



Beyond Training and the “Skills Gap”

Research and Recommendations for
Racially Equitable Communications
in Workforce Development

2019

race
forward

Executive Summary

Purpose

AS PART OF A THREE-YEAR RACE FORWARD PROJECT on racial equity in workforce development, Beyond Training and the “Skills Gap” – Research and Recommendations for Racially Equitable Communications in Workforce Development provides a broad picture for the field’s leaders and professionals of how the workers they serve – particularly workers of color – are framed in the media coverage of jobs in two expanding, higher wage industries – technology and health care. The report also provides the workforce development field with practical tips for racially equitable communications to broaden the collective responsibility for employment and other economic outcomes in our communities.

Research Question: To what extent are workers – particularly workers of color – framed in individualist vs. systemic ways in workforce development-related coverage of technology and health care jobs in mainstream media?

Practice Question: How can the field of workforce development better incorporate, and even center racial equity in communications?

The technology and healthcare sectors are at a crossroads: they can ignore or insufficiently address the realities of systemic racism and thereby reinforce the inequities of the status quo; or they can consciously choose to explicitly address race and become the drivers of equitable and inclusive change. The following recommendations provide a pathway for workforce development strategies in these sectors to move from being passively part of the problem to actively part of the solution – racially equitable and inclusive workforces prepared to meet the critical needs and challenges of our ever-changing and complex society.

Defining Individualist vs. Systemic Frames

INDIVIDUALIST FRAMING

Individualist framing of jobs in the growing fields of technology and healthcare, as well as in other spheres of our economy, centers the responsibility of employment outcomes—from hiring, to retention, to career progress, to earnings, etc.—almost entirely on individual initiative and work ethic. It includes such terms and phrases as “unskilled,” “training,” “soft skills,” and “skills gap,” among other descriptions of individual deficiencies when it tell stories of individuals. If the employer is explicitly incorporated into the story, it is typically to lament the impact of the skills gap and lack of available workers on the company’s growth prospects.

If the employer is included as part of the solution to employment challenges, it does not extend beyond providing charity to support more job training or otherwise improving the soft-skill deficiencies of workers.

While many workforce development agency professionals argue that the hard- and soft-skill deficiencies of their clients are indeed real, even if that is the case, Race Forward argues that racially equitable outcomes will not come through a singular focus on prospective employees alone.

SYSTEMIC FRAMING

Systemic framing, by contrast, uses language and stories that substantively cover the lack of resources underlying the skills gap and the disparities we see in employment outcomes. These resources include education, transportation, social network access, and others that are often place-based. Ideally, systemic framing addresses the role of employer discrimination and inequitable policies and practices, whether carried out intentionally or not.

At its best, systemic framing discusses the root causes and compounding effects of disparities across systems, and suggests solutions in the broadest sense of state and societal responsibility and shared prosperity. Systemic frames expose implicit biases and challenge notions that racism, sexism, and classism no longer erect meaningful and deeply troubling barriers to success. Systemic frames lift up human dignity and a historically informed sense of fairness.

If our goal is to have a shared responsibility and commitment to equitable employment outcomes, systemic framing is essential. And for the purposes of broadly contrasting the individualist (dominant) frames from the systemic (“alternative”) frames, this study considered any article touching on these themes to be “systemic,” regardless of whether or not race or racism was explicitly mentioned. However, our analysis does make these distinctions within the category of systemic framing in order to explore the extent to which the mainstream media and workforce development agencies seem to be more comfortable discussing the systemic barriers and solutions around factors other than race.

And to be clear, we argue that to advance a vision of racial justice, systemic framing must incorporate an explicit racial lens. While important discussions can and should be had about many social, economic, and other factors, race and racism are too often left out of common discourse. We believe that workforce development leaders and communications teams can and should do more to use an explicit racial equity lens far more often to counteract the mainstream framing of the workers they serve.

Key Findings

1. Individualist framing dominates [Note: larger FONT for bold]. Individualist framing – which often centers a) the “skills gap” between workers and vacant employment

position, and/or b) the need for job training – dominates the mainstream media coverage of jobs in technology and healthcare, with more than three-quarters (76.5%) of all the coverage in our analysis featuring individualist framing (see Figure 1). Moreover, individualist framing is too often unchallenged, considering 50.2% of the coverage exclusively featured individualist framing, compared to only 7.8% containing exclusively systemic frames (See Figure 1).

2. Even when present, systemic framing typically must compete with individualist framing. Overall, only about one third (34.1%) of the workforce development-related coverage of technology and healthcare jobs in mainstream media contained systemic framing (see Figure 1). And while mainstream media coverage tends to include more systemic framing when worker demographics are identified (e.g., in the 54.8% of coverage when the income level, and/or gender of workers, etc. are explicitly mentioned), individualist framing is nevertheless simultaneously ever present. For example, while 55.6% of the articles with raced workers (typically workers of color) contained some significant systemic framing, only two out of 36 articles (5.6%) exclusively did (see Figure 3). Almost nine out of ten articles (88.9%) with workers of color included individualist framing.
3. Infrequent attention to race. When worker demographics of any type are included in mainstream coverage of tech and healthcare jobs, workers of color are featured less often than “non-raced” workers, which includes low-income workers, women, the formerly incarcerated, etc.
4. Insufficient attention to race in systemic framing. When systemic frames are present, the media devotes more attention to non-raced workers – (i.e., the race of the workers is unspecified in the text) than to raced workers.

Methodology

RACE FORWARD CONDUCTED MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS of 200+ mainstream newspaper and wire articles from Jan 2016 to October 2017 of 1) technology or healthcare jobs, or 2) a sample of workforce development organizations that Race Forward had been in contact with in mid- to late 2017 about centering racial equity in their work. As a result, the levels of systemic framing reported in this study are more likely to be higher than just general coverage of the workforce in other industries beyond tech and healthcare, or of workforce development agencies more broadly speaking (i.e., those who were not already inclined to pursue some racial equity training and/or coaching).

Race Forward researchers compiled the data set both through broad terms (e.g., “workforce development and tech and diversity”) and through specific agencies (e.g., “[agency name] and jobs and health OR tech”). And we coded articles for individualist and/or systemic framing, and for the type of workers discussed: people of color, gendered (typically women workers), low-income, formerly incarcerated, etc.

Communications Recommendations

CURRENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS related to workforce development in both the technology and healthcare sectors insufficiently address the existence, realities, and impacts of systemic racism. Without a more complete analysis of race, these sectors not only reflect, but replicate patterns of racial inequity and exclusion. Because both sectors play such pivotal roles in our society and daily lives, the accessibility, composition, and competencies of their respective workforces matter. These sectors are at a crossroads: they can ignore or insufficiently address the realities of systemic racism and thereby reinforce the inequities of the status quo; or they can consciously choose to explicitly address race and become the drivers of equitable and inclusive change. The following recommendations provide a pathway for workforce development strategies in these sectors to move from being passively part of the problem to actively part of the solution – racially equitable and inclusive workforces prepared to meet the critical needs and challenges of our ever-changing and complex society.

