# The RETOC
Five Steps Towards Racial Equity

Outline of the RETOC

The RETOC consists of five steps, which progress from visioning about change to identification of early actions that can be taken in that direction. This book is designed to do the following:

- Assist community change leaders in unpacking the root causes and dynamics of problems and
- Help leaders begin thinking about action strategies likely to dismantle structural racism and promote racial equity.

To help facilitate group deliberation, we offer guidelines for working backwards from a desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO) to identify five stepping stones most likely to lead to that goal.

Here is an overall "backwards map" of these five steps, headed by the Desired Racial Equity Outcome. Each step is explained in detail in the following pages.
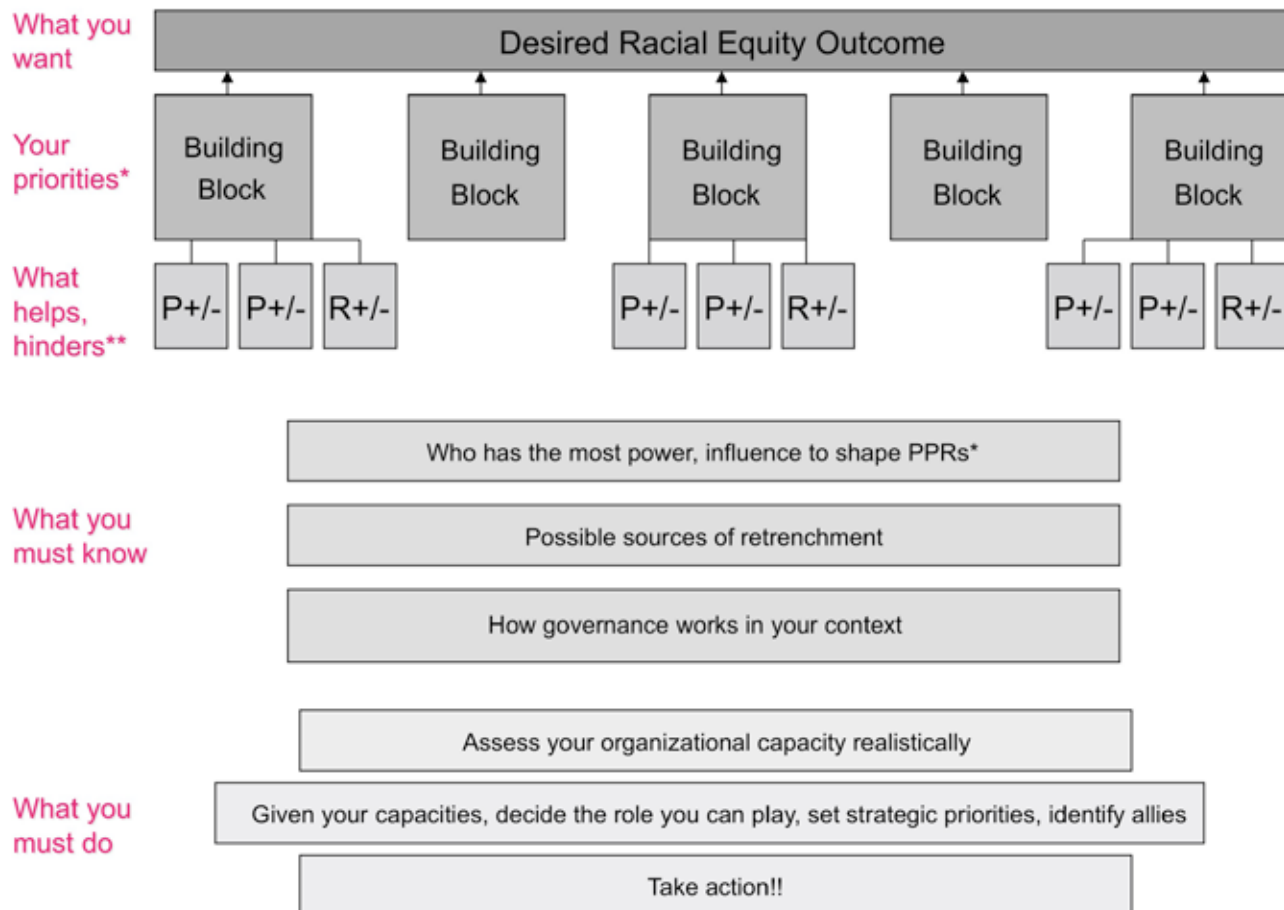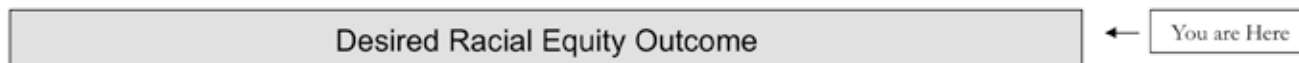

