



Workforce Alliance Racial Equity and Accountability

Integrated Plan

Workforce Alliance in conjunction with its board of directors has made commitments and has identified a set of action steps aimed at Racial Equity and Accountability. This document takes the commitments included in the public statement entitled “Workforce Alliance Affirms Commitment to Racial Equity” dated June 19, 2020 as its starting point. The Integrated Plan provides high level strategies to achieve the commitments laid out in the statement and, where appropriate, expands the scope of Workforce Alliance’s commitments.

Because the board and staff of Workforce Alliance believe that successful work to promote racial equity must be informed by, and if at all possible, led by individuals with lived experience, we are committed to insuring there is appropriate racial representation at all levels of development and implementation.

A. Setting the foundation for transformation and on-going growth: Knowledge Building

The first element of this Integrated Plan for Racial Equity and Accountability is to ensure that the board, staff and partners of Workforce Alliance have an understanding of the history of inequity in our society AND the tools to confront and address inequity on the personal, group and organizational level. While Knowledge Building was not among the original commitments in the June 19th Statement, the board and staff of WA recognizes that it is an essential first step to successful implementation of the entire plan.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE BUILDING PROCESS WILL:

- a. Educate us on the history of racial inequity
- b. Dig into impacts of history on our systems and ourselves
- c. Understand the difference between equity and equality
- d. Determine effective ways to disseminate knowledge (informing/educating our constituents)
- e. Determine tangible actions to get to equity (example: review of policies and identifying what are actions we can take to ensure we are not furthering the issue but promoting change and equality)
- f. Continue with ongoing learning and education/knowledge building

II. THREE PHASES OF KNOWLEDGE BUILDING:

	Short Term	Mid Term	Long Term
Knowledge Building	<u>REAIT & WFA Exec Committee</u> <u>WFA Board</u> Audience: ~28 people	<u>WFA Managers/ Leadership</u> <u>WFA Staff Members</u> Audience: ~32	<u>Job Center Provider Staff</u> <u>Partnerships</u> (broader network, inclusive of employers) Audience: ~140+
Dissemination Plan	Start by end of 2020	Start by April 2021	Start by end of 2021
First Step	Sessions to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart – how are you feeling? - FEEL • Head – brainstorming phase - KNOW • Hand – the action plan - DO 		
Continued Learning Plan	TBD	TBD	TBD

B. Establishing a Diversity - Equity – Inclusion (DEI) structure to ensure implementation and continual improvement to achieve lasting racial equity at Workforce Alliance

In conjunction with the Knowledge Building activities defined above, a formal DEI structure will be established to ensure that all aspects of implementing the specific commitments below will take place in an organizational culture that is both diverse and equitable.

- I. Conduct feedback session(s) with Black and Brown staff members with an external, experienced facilitator. The facilitator should be a Black or Brown individual. In addition to discussing problems and obstacles that members of this group have encountered, they should be encouraged to provide what they see as solutions to these problems.
- II. Form a DEI committee, called The Internal Equity Group. The committee should include staff at all levels, inclusive of several Black and Brown employees.
- III. Conduct DEI education sessions with managers using an external facilitator:

- Reinforce learning from initial Knowledge Building sessions on history and impact of racial inequity
 - Discuss feelings that the managers may have about DEI
 - Explore problems they feel we may face in this endeavor
 - Share ideas they may have to promote and improve DEI
- IV. Conduct DEI education sessions with external facilitators and speakers for all staff on a regular basis. Topics would essentially be the same as those listed above for the managers session(s)
- V. The DEI Group would also have a major role in ensuring that the following tasks are designed to promote diversity, equity and inclusion:
- Review WA policies, practices and employee handbook
 - Examine our recruiting/interviewing/hiring practices
 - Review the process of selecting vendors (services, consulting, purchasing, auditing, etc.)
 - Develop guidelines for productive internal communications following a particular event and surrounding facilitated sessions
 - Brainstorm ideas and activities to support DEI
 - Identify behaviors as well as evidence and data that will support our ability to improve diversity, equity and inclusion
- VI. The DEI Group would prepare concise reports on each of the above areas and present their findings and recommendations to the Workforce Alliance CEO and Senior Management.
- VII. Leadership, as with any project, will be the key to success in this endeavor. In addition to the full engagement of staff, the following leadership is also needed.
- a. Organization leaders (Board Chair to the REAI Team (Executive Committee), as well as the WA CEO and Senior Managers need to be and remain fully committed to this endeavor. They need to provide guidance and direction to other members of the team.
 - b. We need to retain the services of an external facilitator experienced in guiding organizations through the DEI process. This person should be hired as early in the process as possible.
 - c. There should be a staff member assigned to oversee the internal program outlined in this document, working hand and hand with the facilitator. The responsibilities of this assignment need to be defined and other staff members need to be identified to assist. These responsibilities should not just be additive to a staff member's existing job. Organizational capacity should be provided so the staff member will be able to dedicate time and attention to this endeavor.

VIII. Role of Managers:

- a. Each manager should set expectation for diversity, inclusion and equity as a part of their performance requirements and should be held accountable for meeting those expectations.

- IX. Enhance the performance management program from a largely once a year performance review to a year-round performance development process.

C. Action: Informed by Knowledge Building, sustained and guided by a firm DEI structure, what follows are commitments for action and change by the board and staff of Workforce Alliance, based upon the original June 19, 2020 public statement, This action plan will be reviewed and revised as necessary to keep Workforce Alliance on track to achieve racial equity in all aspects of its operations and sphere of influence.

