate these problematic ideas that preserve racially inequitable stereotypes. Addressing them will help to address this problem.

**8. How can we approach nutrition and feeding programs in a racially equitable way during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

*Marlysa:*

Please read the [Racial Equity and Nutrition Report](#) (many of the recommendations to these programs will be similar, but increase in size and scope to respond to the scope of how the virus is disproportionately impacting communities of color). For example, on page 19, the report calls for SNAP to provide additional support to families with the lowest amount of wealth. Because the racial wealth divide increases among people nearing or below the poverty line, people of color receiving SNAP face the least amount of wealth, and would be targeted with additional support based on this inequity. This recommendation would be the same in nature, but the level of support needed for each household, and the additional level of support needed for the lowest wealth households, would need to increase to match the severity of the crisis.

In addition, read the blog series on Race, COVID-19 and Hunger authored by Marlysa Gamblin and published by Bread for the World Institute. It can be found at [bread.org](#). The first one is already published, and focuses on [African Americans](#). The second and third ones will focus on Latino/as and Indigenous communities, followed by specific recommendations. Please also [register for the webinar titled, "Race, Hunger and COVID-19"](#) sponsored by the Racial Equity and Hunger National Learning Network. This is taking place April 21st and will discuss what responses need to happen to apply a racial equity lens.



**9. Does Bread for the World Institute work in any of the U.S Territories? Also how do these models play out in Black-led communities where the dynamics of structural racism and equity look different.**

*Marlysa:*

Please review the [Racial Equity and Nutrition Report](#), to see recommendations for how the Institute believes federal policy can apply a racial equity lens to ensure that anti-hunger policies and programs in U.S. territories are racially equitable. Please review these pages in particular for more information on this topic: 5, 21, 22, 61, and 70.

**10. How can churches use this information, especially in trying to feed the community right now?**

*Monica:*

Almost every church has a “Wellness Ministry.” This is a great place to center conversations about increasing access to nutrient-rich foods for the congregants, neighbors and broader communities that they serve. What would be great is to sponsor a farmers’ market after religious services. Historically, there are many ways that religious entities have collaborated with farmers. One beautiful example is the work of Dr. Heber Brown and the Black Church Food Security Network based in Baltimore:

<https://www.blackchurchfoodsecurity.net/>

Ultimately, all of our social institutions should be thinking about ways to meet the food needs of our community members. With this in mind, we should work on models that emphasize equity and not charity.

*Marlysa:*

The church can do the following:

- **Ask communities of color** how your church can partner with them, serve, and support them.
- **Start investing in black and brown communities** (i.e. banks, ventures, businesses, vendors) as much as possible, instead of their traditional business partners. The racial wealth divide will likely increase as a result of this crisis and churches have to keep their money somewhere. Might as well invest in black and brown businesses and financial institutions like banks owned by people of color, which will help the community.





- **Have the community co-create the design of how they are being served** and how they want to be served, to meet their needs and account for the possible racial tension given historical trauma.
- **Use your power to advocate WITH; NOT FOR.** More resources are needed, not just food. Additional SNAP benefits are needed for households of color. Additional funding for tests are needed for communities of color. Additional funds for preventative equipment is needed for communities of color. I am sure they know what they need. Use your privilege and relationships to advocate on the local, state and federal levels for policy change and use your relationships to co-broker opportunities for communities of color to receive targeted, racially equitable support to reduce the contraction rate among communities of color, and reduce the racial hunger divide that communities of color face and that will increase during COVID-19. Use your power to co-publish and co-circulate this need in the media (and do so in a racially equitable way WITH communities of color in a co-created, co-led way; not in a way that will maintain white saviorhood).

**11. How do us "nice white ladies" participate in the fight against food insecurity, and make sure our neighbors know we are passionate and care without coming off as pompous? On a personal level, not so much a policy level.**