* These are the most essential components of your desired racial equity outcome.

** These are **policies**, **practices**, and cultural **representations** (PPRs) that may help or hinder efforts to create your building blocks

STEP #1: What You Want
Defining Your Desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO)

Desired Racial Equity Outcome	← You are Here

The first task is to produce an outcomes statement that specifies the racial disparities you would like to reduce or eliminate in a given place and timeframe. This means defining, as clearly as possible, the focus of your reform/change effort over the coming months and years.

Here are some examples of very *broad* anti-racism vision statements from other initiatives:[3]

> To undo institutional and structural racism—the structures, policies and behaviors that create segregation and inequality in every aspect of daily living.
>
> *–ERASE Racism Initiative, Long Island, New York. 2001*
>
> To end institutionalized racism in city government; and to create a community that is enriched by diverse cultures, with full participation of all residents.
>
> *–Race and Social Justice Initiative, Seattle, Washington. 2004*
>
> To provide a welcoming, nondiscriminatory environment with respect and opportunity for all.
>
> *–Mayor's Racial Harmony Initiative/Create community, St. Cloud, Minnesota. 2003*

Important Note

As you go through this visioning process, you may realize that your staff holds divergent views on issues of race, or that your organization has overlooked its own racial inequities. If so, it may be necessary to make internal organizational change, starting with building a consensus around an appropriate race analysis,[4] as a complement to the RETOC process.

Initially, you may have visions of similar scope in mind. But you may need to "unpack" such broad visions by answering questions like these:

• Is there a specific area of racial disparity you'd like to eliminate?

• At what scale will you seek change? Institutions or organizations? Community? County? State? Region?

• What will "racial equity" look like in your outcome area? Are your racial goals measurable?

• When do you expect to see results? What is the timeframe? Two years? Ten years?

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[3] See Potapchuk, Maggie. 2006. *Lessons Learned: How Communities are Addressing Racial Inequities.* A report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation by the National League of Cities, the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change and MP Associates.

[4] For an excellent review of analytical perspectives and training resources relating to race, see:
Shapiro, Ilana Ph.D. Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. 2002. "Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs" Washington D.C: The Aspen Institute.

Answering these questions will allow you to come up with a number of narrower, more specific racial equity outcome statements that will help you focus your efforts and resources.

Below are several examples:

Example REO Statements:

- To eliminate racial disparities in juvenile sentencing in (my city/county/region) within two years.

- To reduce black and Latino high school dropout rates in (my city/county/region) by 50 percent within six years.

- To produce x units of affordable, multi-family housing in high performing school districts in (my city/county/region) within five years.

Now, use what you have read in Step #1 to complete Exercise # 1 on page 33. This exercise will help you compose a Racial Equity Outcome that is both focused and attainable.

STEP #2: Setting Your Priorities
Identifying the "Building Blocks" of Your Racial Equity Outcome

Desired Racial Equity Outcome				
Building Block	Building Block	Building Block	Building Block	Building Block

← You are Here
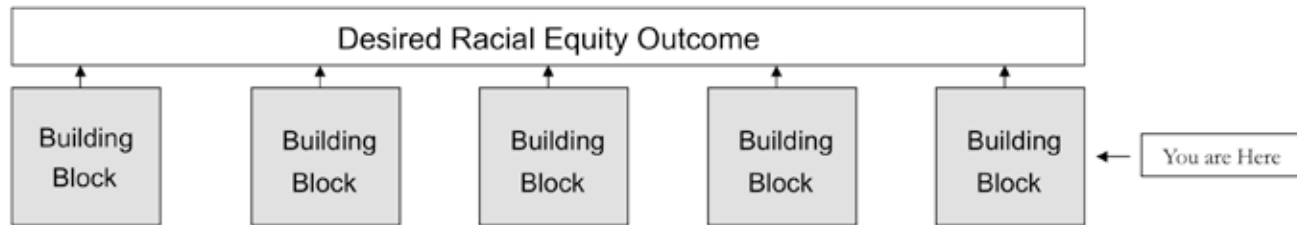
Here, you begin **Setting Your Priorities** for action later on. **By this we mean identifying what must be in place for your desired Racial Equity Outcome (REO) to become reality.**