- I. **Assess our operations as an organization both internally and externally to make changes and be accountable for them.**

Internal Commitments – Staff Led

- a. Review data and analysis to examine outcomes of racial groups within Workforce Alliance and American Job Center programs so that adjustments can be made that may include modification of internal practices.
- b. Review of procurement procedures and relevant regulations both state and federal for any guidelines that may pose barriers to minority-owned vendors
- c. Review of the employer handbook for employee/employer expectations
- d. Refection of REAI goals and recommendations are within the Workforce Alliance’s 5 Year Strategic Plan (2020-2025) that is currently being drafted.
- e. Research and incorporate similar, successful initiatives across the country for policies, procedures and best practices that can be incorporated locally by our One Stop Operator Farnham & Associates.
- f. Establish a staffing/talent plan that includes targeted recruitment, internally and externally, to access a diverse, qualified pool of candidates, internal talent development and succession planning.
- g. Identify knowledge-building facilitators and other speakers who will bring value to the initiative (Workforce Alliance staff is working with the Racial Equity Accountability Initiative Team on this)

External Commitments – Board Led

a. Accountability:

1. Hold quarterly “deep dive” assessment of plan progress and make any necessary adjustments.
2. Establish a process for holding staff accountable for implementation of the Internal Plan including regular reports on progress towards specific goals.
3. Review Workforce Alliance key policies or procedures to make necessary changes or additions to promote increased racial equity in all areas of operations.
4. Revise Succession plan for Executive Director to make sure there is a diverse, qualified pool of candidates both internally and externally.
5. Work with Executive Director to ensure that appropriate staff will exist to support the implementation of the Racial Equity and Accountability Initiative and to support development of Workforce Alliance into an increasingly equitable organization.

b. Seek additional resources to increase racial equity impact.

II. Dedicate new outreach resources through our network of American Job Centers and increase our collaboration with our community partners to not only reach and serve more Black and Brown people with employment & training services, but also to provide us with input to ensure we are having meaningful impact in what we are doing.

Internal Commitments – Staff Led

- a. One Stop Operator Farnam & Associates has been charged, together with Kymbel Branch, Manager of Career Development Services, with developing a plan to migrate from information sharing to actively collaborating in concrete ways to improve upon the impact of the South Central CT Partner network.
- b. Shift network from an information sharing group to one that has a shared focus on community engagement and retention that ensures reaching the Black and Brown communities, faith-based organizations and neighborhood groups.

- c. American Job Center Provider Equus (formerly ResCare) has pledged to incorporate the racial equity mission into its strategic plan, with a particular focus on participant retention.
- d. Communications and outreach resources already in place, including recently created positions of AJC Ambassador and Communications Specialist, will have a particular focus on reaching Black and Brown people and engagement with the partners.
- e. Spend resources with Black and Brown-owned outlets, whenever paid media outreach is possible. In all cases, intended paid media audience will specifically be Black and Brown people.

External Commitments – Board Led

a. Board Member Diversity:

- 1. Adopt a goal to have the board membership reflect the demographic make-up of the customers served.
- 2. Re-engage the Nominating Committee with specific intent of developing Black and Brown candidates to fill board vacancies, particularly for private sector seats and to build a “bench” of candidates for future openings.
- 3. Revise the training process for new board members to ensure the Racial Equity Accountability Initiatives are integrated and knowledge building opportunities are on-going for both new and existing board members.

b. Identify opportunities where board member Ambassadors and partners can work to promote increased racial equity.

- 1. For Example, Governor’s Workforce Council, NAWB, chief elected officials, chambers of commerce and non-profit partners.
- 2. Explore opportunities to connect with individuals and organizations engaged with entrepreneurship that can support efforts by staff.

III. Urge the Governor’s Workforce Council to put into action recommendations we made last year to remove barriers caused by poor transportation, lack of adequate child care and benefit cliffs which disproportionately affect minority populations.

Internal Commitments – Staff Led

- a. In collaboration with the Board, determine best way to engage and inform the Chief Elected Officials in South Central CT and report action.

- b. In collaboration with the Board, enlist statewide champions from South Central CT.
- c. Provide information to Board members so that they can advocate for policies related to increasing access to essential services.

External Commitments – Board Led (The scope of the Board led commitments move beyond the Governor’s Workforce Council and include state and local legislation)

- a. Legislative Advocacy:
 - 1. Using research and data, in partnership with staff and partner organizations, identify a set of key legislative changes that will most directly address racial inequity in the workforce development area and build on the recommendations made to the Governor’s Workforce Council.
 - 2. Identify members of the Workforce Alliance board of directors who will take on specific advocacy roles/actions based on interest and affiliation.

IV. Expand efforts to serve Black and Brown-owned businesses and entrepreneurs through our Business Services unit. In addition, continue to support employers to diversify recruiting and hiring.

Internal Commitments – Staff Led

- a. Review existing Business Services policies to ensure that Black and Brown-owned businesses and start-ups are not excluded from services.
- b. Document efforts to present a diverse slate of jobseeker candidates to employers for open positions.
- c. Collaborate with existing community programs with a shared mission to reach and serve Black and Brown-owned businesses.
- d. Encourage employers currently utilizing Business Services to become mentors to Black and Brown-owned businesses and start-ups.
- e. Strengthen relationships with business and community organizations, affinity groups to better understand the issues and challenges faced by the Black and Brown business community and to identify strategies to increase coordination.

- V. Expand and build upon the impact of our Next Steps for Ex-Offenders program that has helped over 2,000 people since 2003 to find gainful employment after incarceration – a systemic plague that has for too long impacted Black and Brown lives and livelihoods in South Central CT.**

Internal Commitments – Staff Led

- a. Incorporate additional American Job Center resources into the Next Steps curriculum to enhance engagement and retention of Black and Brown participants.
- b. Assign additional staff to provide case management and substance abuse counseling