*Marlysa:*

Being humble matters. Owning your privilege also matters. Both of these things go a far way. Being conscious about how you can step back to make space for a colleague of color (whether within your own organization or at a partner organization or within the community) is also important. Thinking about ways that you are benefiting from and participating to maintain current racial inequities are critically important on the personal level too. Personal reflection is important and a lot of folks don't engage in these efforts. This will help you own up to your privilege as you relate to other white people, as well as people of color. Once you do, I think you might realize how you too previously engaged, and/or still do engage, in micro-aggressions against people of color (of course, mostly unknown to you, unless you intentionally reflected on how you have learned and how you need to unlearn racism within your own life). Ask your colleagues of color what they need from you, but this should be the last thing and not the first thing you do, because in your reflection, you should be able to take the responsibility to identify how you can participate in anti-racist work. It all starts on the personal level. You should use the [Racial Equity Methodology](#) on a daily basis as you make all your decisions, projects, and workplan items with a racial equity lens. You should ask yourself if your decision/project is neutral to the racial hunger divide. If it is, then it is not anti-racist, and should be changed. Ask yourself how people of color have equitable power in this decision/project. Start asking yourself these questions as well as your other white female colleagues who are all well-intentioned, but may be "talking the talk" but their actions are not yet fully aligned with assertively practicing anti-racism as a lifestyle. Practicing anti-racism as a lifestyle, in both your personal and professional lives, is how it filters into our work, our



relationships, and the way in which we relate to people and power in our work on food insecurity. It will be from this that people of color will see your passion for justice, not charity, and your commitment to racial equity, not self-promotion, or unconscious “feel-good” white-saviorhood.

## 12. What are ways to engage farmers given their work schedules?

*Monica:*

Spring and fall seasons are busy with planting and harvesting. In the summer, work starts early with an afternoon break and then evening work. Winter is often for planning and a great time for conferences. If you're looking to assist or work with multiple farmers, they are the best resource for reaching out to and finding each other. Also, there are several federal, regional and local organizations that meet the needs of farmers, I would identify those organizations that are already serving farmers but include additional effort to reach those often under-resourced and uninvited to these conversations.

## 13. I live in the Corn Belt, home of big agriculture. How do we shift our American ideals of rugged individualism to support more cooperative farming systems?

*Monica:*

We have a crisis on our hands if we fail to support and increase small family farmers in rural communities who often grow our food crops. The fallacy of individualism is partially responsible for our incredibly fragile food system that leaves us vulnerable, in search of sufficient, nutrient-rich and affordable foods. There are two suggestions that I have for building coalitions of folks who can work together. 1) Education of alternatives, when we learn about mutual aid societies and cooperatives, these lessons offer us different ways of being, living, and working collaboratively for our collective health and wellness. 2) Coalition building, who are the folks who share our ideas and with whom we can work but also who are those with whom we have some tangential interests but who can broaden the tent of ideas, resources and connections. These are the folks to ask in the room for surviving the current farmers/food crises. I have other ideas but these are ways to start organizing around our basic needs. We know that we are stronger when we work together.

These articles show the wastefulness and vulnerabilities of our food system:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/business/coronavirus-destroying-food.html?searchResultPosition=1&fbclid=IwAR2aMmxuSstCWh6KFzMR2BFhHGqHgkEuEKbOiQkfDL6jwtrRRjkS2tWqxavl>

[https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2020/04/03/826006362/food-shortages-nope-too-much-food-in-the-wrong-places?fbclid=IwAR3LNf-ivHeaTelluhrWRkfw0\\_7N1jUMyOYqT-pw1ATy7L4x0daqRUIIOIU](https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2020/04/03/826006362/food-shortages-nope-too-much-food-in-the-wrong-places?fbclid=IwAR3LNf-ivHeaTelluhrWRkfw0_7N1jUMyOYqT-pw1ATy7L4x0daqRUIIOIU)



<https://www.clickorlando.com/business/2020/04/08/coronavirus-claims-an-unexpected-victim-florida-vegetables/?fbclid=IwAR3f9xiH-8GsBdcwxYhJ97ybmQiT3VndRFLWf-K9b1F3AbF1I18p02CoozM>

Relatedly, I've done lots of asset-building/mapping work with leaders of various institutions (educators, religious leaders, community organizers/activists, funders, emergency food providers, etc.) to think differently about the resources we have organizationally and institutionally, how might we use these resources differently to support the communities that surround and support us. For example, emergency food providers have commercial kitchens and resources that they use during mealtimes. What if those commercial kitchens created opportunities for community organizations to do value-added product preparation on the off hours? While this example is more food-system related, farmers are aware of the resources they share, and they are aware of those with whom they can build. This is a way to develop an asset-based approach to bridging the needs of farmers to communities that can all benefit from the "fruits of their labor."