Usually, you think of BIG racial equity outcomes like those offered as examples in Step # 1. These are the types of outcomes you ultimately want. But, you have to unpack those big outcomes into smaller **building blocks** so that you can be focused, realistic and consistent in your planning and action.

These building blocks will be your priorities, since they are the essential preconditions for the change you want to see. You should frame them as the policies, regulations, information, resources, or anything else that must be in place, at a minimum, to support the outcome you want.

Think comprehensively. Don't limit your imagination only to building blocks that seem to be within easy personal or organizational reach. Try to develop a realistic list that reflects the full complexity of your desired REO. You can narrow this list later.

And remember…use *nouns* here, not *verbs*. Frame the conditions that are absolutely necessary and must be in place. (Resist the temptation here to list prematurely actions that might be taken). Then, separate those building blocks that you feel are critical and within your reach as an organization from those that may not be.

So, for example, if "elimination of juvenile racialized sentencing disparities," is your desired REO, you might have building blocks like these:[5]

Important Note

To identify the right building blocks, you might need the advice of experts and local stakeholders familiar with your chosen issue. It is important to take the time to ground your decision-making in research, expert knowledge and community experience.

Initially, you may come up with more building blocks than you can handle organizationally. Choose a manageable number that you consider critical and within your reach. For those beyond your capacity, collaborate with other organizations that can take the lead.

Hint:

One helpful way to identify building blocks is to "flip" the thinking process and ask:

"What barriers to this desired racial equity outcome must we cross or eliminate in order to be successful?"

Examples of Building Blocks to Eliminate Juvenile Racialized Sentencing Disparities:

- Similar arrest rates for white, black and brown youth in the same community or region for any given offence.

- A wider menu of positive recreational options for local youth.

- Alternative sentencing options for local judges: options that are more proportionate to the crimes committed and that take the devastating community impacts of mass incarceration into account.

- Preventive rather than aggressive community policing, which does not, for example, emphasize stop-and-frisk tactics or quality-of-life sweeps in poor neighborhoods.

- Culturally competent police officers and juvenile justice officials.

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[5] This hypothetical example is developed throughout this book and synthesized in Appendix A.

It is important for you to be able to break down your own Racial Equity Outcome into narrower, more manageable goals as was done in Step # 2 above.

Exercise # 2 on pages 35-38 will help you the develop building blocks for your specific initiative.

STEP #3: What Supports or Impedes Your Building Blocks?

Identifying Public Policies, Institutional Practices and Cultural Representations (PPRs)
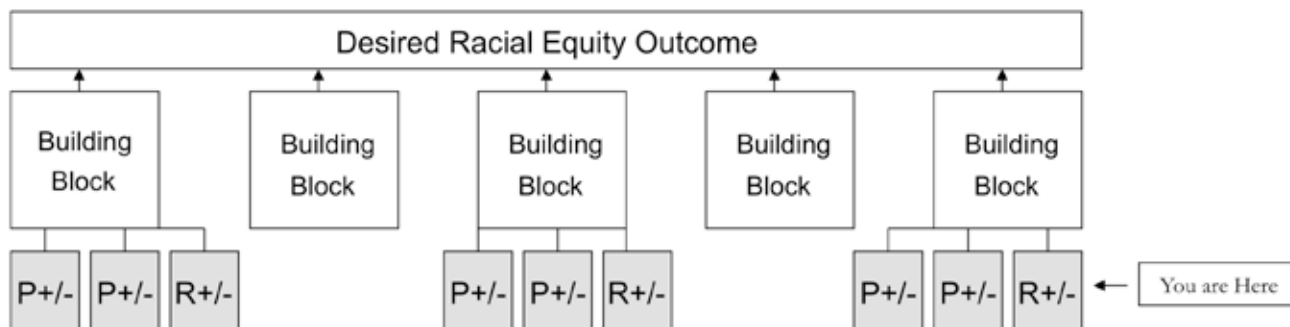
At this point, you will have already…

- Clearly defined the racial equity outcome that will anchor your planning effort

- Unpacked its key building blocks and

- Decided which ones will be your priorities, given your situation and capacities.