- **Address race early and often.** A race-centered conversation needs to become normalized and habitual. Addressing race early and often means making it part of the discussion at the beginning and throughout the process of functions such as program development and review, strategic planning, communications strategy development, grant-writing, etc.
- **Address race inclusively and intersectionally.** Race is often, but not the only, salient dynamic contributing to social inequities. You can address racism explicitly, not exclusively, because other factors also matter. It's also important to address race intersectionally because the combination of being a person of color and also being a woman, or also having a disability, can have compounding impacts that must be understood.
- **Address race proactively and preventatively.** When racism is addressed, it is often from a reactive framework—for example, once discrimination has occurred or bias and barriers are uncovered. The goal of racially equitable systems change is proactive and preventative in order to get ahead of the curve so that racial inequities and discrimination are not produced in the first place.
- **Provide training to leadership and all staff in racial equity competencies.** Racial equity competency—which is related to but distinct from cultural competency—involves understanding systemic racism and racial equity and includes skills such as using racial equity impact assessment tools, authentically engaging stakeholders in decision-making, and using strategies to remove bias and barriers.
- **Conduct an organization-wide assessment of content using a racial equity lens.** Racial bias or a lack of a racial analysis can show up in all kinds of organizational content—social media posts, promotional and marketing materials, program and service descriptions, media releases, strategic plans, policy positions, etc. It can be helpful to review these documents to find and remove bias and to move from individual blame to a systemic frame. Creating and using a style guide tailored to the particular programs and audiences of the workforce development organization can

be a way to ensure more clarity and consistency in future content development and communications.

- **Replace phrases and words that reinforce dominant frames** on race and replace them with racial justice frames. “Skills gap” is one example of a term that has the tendency to reinforce individual accounting of racial disparities in employment. Instead, use words and phrases that focus on systemic barriers like “employment discrimination” or “policies and practices” or “lack of institutional support.” Involving more people of color in the conceptualization and formulation of organizational content and communications, can help the products be more representative, and ideally speaking in the language of lived experience.
- **Counteract institutional implicit bias by using racial equity decision-making tools.** The use of Racial Equity Tools is becoming a common practice in large systems such as government agencies. These tools provide a series of steps and question prompts that can be used for policy-making, planning, budgeting, hiring, program development, service delivery, etc.
- **Hire more people of color in content development and communications roles.** People who have experienced racism firsthand can best understand its impacts and realities. Conversely, people who are disconnected from the realities of racism or from communities of color are more prone to developing well-intentioned, but often unconsciously biased, content. Omission—who is left out of consideration, which issues and needs are ignored, and which systemic factors are not considered—is often more of a problem than commission.
- **Become clear on the needs and benefits of addressing and advancing racial equity in the specific and overall sectors of healthcare and technology.** For example, in the field of public health, many government agencies have been at the leading edge of embracing a systems-view of healthcare for decades, with explicit considerations of the social determinants of health. This informs health strategies that can significantly improve the quality of people’s lives, and even save lives. Applying a similar systems analysis framework to workforce development in the healthcare sector can also inform strategies for advancing equity and inclusion in the sector itself. Building an inclusive and equitable technology workforce is key to building an inclusive and equitable technology, which in turn plays a critical role in building an open and democratic society dependent on the free and inclusive exchange of information and ideas. In your communications, you should include language that speaks to the vision of a skilled, diverse workforce.

Conclusion

WITH CONSCIOUS ANALYSIS, COMMITMENT AND ACTION, the field of workforce development can play a critical role in expanding collective understanding for the root causes of racially inequitable outcomes in our economy, as well as in broadening support for collective responsibility of racially employment outcomes. Too often, mainstream media depictions of jobs and workforce development in high-earning fields, such as healthcare and

technology, center on individual-level explanations for failure and success. That means too many journalists utilize the terms of individualist framing – such as “skills gap” and “jobs training” – with insufficient attention to systemic perspectives that can build support for not just increased education resources, but transportation infrastructure, child care support, implicit bias training for workforce development trainers and employers, social capital growth, recruitment and hiring practices, retention programs, and so on.

Race Forward urges leaders in the field of workforce development to in fact lead with racial equity explicitly—but not (necessarily) exclusively—in both their internal and external communications and practices. To do otherwise allows past and present racial inequities in our employment and related systems to persist with the unspoken or explicit assumption that individual-level training and “personal responsibility” are the only factors needed for success, and that our current, broad racial inequities are the result of broadscale personal failures. The field of workforce development can and must speak more explicitly about racially equitable solutions and for its commitment to racial equity for the workers it serves.

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Introduction

THE FIELDS OF TECHNOLOGY AND HEALTHCARE are two of the nation’s fastest growing U.S. industries, where workers are typically paid higher wages and are offered more employment benefits than their counterparts in other large industries. The industries’ growth is so fast, in fact, that much of the national media conversation on these jobs centers on the inability of employers to find enough qualified workers to fill their needs. But the corresponding emphasis on the “skills gap” and the need for workforce development training of individual workers is only part of the story that needs to be told. For while the fast-growing technology and healthcare fields may indeed be the waves of the future in terms of high-earning workforce growth, these industries are more likely to exacerbate the racial disparities of our past and present if more is not done to build collective responsibility and commitment for equitable economic outcomes. To ensure a racially equitable future, we need greater awareness of the language we use to discuss jobs, workers, and the stories we tell.

There are many institutions and sectors that can play a positive role in growing technology, healthcare, and other industries more equitably—including business, investors, and educators; as well as government, philanthropy, and labor organizations. As part of Race Forward’s multi-year W.K Kellogg Foundation-funded racial equity project [www.raceforward.org/workforceequity] in the field of workforce development, *Beyond Training and the “Skills Gap”*: *Research and Recommendations for Racially Equitable Communications in Workforce Development* was designed to provide a broad picture to agency leaders, communications staff, and others in the workforce development field of how rarely the workers they serve—particularly workers of color—are framed in systemic ways in mainstream media. That is to ask, to what extent are jobs in these industries framed in ways that broaden the scope of responsibility for the racially inequitable outcomes we see? In what ways can we expand the collective commitment to an equitable future?

The research findings included in this report should be of interest and use to anyone seeking to advocate for a fair and racially equitable economy. This includes those who work in media, government, business, and labor advocacy or education who appreciate the need to challenge the “meritocratic” assumptions and dismissiveness—whether conscious or unconscious—that are too often the default in our nation for matters of the economy. Accordingly, as a racial justice advocacy organization, we provide recommendations for communicating about racial equity in these and other fields, and for language and stories that expand the scope of responsibility for economic outcomes in our society.