Now that you know where to concentrate your attention fruitfully, you must determine **what supports or impedes your building blocks.** This step is crucial for deciding the action agenda you will pursue to realize your ultimate goals.

As you set out to define that action agenda, the RETOC asks you to apply a structural racism "litmus test" to each building block. For each one (say, the "similar racial arrest rates" building block in our juvenile justice example) you must identify public policies, institutional practices and cultural representations (PPRs) likely to determine whether or not that building block materializes or stays in place.

Important Note

The "PPR" step cannot be completed properly in a single "brainstorming" session. It requires significant policy-related research and expert institutional analysis.

Remember to take a cross-sectoral approach. Policies and practices across multiple sectors (e.g., education, housing and employment) often cumulatively reinforce inequities.

You may come up with a sizeable list here. Narrow it down to those items that, in your judgment, represent the most significant barriers or supports to each building block.

Example

To create racial equity in juvenile arrest rates, you might look closely at the systems and procedures of public schools, child welfare agencies, police departments and other youth-serving institutions to identify key decision criteria that may be ostensibly neutral, but end up producing disproportionate outcomes—often due to the disproportionate contact of youth of color with social control institutions.

These PPRs are the specific things that community change stakeholders must promote or target for change.

Identifying relevant cultural representations can be challenging, but vital. Cultural representations are popular assumptions, images and "wisdoms" associated with different groups of color in particular social contexts.

Males of color, for instance, are widely perceived in our society as threats to safety and security—black men and boys are often portrayed as violent predators who threaten personal safety, while some categories of Latinos are assumed to be illegal immigrants and gang members. Media and entertainment producers often gratuitously exploit these and other stereotypes to boost ratings. Although overt discrimination grows rarer, damaging representations of all groups of color shape many political, business and other contexts in which social resource allocation decisions made. For instance, these cultural representations can make policy-makers less sympathetic or inclined

to support change initiatives. Common assumptions can also dictate or influence the creation of certain policies—whether it be in government, the workplace, or elsewhere.

Moreover, those most damaged by these racial representations often unintentionally reinforce them. Chronically underdeveloped communities inevitably evolve a culture that reflects their state of limited opportunity. Forced to live in these places, many individuals of color make choices that unintentionally reinforce these very stereotypes, impeding progress towards racial equity.


Example: An "alternatives to prison" building block might be opposed by a convergence of the following policies, practices and cultural representations:

- Mandatory sentencing laws (policy)

- Prison construction as a rural economic development strategy (policy)

- Public housing regulations requiring eviction of convicted felons (policy)

- Employer practices against hiring individuals with criminal records (practice) and

- Pervasive images of inner cities, crime and violence, so that mass incarceration seems the only rational option (representation).

Using Step # 3 as a guide, Exercise # 3 on pages 39-44 will help you identify any policies, practices and cultural representations that may impede or further your goals. This part of the process will hopefully limit the number of unforeseen challenges you will face while trying to create change.