Race Forward seeks to normalize explicit discussions about systemic racism and the corresponding institutional and structural solutions. While the challenges experienced by low-income workers, women in the workplace, and people of color are often overlapping, they aren't the same. And some workers or prospective workers—for example, low-income women of color—may simultaneously experience the compounding challenges of all three. When social justice advocates and other economic stakeholders aren't explicit about race and systemic racism, our default, sometimes unspoken understanding of the underrepresentation of Black and Brown workers in these industries—in hiring, retention, promotions, and leadership—is that these negative outcomes are the workers' own individual fault.

In 2016 and 2017, our researchers analyzed over 200 items from mainstream media coverage of jobs in the health and technology sectors, as well as coverage of many workforce development agencies that service them. The purpose of this research was to identify how and to what extent the news coverage reinforces or challenges the dominant frames (e.g., personal responsibility, individualism, and unquestioned meritocracy) that situate a “skills gap” as the central or sole challenge and the “training” of individual workers as the central or sole solution.

From the perspective of racial justice advocacy, individualist framing is problematic, among other reasons, because it largely if not entirely absolves institutions and systems from their share of responsibility for racial and ethnic employment outcomes. Individualist framing taps into a mythology of the self-made person and the “American dream” that if a person works hard enough, they will succeed in life socioeconomically. It can also convey the often unspoken but arguably more important corollaries that a) if one has not succeeded, it is due to individual mistakes and/or lack of effort; b) if one has succeeded, it was largely or entirely due to initiative and hard-work; and access to more resources, opportunities, fair treatment, and other privileges play little to no role in this inequality.

We also tracked the extent to which systemic framing was incorporated into the mainstream media coverage. For example, we tracked whether or not the coverage of jobs and workforce development agencies in the technology and healthcare industries included any mention or deeper discussion about the underlying causes of the disparate outcomes that exist in these fields. For example, systemic framing can help paint a portrait of a more collective responsibility for outcomes. This perspective incorporates the key roles that are, or that could be, played, for example, by employers, educational institutions, government agencies, and related collaborations and partnerships.

Distinguishing Systemic Framing from Individualist Framing

Individualist framing of jobs in the growing fields of technology and healthcare, as well as in other spheres of our economy, centers the responsibility of employment outcomes—from hiring, to retention, to career progress, to earnings, etc.—almost entirely on individual

initiative and work ethic. This is also referred to as “dominant” framing in this report because the language and explicit or implicit stories of this frame are the most commonly expressed and shared in our inequitable society.

Dominant individualist framing of jobs in the fields of healthcare and tech includes such terms and phrases as “unskilled,” “training,” and “skills gap,” among other descriptions of individual deficiencies when it tell stories of individuals. If the employer is explicitly incorporated into the story, it is typically to lament the impact of the skills gap and lack of available workers on the company’s growth prospects. If the employer is included as part of the solution to employment challenges, it does not extend beyond providing charity to support more job training or otherwise improving the soft-skill deficiencies of workers.

While many workforce development agency professionals argue that the hard- and soft-skill deficiencies of their clients are indeed real, even if that is the case, Race Forward argues that racially equitable outcomes will not come through a singular focus on prospective employees alone.

With half a million technology jobs currently open and nearly two million similar new jobs expected to be created in the next decade, a new JPMorgan Chase & Co. report released today reveals that the rapidly growing and quickly evolving tech training field faces unique obstacles for developing the skilled and diverse workforce required to meet a growing need in our economy.

“New JPMorgan Chase Report Reveals Uncertainty Over How Well Tech Training Programs Are Meeting Employers’ Needs,” Business Wire. (8 March 2016.)

Systemic framing, by contrast, uses language and stories that substantively cover the lack of resources underlying the skills gap and the disparities we see in employment outcomes. These resources include education, transportation, social network access, and others that are often place-based. Ideally, systemic framing addresses the role of employer discrimination and inequitable practices, whether carried out intentionally or not.

At its best, systemic framing discusses the root causes and compounding effects of disparities across systems, and suggests solutions in the broadest sense of state and societal responsibility and shared prosperity. Systemic frames expose implicit biases and challenge notions that racism, sexism, classism no longer erect meaningful and deeply troubling barriers to success. Systemic frames lift up human dignity and a historically informed sense of fairness.

If our goal is to have a shared responsibility and commitment to equitable employment outcomes, systemic framing is essential.

Systemic Framing—Race Explicit or Not?

Race Forward challenges systemic racism, and consistently advocates for *explicit* (though not necessarily *exclusive*) discussions of racial equity, inclusion and justice, as the reader will later note in the recommendations section that concludes this report. But in the interest of conceptual clarity, it is important to note that a label of “systemic” framing in this study, does not necessarily mean an article included explicit discussions of workers of color, race, or racism.¹

Systemic framing sometimes emphasizes different types of independent or overlapping themes, including race, class/income, gender, and additional identities and orientations. Each of these systemic frames featured language or content that moved beyond the individual worker or workers’ responsibility for employment outcomes. Those might be the systemic barriers and challenges faced by workers struggling with poverty, or the gender discrimination faced by women, or the employment barriers faced by the formerly incarcerated or otherwise “disadvantaged” workers.

For the purposes of broadly contrasting the individualist (dominant) frames from the systemic (“alternative”) frames, this study considered any article touching on these themes to be “systemic,” regardless of whether or not race or racism was explicitly mentioned. However, our analysis *does* make these distinctions *within* the category of systemic framing in order to explore the extent to which the mainstream media and workforce development agencies seem to be more comfortable discussing the systemic barriers and solutions around factors *other than* race.

And to be clear, we argue that to advance a vision of racial justice, systemic framing must incorporate an explicitly racial lens. While important discussions can and should be had about many social, economic, and other factors, race and racism are too often left out of common discourse. We believe that workforce development leaders and communications teams can and should do more to use an explicit racial equity lens far more often to counteract the mainstream framing of the workers they serve.

¹Previous Race Forward research documented in the 2014 report *Moving the Race Conversation Forward – Part I: How the Media Covers Racism, and Other Barriers to Productive Racial Discourse* defined “systemically aware” media content as that which “mentions or highlights policies and/or practices that lead to racial disparities; describes the root causes of disparities including the history and compounding effects of institutions; and/or describes or challenges the aforementioned.” In order to draw a greater contrast between individualist framing and other frames, “systemically” framed content is not as narrowly defined in this study. Race Forward’s goals remain the same today, as we continue to advocate for explicit, though not exclusive, racial framing and discussion of systems and systemic racism and solutions in our society.

Examples of Different Types of Systemic Framing: Statements and concepts that we consider key to the particular type of systemic framing identified.