STEP #4: What You Must Know
Mapping the Local Change Landscape
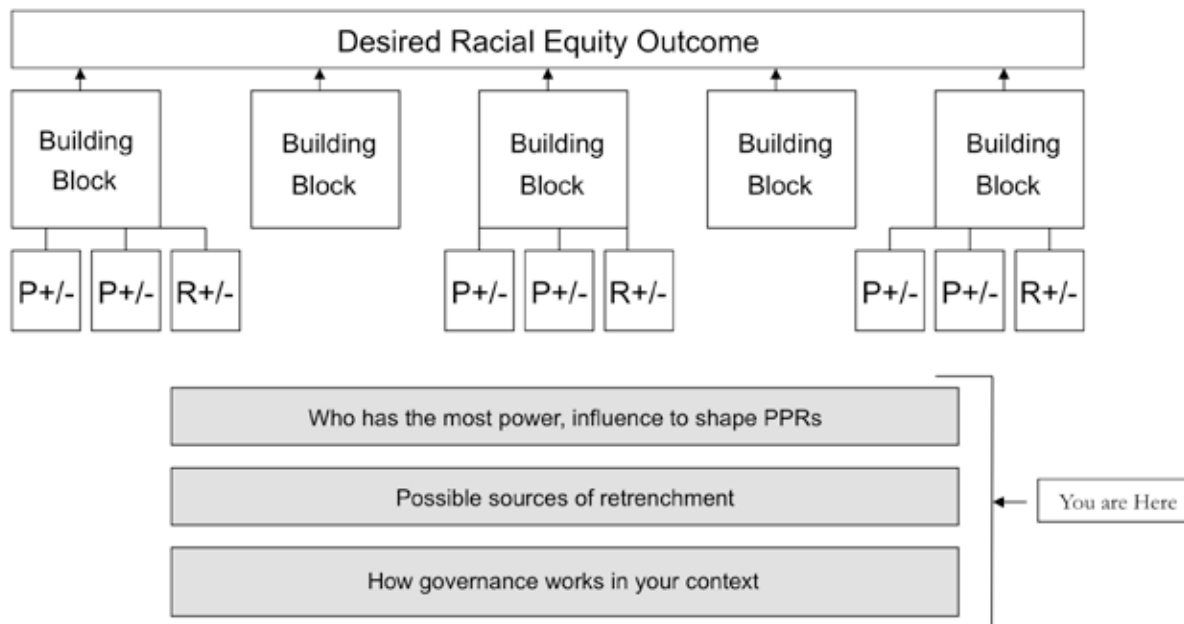
Now that you know what you want to accomplish and your strategic priorities, you must become familiar with the terrain that you and your colleagues will have to negotiate as change agents. You must understand the politics of change in your community—the "nuts and bolts" of local power and governance.

Racial equity work is as much political as it is technical and programmatic. Much of it involves building alliances for action, developing public will to support change and productively countering the resistance you will encounter.

So, in mapping the local change landscape, three areas of knowledge are essential:

- Who are the key "players" in your local context
- How the governance process works at the level you want to engage
- Possible sources of retrenchment: who and what are likely to undermine or undo progress toward creating your building blocks

First, you need to develop a picture of the key public, private and civic powerbrokers and stakeholders associated with your PPRs. This should reveal who are critical "gatekeepers" and "authorizers" on particular policy issues, media postures and so on.

These "players" will be elected officials, interest groups, government bureaucrats, business executives, media and entertainment organizations, unions, opinion leaders and other important local/state actors who must be (a) engaged or challenged to bring about change and (b) monitored, either because they have opposed such change historically or can be expected to oppose change, or because they tend to fall short when it comes to implementation.

A historical understanding of this landscape is vital not only for making progress, but also for *limiting retrenchment:* for anticipating the type, sources and timing of local resistance to the establishment of these racial equity building blocks.

To be comprehensive, remember to look closely at the organizations and individuals within the **government, business** and **civic** sectors as you do your power analysis.

Identify the key power brokers and alliances associated with a particular policy, practice, or representation. Then, identify the processes and dynamics that actually produce or maintain them.

Learn how governance works in your particular context. Find out where the critical decisions are made and what current and past alliances influence specific issue-areas. Without this knowledge, it will be hard to know where and how to intervene to make change. Be prepared for a challenge here, since much of the bargaining and influencing that takes place among power elites can be informal.*

You also may need to master unfamiliar "policy knowledge" to engage power elites effectively. This is often the crucial advantage they hold over the general public. For example, remedial education resources for high-school dropouts may be allocated according to funding formulas known only to a few budget insiders. They and a few legislators, also may be the only ones familiar with the timetables and processes for changing those formulas.

To help you navigate the politics in your area or community, Exercise # 4 on pages 45-52 helps you apply the ideas in this step to your initiative.

* Some aspects of a public contracting process, for example, can be formal, transparent and accessible, while others can be very obscure. Public agencies may have a standard process for soliciting and evaluating responses to requests for proposals (RFPs) for, say, at-risk youth services. But at the same time, it can be hard to know when such RFPs are issued if elites informally agree to limit public notification. Informal deals are also routinely made to craft RFPs in ways that favor particular applicants—whether intentionally or not.