SYSTEMIC FRAMING BASED ON CLASS AND INCOME

2017 may be our region's most ambitious year yet *in our collective work to improve our community and people's lives. . . .*

The Child Poverty Collaborative has begun implementation of a four-year strategy action plan to help 5,000 families and 10,000 children lift from poverty toward self-sufficiency in the next five years. Dozens of agencies will work together on a coordinated one-to-one family coaching initiative, *an employer human resources roundtable will identify ways employers can support their employees who struggle to achieve self-sufficiency; a public policy collaborative will work to change policies that hold individuals and families back*, and United Way will increase its focus on opportunities for families in poverty.

Robert C. Reifsnnyder (president of United Way of Greater Cincinnati), "We all must work together to produce results, improve lives," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Ohio), 19 April 2017

SYSTEMIC FRAMING BASED ON GENDER

Icy Williams, president of Atmos 360, a manufacturing firm with 45 employees in Greenhills, said *employers should be more deliberate about finding female workers. . . .*

Williams, a former Procter & Gamble manager, said *the only way to get more women in the field is to talk about issues that make people uncomfortable*. "We need to find ways in the business world, predominantly the white male-dominated business world, on how do we get a discussion going on around the real value that diversity brings and the impact that it is still having on us all," Williams said.

Increasingly, companies are developing programs to encourage women and girls to enter STEM-related fields.

Fatima Hussein, "Labor shortage solution: adding women," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Ohio), 7 August 2016

SYSTEMIC FRAMING BASED ON RACE AND INCOME

Sadiqa Reynolds, president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League, said those [family median income] disparities reflect differences in home ownership rates and values in certain parts of the community. She said that *to deal with racial income gaps, the city must do a better job tackling segregated housing patterns that have reinforced those income and wealth divides.*

"We need penalties and incentives for developers to create affordable housing throughout the city, as a portion of any project, that we can de-concentrate poverty," Reynolds said.

Phillip M. Bailey, "Growth in Louisville due to diversity," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), 20 May 2017

SYSTEMIC FRAMING BASED ON RACE AND GENDER

After a year *dissecting benefits and pitfalls of existing programs, gathering feedback from employers and analyzing the experiences of black men,* North@Work launched this month. It mimics best practices and counters weak points with employer-specific training and fast-tracked certification programs.

The formula also includes aptitude testing and ongoing coaching on both sides, for employers looking to support diversity as they increase their headcounts as well as workers who have, in some cases, been out of the mainstream workforce for years.

"Often, the CEO might be saying, 'Yes, we should do this,' but if the CEO isn't prepared to be an inclusive supervisor or if the leadership developers see this partnership more as charity than helping the workforce, then it's a recipe for a lot of turnover," [Northside Funders Group Executive Director Tawanna] Black said.

Karlee Weinmann, "On North Side, a big plan to build up workforce," *Finance & Commerce* (Minneapolis, MN), 20 February 2016

"Because of investors' lack of diversity, they do not necessarily understand the value of companies that make products for customers who are not like them, said Tristan Walker, founder and chief executive of Walker & Company, which makes health and beauty products for minorities, including the Bevel razor. On his first pitch, the investor told him she didn't think shaving irritation was a big enough societal issue.

"All she had to do before she said that was get on the phone with 10 black men or women and eight or nine would have said, 'This is an issue I've had to deal with my entire life,'" Mr. Walker said.

*Some investors are working to change this. Venture firms like Kapor Capital were formed specifically to finance start-ups with a diversity mission and to prioritize underrepresented founders. Others fill *their partner ranks with people who are not white men.**

"Deal flow comes in through people's network, and if you're a young woman or a person of color, a lot of times you just might not know who that senior person is at that top-tier firm," said Joanne Yuan, an associate partner at Cowboy Ventures, whose investment team of four has three women who are minorities. *"Our portfolio looks more diverse because we know a lot of people who aren't white males."*

Claire Cain Miller, "The Venture Capital Ceiling," *The New York Times*, 28 February 2016

A Brief Note on Methodology

OUR MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS focused not on broad coverage of the tech and healthcare industries, but more narrowly on mainstream media coverage of 1) tech and healthcare jobs in these two sectors, and 2) a sample of workforce development agencies that provide training and/or other services to prospective workers entering these fields. Yielding more than 200 mainstream media articles in a nearly two-year period, we used both general search terms and specific workforce development agency names from 17 organizations or agencies that Race Forward had been in contact with in mid- to late 2017 about fostering more racial equity in their work.

Search terms used to create the dataset of articles from Nexis.com (1 Jan 2016 – 15 Oct 2017):

- “workforce development AND tech and diversity”
- “workforce development AND health and diversity”
- “[‘workforce development organization/agency name’]” and jobs and [state, if applicable] AND health OR tech
 - Our searches included 17 workforce development organizations/agencies across nine states (California, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin) [Northside Funders Group Executive Director Tawanna] Black said.

As a result, the levels of systemic framing reported in this study are more likely to be higher than just general coverage of the workforce in other industries beyond tech and healthcare, or of workforce development agencies more broadly speaking (i.e., agencies that were not already inclined to pursue some racial equity training and/or coaching.)

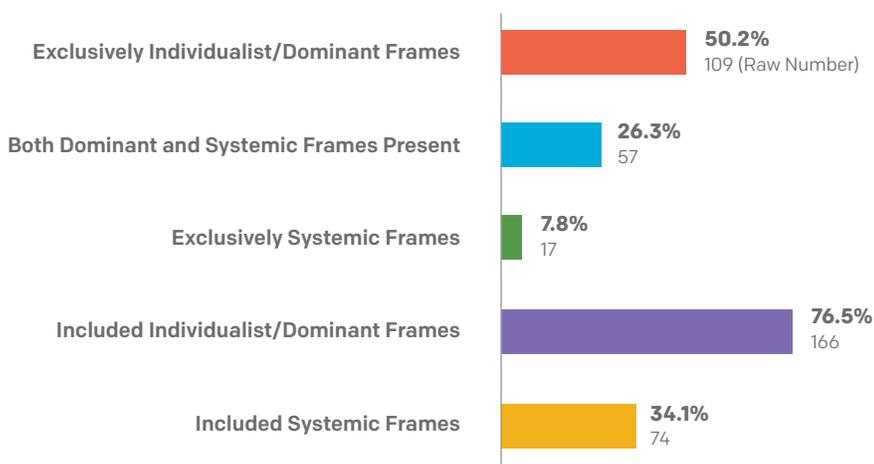
Race Forward researchers coded articles for individualist and/or systemic framing, and for the type of workers discussed: people of color, gendered (typically women workers), low-income, formerly incarcerated, etc. When a worker type was discernible, more often than not, the workers were low-income or described in otherwise coded language.

Findings from Mainstream Media Analysis

OUR STUDY FOUND THAT MAINSTREAM MEDIA COVERAGE of jobs in the healthcare and technology fields—and of the workforce development agencies that service them—is dominated by “individualist” and “personal responsibility” frames that center the “skills gap” and “training” as the principle challenge and solution for jobs in these sectors. About three out of four articles included this frame, which implicitly or explicitly lays blame at the foot of underrepresented workers for that underrepresentation. A reliance on increased training opportunities alone is unlikely to lead to racially equitable outcomes in these fields.

It is troubling that the dominant “personal responsibility” frames are too often unchallenged in mainstream coverage, with half (50.2%) of the articles studied containing individualist or other dominant framing alone. The opposite is rarely true for the contrasting systemic frames, with less than 10 percent of articles exclusively containing substantively systemic framing. That is, more than half of the media coverage only included these dominant frames, while only 7.8% of the coverage exclusively included systemic frames without any discussion of the “skills gap” and “training.” About one in four articles (26.3%) contained both individualist and systemic framing.

Figure 1. Distribution of Individualist vs. Systemic Media Frames on Tech or Healthcare Jobs and Workforce Development, 2016-17 (n = 217 articles)

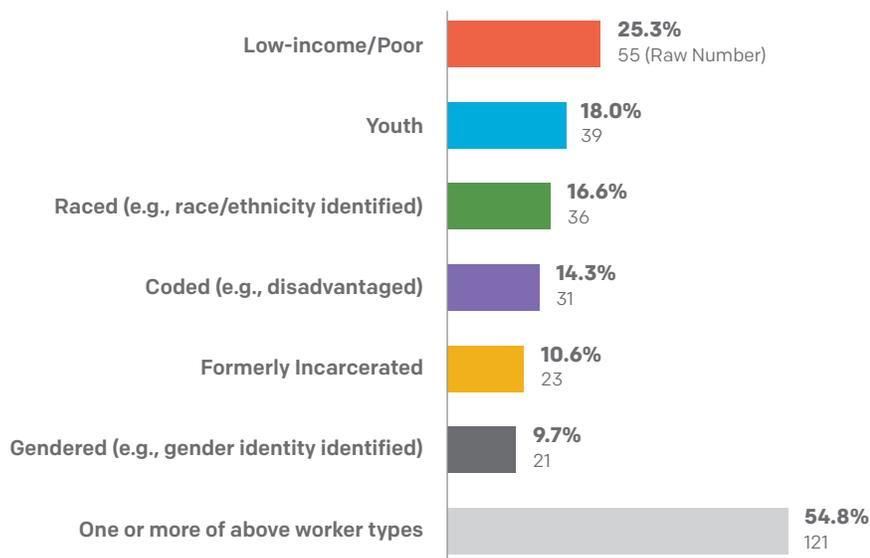


Note: The percentages do not sum to 100%, as articles lacking a clear or strong individualist or systemic frame are excluded from the figure.

In 54.8% of the mainstream articles studied, a discernible type of workers was explicitly mentioned: low-income workers, gendered workers (usually women), workers of color, the formerly incarcerated, youth, or coded workers (e.g., “disadvantaged workers”). For most worker types, at least eight or even nine out of 10 articles contained dominant individualist framing of some kind. The percentage was slightly less for low-income workers, whose experience was covered through dominant framing three-quarters of the time in the 55 articles studied. Combined with the fact that articles featuring low-income workers used exclusively systemic framing more frequently than articles about all the other types of workers, this suggests that low-income workers receive a lighter, more understanding touch by mainstream journalists and editors than do workers of color, coded workers, the formerly incarcerated, gendered workers, etc.

Low-income workers also garnered more attention than other types of workers. Specifically, they were incorporated into a higher percentage of articles than any other group of identifiable workers—25.3% of the 217 articles studied. Youth workers (or prospective workers) were the next most frequently covered worker type at 18.0%, followed by raced workers (i.e., workers whose race or ethnicity was identified) (16.6%), “disadvantaged” or other coded workers (14.3%), the formerly incarcerated (10.6%), and gendered workers (9.7%). In all, just over half of all articles (54.8%) incorporated one or more of these identifiable types of workers. And articles that featured every identifiable worker type except low-income workers incorporated a dominant individualist frame the vast majority of the time: more than 90% for gendered, coded, and youth workers; and more than 80% for workers of color and the formerly incarcerated.

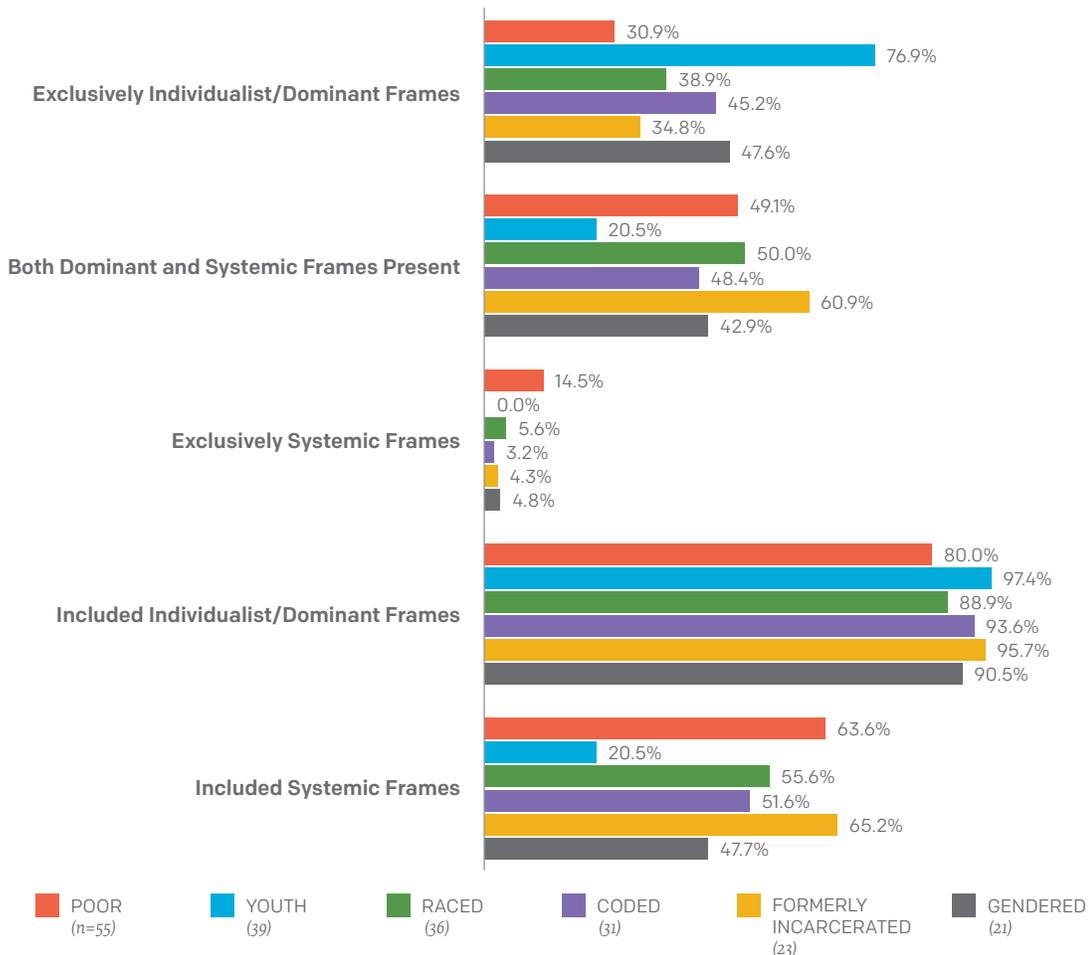
Figure 2: Representation of Worker Demographics in Articles on Tech or Healthcare Jobs and Workforce Development (*n* = 217 articles)