STEP #5: What You Must Do
Assessing Your Capacity, Planning, & Gearing Up for Action
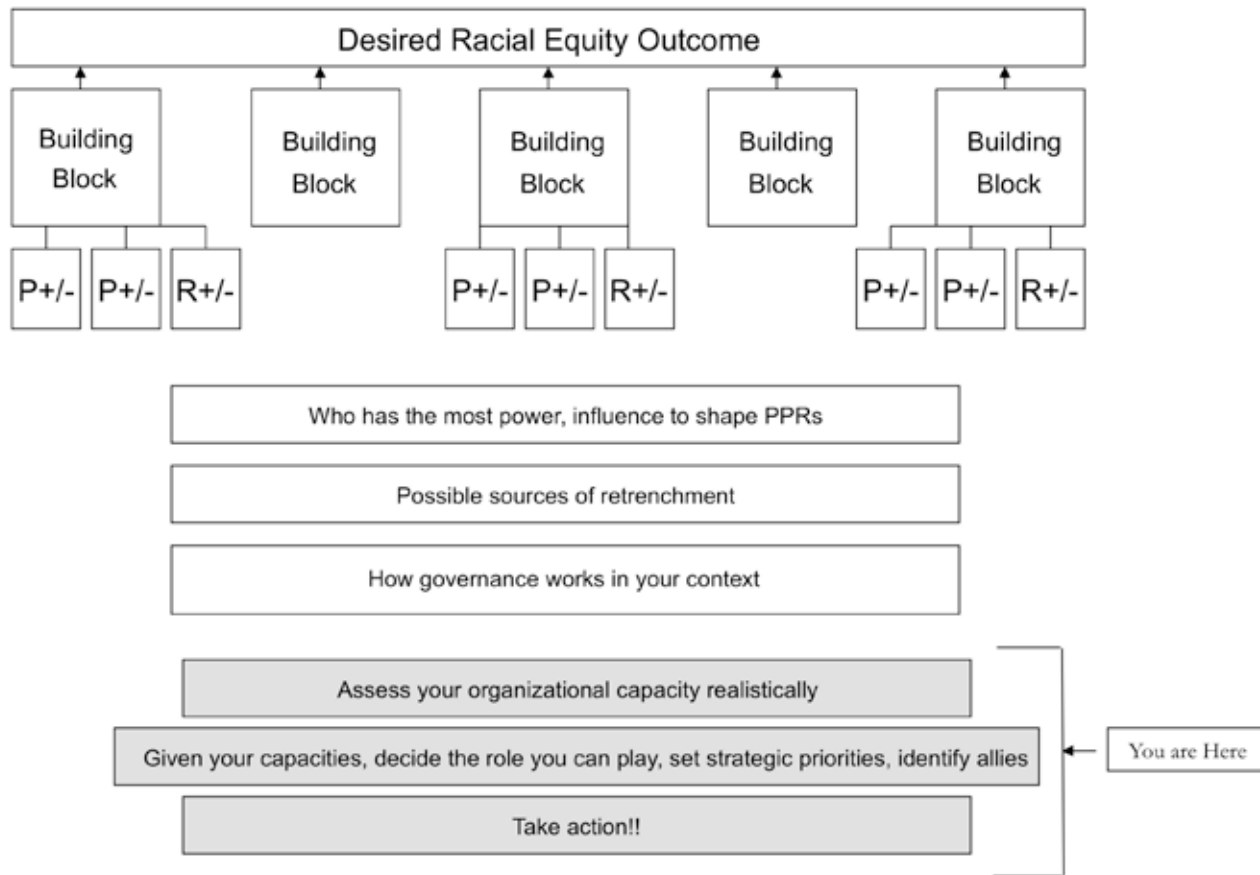
Now you can see that the work of racial equity involves taking **actions to change or support a specific set of PPRs,** either on your own, but most often in collaboration with others. These actions must target those who most influence the characteristics of those PPRs in your local context.

Exercise # 5 on pages 53-57 will help you make your own detailed and focused plan of action, putting you on your way to achieving your Racial Equity Outcome.