Note: Representation was not mutually exclusive. The percentages do not sum to 100% because a single article could feature one or more worker demographic/type. And 44.2% of the coverage (96 of 217 articles) did not feature any type of identifiable worker (e.g., the content focused on “jobs” or employment trends)

Articles that incorporated identifiable workers—as opposed to generic workers or no workers at all—were more likely to incorporate substantively systemic framing. More than six in 10 articles on low-income workers had some substantively systemic content. Though the formerly incarcerated were rarely covered by the media (in only about one in 10 articles), they received substantively systemic content almost two-thirds of the time. That was a bit more frequently than the corresponding figures for articles featuring workers of color (55.6% of 36 articles) and coded workers (51.1% of 31 articles). Coverage of gendered workers included substantively systemic content only 47.6% of the time (in only 21 articles), and youth workers were even less frequently covered systemically (20.5% of 39 articles). Coverage that identified three or more types of workers was no more likely to incorporate substantively systemic framing than coverage that mentioned only one type of worker. But for coverage that exclusively featured systemic framing, it was almost always focused on a single category of worker: of the 11 such cases, two focused on raced workers, eight focused on a single non-raced worker type (i.e., the workers’ race/ethnicity were not identified), and one featured a combination of non-raced workers.

Figure 3: Distribution of Media Frames on Tech or Healthcare Jobs and Workforce Development, by Worker Demographic, 2016-17 (n = 217 articles)



Note: The percentages do not sum to 100%, as articles lacking a clear or strong individualist or systemic frame are excluded from the figure.

The mainstream media excerpts below and on subsequent pages reflect examples of the labeled framing variables coded by Race Forward in this study. We have italicized statements and concepts that reflect the characteristics of the respective variables.

DOMINANT NARRATIVE

With half a million technology jobs currently open and nearly two million similar new jobs expected to be created in the next decade, a new JPMorgan Chase & Co. *report released today reveals that the rapidly growing and quickly evolving tech training field faces unique obstacles for developing the skilled and diverse workforce required to meet a growing need in our economy.*

“JPMorgan Chase Report Reveals Uncertainty Over How Well Tech Training Programs Are Meeting Employers’ Needs,” Business Wire, 8 March 2016.

“Over the last several years that The Iron Yard has operated in Atlanta, we have had the privilege to work with many of the city’s world-class innovators and employers, and meet ambitious, talented individuals who want to pursue careers in technology,” said Peter Barth, CEO of The Iron Yard. “It comes as no surprise to us that a city with such a range of talent would be named a White House TechHire city. We are honored to work alongside the White House and our Atlanta *partners to empower individuals with in-demand skills and strengthen the community’s workforce.*”

“City of Atlanta Receives Official White House TechHire Designation,” State News Service, 9 March 2016

TRAINING

But the economic recovery has *at least partly replenished training budgets, and a much-lamented “skills gap” has employers struggling to hire skilled workers and willing to try new strategies, or revert to time-tested ones, to find them. Apprenticeships are blossoming again* in manufacturing and construction and spreading to less traditional sectors grappling with labor shortages as baby boomers retire, including information technology, health care, even white-collar bastions such as insurance.

Paul Davidson, “College without the debt,” *Asbury Park Press* (New Jersey), 3 April 2016

Many health-field students find work with Inspira Health Network, Cumberland’s largest employer in the healthcare industry. According to

data compiled by the Cumberland County Department of Planning, Inspira employs 2,894 workers as of July, 2016.

"That's been our largest population, it's always got the largest interest, it's always got the most enrolled, and it makes sense [because] it's our No. 1 employer here in Cumberland County, so there's a direct correlation to that," [Superintendent Dina] Elliott said. *"They are 100 percent employable when they leave our doors."*

"Getting jobs prove to be ultimate test; Tech school graduates hone skills in hopes of securing a career or degree," *The Daily Journal* (Vineland, NJ), 22 June 2017

JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon says "it's a moral and economic crisis" that *too many young people graduate high school without appropriate work skills and it should be a national priority to give them those skills through meaningful summer work.*

The investments announced Monday include \$500,000 to City Connect Detroit; \$300,000 each to the Chicago Public School Foundation and United Way Bay Area in San Francisco; and \$100,00 to the Boston Private Industry Council.

CityConnectDetroit, "JP Morgan Chase pumps \$17M into summer job programs," Associated Press. 22 May 2017

"Though some programs have a higher likelihood of instant job-placement after graduation, programs in both pathways provide students with a solid education," officials said.

And hopefully that means attracting more businesses to Cumberland County.

"If we can produce and send out highly trained individuals . . . and they end up relocating because of their skill set, those employers are going to find out that we're producing some tremendous assets for their industry," Freeholder Director Joseph Derella said. "Maybe they'll even say 'Hey, we need to relocate our business there to see what we can do because they are producing such high quality individuals.' We are starting to see the ripple effect."

"Getting jobs prove to be ultimate test; Tech school graduates hone skills in hopes of securing a career or degree," *The Daily Journal* (Vineland, NJ), 22 June 2017

Alternative and Systemic Frames

SYSTEMIC FACTORS AND/OR SOLUTIONS

[Austin]'s tech ecosystem is so homogeneous because *"business leaders failed to make diversity and inclusion a passionate, sincere and genuine priority for their businesses,"* said Preston James II, an African American who is CEO and co-founder of DivInc, a nonprofit accelerator that focuses on people-of-color and women tech-startup founders. *"Businesses must establish cultures that are authentically inclusive." ...*

Mike Cronin, "Austin's lack of tech diversity not unique, but it's likely costing companies money and hampering the city's economic growth," *Austin Business Journal* (Texas), 14 Sept 2017

The usual explanation offered by business and education groups is that too few Americans have the right skills for the openings. The way to close this "skills gap," they say, is to improve job training and more closely align higher education to employment.

But this solution, promoted by politicians as the way to help workers left behind by globalization and automation—both major challenges for the country in the 21st century—is too simplistic.

Throwing more public dollars at education and training won't be enough to connect willing workers to open jobs. In many places, employers are also setting wages too low, defining qualifications too narrowly, or not recruiting widely enough. Many people who are eager to work can't because they lack transportation, or don't have anybody to watch their children during the workday.

Besides, a lot of the open jobs that employers are struggling to fill right now don't require any education or training beyond high school.

"I think [the] 'skills gap' has run its course. It's overhyped and overrated," said Janice Urbanik of Partners for a Competitive Workforce, the umbrella organization for workforce efforts in the Cincinnati area. *"I don't think it's the only factor, and to some extent it's not even the primary factor."*

Sophie Quinton, "Why the 'skills gap' doesn't explain slow hiring," *Herald and News* (Klamath Falls, OR), 27 November 2016

WORKERS OF COLOR AND RACISM

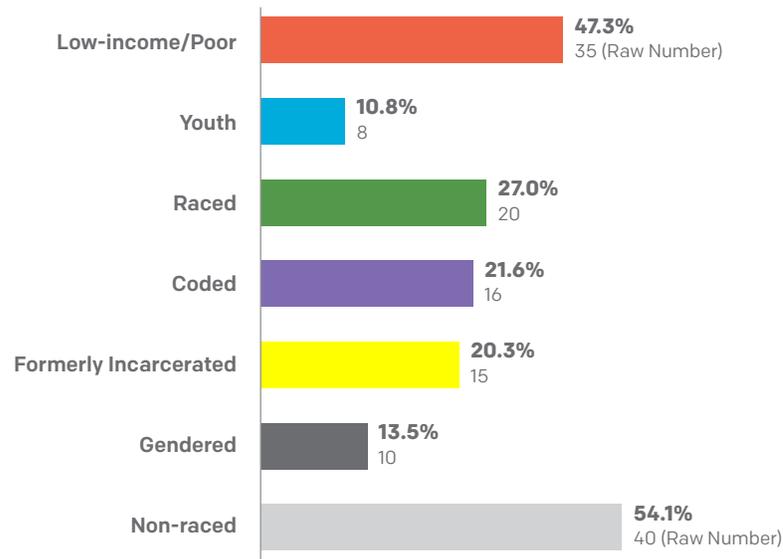
Only when an African-American job candidate expressed reservations about living in the relatively homogeneous Texas capital did one Austin tech-company CEO realize the problem. "We'd extended him the offer," said the CEO, who is white. "He told me he liked our company more than the one in Chicago that also made him an offer. But he wondered how many people like him he would find in Austin. He said that wouldn't be a problem in Chicago."

The candidate ultimately chose the Austin company. But the conversation, which took place within the past six months, prompted the CEO to confront a reality facing the city's tech sector—and the Texas capital as a whole. "I can't magically make Austin more diverse," the CEO said. "But I can do something about it in my company."

Like many other Austin tech-company executives, that CEO declined to be identified for this story. Several others—like that CEO—said their companies weren't where they wanted to be in terms of a racially and ethnically diverse staff. Others simply declined to speak to Austin Business Journal on the subject without explanation.

Mike Cronin, "Austin's lack of tech diversity not unique, but it's likely costing companies money and hampering the city's economic growth," *Austin Business Journal* (Texas), 14 Sept 2017

Figure 4: Share of the Systemic Articles That Included Respective Populations (n = 74 articles)



WOMEN AND OTHER GENDERED WORKERS

Job training programs typically focus on teaching occupational skills everything from data entry to truck driving, and customer service to carpentry, among many others. But recent IWPR research reveals that participants female and male *are more likely to finish their training and land a job thereafter if they can access needed supports such as transportation and child care.*

"IWPR report profiles effective, replicable strategies that meet trainees' needs for supportive services," State News Service, 16 May 2017

NON-RACED (SYSTEMIC)

In Detroit, 108,000, or 61 percent of employed Detroit residents, travel outside the city for their jobs, according to the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce study. Roughly 46 percent of those travel more than 10 miles from home, the study said. *Unreliable transportation options for the city's residents precludes many from finding those jobs in the suburbs.*

Dustin Walsh, "Autonomous cars could drive Detroit job growth," *Crain's Detroit Business*, 26 September 2016

BOTH DOMINANT AND ALTERNATIVE FRAMING

A former social worker, [and former board member, Jann] Seidenfaden saw *how people were directed from one group and agency to another to find help. Brighton Center's community needs assessment system and bundling of service has grown into a unique operation, she said. "They really try to define the needs of the community and then find ways to meet their needs,"* Seidenfaden said. *"But at their core is self-sufficiency."*

Chris Mayhew, "Brighton Center at 50: Keeping the safety net strong," *The Cincinnati Inquirer* (Ohio), 19 January 2017

"Companies are moving to Portland and looking for talent," [local entrepreneur Juan Barraza] said. "We have the numbers, *but access to training for high schoolers and young college students is crucial. We want to replicate San Francisco successes—being a hub, attracting talent. The part we want to make our own is to include everyone in our community—African-American, Latino, women, veterans - and build that bridge to enable them to take advantage of the opportunity.*"

"We've begun building bridges to underrepresented communities via the Startup PDX Challenge, Startup Weekend Latino and the Inclusive Startup Fund," he said. "[San Francisco-based non-profit] CODE2040 could go

deeper into the pipeline to support Portland's efforts to create a more inclusive startup ecosystem."

One organization can't do everything, he noted, so partnerships across the existing community as well as new players and tools are needed. This is one more avenue.

"We need different champions all working together: our local diversity champions, the Tech Diversity Pledge companies, the PDC, and, I hope, CODE 2040," he said. "Sometimes it's just knowing how to get the training, how to get your foot in the door. And once you see people like yourself being successful, you believe you can do it, too. "

Anne Mangan, "Tech Diversity: Making a Pitch to CODE2040," *Portland Business Journal* (Oregon), 29 June 2016.

Communications Recommendations for the Field of Workforce Development

CURRENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS related to workforce development in both the technology and healthcare sectors insufficiently address the existence, realities, and impacts of systemic racism. Without a more complete analysis of race, these sectors not only reflect, but replicate patterns of racial inequity and exclusion. Because both sectors play such pivotal roles in our society and daily lives, the accessibility, composition, and competencies of their respective workforces matter. These sectors are at a crossroads: they can ignore or insufficiently address the realities of systemic racism and thereby reinforce inequities; or they can consciously choose to explicitly address race and become the drivers of equitable and inclusive change. The following recommendations provide a pathway for workforce development strategies in these sectors to move from being passively part of the problem to actively part of the solution—racially equitable and inclusive workforces prepared to meet the critical needs and challenges of our ever-changing and complex society.

- **Address race early and often.** Workforce development organizations need to operate with a clear understanding of both systemic racism (a key problem) and racial equity (a key solution) in their respective sectors and specific organizations. Most fundamentally, racial inequities reside at a systems level—embedded in our history, institutions, policies, and culture—which often shape conditions and experiences at the individual-level (e.g., access to wealth, opportunities, education services, and employment). The most significant barriers and biases people face are individual-level symptoms of systems-level inequities. Thus, change strategies must be designed to be substantive and long-lasting rather than superficial and short-lived, but focus on systems change, based on a systems analysis. And change strategies designed to eliminate institution racism must explicitly focus on racially equitable systems change. Addressing race early and often means making it part of the discussion at the beginning and throughout the process of functions such as program development and review, strategic planning, communications strategy development, grant-writing, etc. A race-centered conversation needs to become normalized and habitual. Based on our research findings, the kind of specific attention to race that is needed involves the following:

- **Address race explicitly and realistically.** The realities of racial discrimination and inequities and their real-life impacts on different racial communities need to be acknowledged rather than ignored or denied. This awareness and acknowledgement are a necessary first step in order to pursue solutions to the pervasive and persistent patterns of racism.
- **Address race systemically and holistically.** Racism occurs at many levels—structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual—which are interrelated. A holistic framework informs the formulation of strategies that address and transform *systems*, rather than *symptoms*.
- **Address race inclusively and intersectionally:** Race is often, but not the only, salient dynamic contributing to social inequities. Sometimes it may be gender, immigrant status, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity that may also need to be addressed. You can address racism explicitly, not exclusively, because other factors also matter. It’s also important to address race intersectionally because the combination of being a person of color and also being a woman, or also being disabled, can have compounding impacts that must be understood and addressed.
- **Address race proactively and preventatively.** When racism is addressed, it is often from a reactive framework—for example, once discrimination has occurred or bias and barriers are uncovered. The goal of racially equitable systems change is proactive and preventative in order to get ahead of the curve so that racial inequities and discrimination are not produced in the first place. Remedies that address racism after it has caused harm and damage are costly, lacking, or limited. Strategies to address racism on the front-end, rather than the back-end, are a much better investment.
- **Provide training to leadership and all staff in racial equity competencies.** Racial equity competency—which is related to but distinct from cultural competency—involves understanding systemic racism and racial equity and includes skills such as using racial equity impact assessment tools, authentically engaging stakeholders in decision-making, using strategies to remove bias and barriers, developing and implementing racial equity goals and plans, using racial equity metrics to inform planning and decision-making, and developing strategies to specifically eliminate patterns and practices that perpetuate institutional racism and other types of systemic inequities.
- **Conduct an organization-wide assessment of content using a racial equity lens.** Racial bias or a lack of a racial analysis can show up in all kinds of organizational content—social media posts, promotional and marketing materials, program and service descriptions, media releases, strategic plans, policy positions, etc. It can be helpful to review these documents to find and remove bias and to move from

individual blame to a systemic frame. Creating and using a style guide tailored to the particular programs and audiences of the workforce development organization can be a way to ensure more clarity and consistency in future content development and communications. This guide should also provide content developers with recommendations regarding language to avoid and preferred alternative language.

- **Check if your sentences, phrases, or words reinforce dominant frames on race and replace them with racial justice frames.** “Skills gap” is one example of a term that has the tendency to reinforce individual accounting of racial disparities in employment. Instead, use words and phrases that focus on systemic barriers like “employment discrimination” or “policies and practices” or “lack of institutional support.”

- **Counteract institutional implicit bias by using racial equity decision-making tools.** The use of Racial Equity Tools is becoming a common practice in large systems such as government agencies. These tools provide a series of steps and question prompts that can be used for policy-making, planning, budgeting, hiring, program development, service delivery, etc. Important to the use of the tools is not only what is being decided, but also who is making the decisions. The tools are designed to address root causes, racial impacts, and systems change while engaging various stakeholders—especially those most directly and adversely affected by current conditions.

- **Hire more people of color in content development and communications roles.** People who have experienced racism firsthand can best understand its impacts and realities. Conversely, people who are disconnected from the realities of racism or from communities of color are more prone to developing well-intentioned, but often unconsciously biased, content. Omission—who is left out of consideration, which issues and needs are ignored, and which systemic factors are not considered—is often more of a problem than commission. By involving more people of color in the conceptualization and formulation of organizational content and communications, the products will be more representative of and better tailored to different audiences, and less likely to perpetuate bias and exclusion.
 - **Try to speak in the language of lived experience.** Talking about workforce equity can too easily be bogged down in jargon. In your communications, try to talk about the human impact of a workforce inequity. For example, “removing systemic barriers to full employment so that children of all races and backgrounds can learn, grow, and achieve their dream careers.”

 - **Try to avoid using passive voice when you describe racial inequities.** Change the passive construction to active construction of your communications to ensure that you name systemic drivers of those inequities. For example: “People of color experience more unemployment than White people” is a

passive construction; “Workplace discrimination drives unemployment in communities of color” is active construction.

- **Become clear on the needs and benefits of addressing and advancing racial equity in the specific and overall sectors of healthcare and technology.** For example, in the field of public health, many government agencies have been at the leading edge of embracing a systems-view of healthcare for decades, with explicit considerations of the social determinants of health. The Centers for Disease Control (<https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm>) articulates that the “conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes” such as housing stability, education quality, neighborhood safety, and other social and environmental factors. This informs health strategies that can significantly improve the quality of people’s lives, and even save lives. Applying a similar systems analysis framework to workforce development in the healthcare sector can also inform strategies for advancing equity and inclusion in the sector itself. Understanding the social determinants that effect job access, retention, and advancement can help inform better workforce development strategies. And if these strategies can result in more low-income and people of color having access to the healthcare workforce, their expertise and insight can help inform and improve services to the various communities that healthcare industries serve.

In the technology field, there is growing awareness of just how vital access to technology can be in people’s everyday lives and how differential access—such as the “digital divide”—can pose significant barriers to education, employment, commerce, healthcare, etc. It’s important to note that there’s a connection between how some communities of color face limited access to technology services and limited access to technology jobs. By having more people of color in the technology workforce, the perspectives they bring could help the technology industry be better-positioned and informed to develop more ways to serve communities of color. Systemically and holistically examining the benefits of closing the employment and digital divides in the technology sector would be a win-win proposition for technology industries and communities of color. Building an inclusive and equitable technology workforce is key to building an inclusive and equitable technology, which in turn plays a critical role in building an open and democratic society dependent on the free and inclusive exchange of information and ideas.

- **Describe why workforce equity is an imperative for all of us.** In your communications, include language that speaks to the vision of a skilled, diverse workforce. For example, striving to create healthier, more resilient towns, cities, and counties and greater economic stability when our fates are more intertwined than ever.



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