



Demos' Racial Equity Transformation

Key Components, Process & Lessons

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WITH ANGELA PARK

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About Dēmos

Dēmos is a public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy.

Our name means “the people.” It is the root word of democracy, and it reminds us that in America, the true source of our greatness is the diversity of our people. Our nation’s highest challenge is to create a democracy that truly empowers people of all backgrounds, so that we all have a say in setting the policies that shape opportunity and provide for our common future. To help America meet that challenge, Dēmos is working to reduce both political and economic inequality, deploying original research, advocacy, litigation, and strategic communications to create the America the people deserve.

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Letter From The President

It is one thing to advocate for equity and inclusion; it is another to turn the lens inward and commit oneself to live those values at the level of day-to-day practice. Over the last few years, the Racial Equity Transformation at Dēmos, spearheaded by the authors of this report, has helped remake Dēmos into an organization deeply committed to living its values. We are a social justice organization working every day to operationalize the racial equity and inclusion that we seek to advance in the country.

This commitment to living our values and transforming our day-to-day practices involves more than appeals to “diversity” or “inclusion.” Rather, as this report demonstrates, genuine racial equity requires transformation: a thorough and deep shift in organizational practices, norms, culture, and composition. The Racial Equity Transformation has touched every aspect of Dēmos’ operational and organizational life, from hiring and recruitment to daily management and more. It has been remarkable to see the fruits of these efforts, not just in the composition and practices of the leadership and staff, but also in the ways in which this commitment to racial equity has unlocked new forms of collaboration, creativity, innovation, and impact in our outward-facing work.

This, then, is the other lesson for us in our Racial Equity Transformation. A real commitment to racial equity requires a thorough transformation of the organization; but this in turn helps animate and sustain a more effective impact on the broader issues of racial equity in the world.

This commitment to racial equity represents an ongoing project: We are continuing the work of building an inclusive organization and of learning along the way. We are proud to share our experiences up to this point, in hopes that others in the field can benefit from the lessons here, and in furtherance of a vision of justice that shapes our organizations as well as our country as a whole.

Sincerely,

Sabeel Rahman
President, Dēmos

Executive Summary

Dēmos is a non-profit public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy. Since its inception in 2000, the organization's focus on tackling inequality has led it to litigation, research and policy advocacy that addressed various racial disparities in society, from predatory consumer lending to voter suppression. However, also since its founding, Dēmos had a majority white staff, a predominantly white senior leadership team, two white male presidents, and operated in a largely white field of national think tanks. In 2014, all that began to change under the leadership of Heather McGhee, the 33-year-old African American woman who became Dēmos' new president. She saw, and brought the organization's staff, leadership and board to recognize, that Dēmos would not be able to fulfill our mission of combating inequality if policymaking continued to reflect the belief that some—because of the color of their skin—have greater value than others. If we are to win progressive policy change that increases economic and political equality for all, Dēmos must work to dismantle white supremacy as a core part of our mission. And if the mission required a racial equity lens, we would have to develop new internal skills, practices, culture and personnel to bring that lens into focus.

We knew that becoming an authentically race-forward organization was going to require a wholesale transformation. But how to do it? When we set out on this process, there was no instruction manual, and few organizations had attempted such profound organizational change.

With expert outside help and enthusiastic buy-in from all levels of the organization, in 2014 Dēmos launched our Racial Equity Transformation (RET). It would eventually impact every staff member and involve the unlearning of deeply ingrained interpersonal and organizational norms, and the learning of new ones; the development of new organizational systems and practices; the systematic elevation of the issue of race in all of our programmatic work; interventions in the philanthropic field; and partnering with a whole new set of aligned organizations.

Four years in, we offer these lessons and sample materials from Dēmos' RET to help other organizations create their own unique racial equity transformation plans. While our path is not complete and has not been perfect, colleagues from dozens of organizations have asked us to share the concrete steps we have taken and lessons learned. Our Racial Equity Transformation included four major components:

- **Foundational Analysis:** It was imperative that Dēmos document and clearly articulate to staff *why* the organization could not fulfill our mission unless we all learned how to lead on issues of racial equity and built the skills necessary to effectively work across cultural

difference. Essential to Dēmos' foundational analysis was a shared-fate analysis of racism, in which we understand racism to be an impediment to genuine progress for all members of a society, and see the ways that racism drives negative policy outcomes across issues, not just traditionally "civil rights" issues.

- **Organizational Assessment:** We conducted a four-month organizational assessment involving all staff. It was designed to get more detailed information about the existing gaps in learning and practice, so we could develop relevant skill-building plans and interventions.
- **Learning:** We conducted a two-year intensive phase of trainings, workshops, affinity groups, readings and discussions designed to help staff develop and hone an equity analysis (e.g. topics such as understanding the social construction and history of race; color-blind racism; universal vs. targeted policy-making) and interpersonal skills (e.g. understanding white privilege and white fragility; racial anxiety and stereotype threat; and gaining skills in direct communication and feedback). This two-year intensive phase was just the beginning; the work of learning is ongoing at Dēmos and always will be.
- **Implementation:** The changes Dēmos made impacted both *how* staff work together and *what* the actual work is. We reshaped our internal policies and practices, including new recruitment and hiring procedures that transformed Dēmos' staff from 27 percent people of color in 2015 to 60 percent people of color in 2018. Staff are now required to develop and exhibit racial equity competencies; these standards are part of job descriptions, staff orientation, performance reviews, and ongoing staff development. (The entirety of our hiring handbook can be found in an appendix to this report.) On the programmatic side, we engaged in new research centered on race; entered new partnerships with organizations that share our racial equity values; and took on new kinds of legal work that directly address racial inequities. (This report includes two case studies of how Dēmos' new racial equity lens changed our approach to issues.)

These four components are not entirely linear; there was considerable overlap and the steps are cycling again. The organization plans to do a new assessment and continuously update our learning curriculum based on the new culture, leadership and personnel four years in.

Among the many lessons we learned was the fact that the most senior leadership at an organization—those who have the power to set policies and hold staff accountable for progress—must be the driving force behind racial equity transformation efforts. Dēmos' RET was housed in the Executive Team and led by our second-most senior staff member, who devoted close to 90 percent of her time to the effort during the first two years.

There's no question that an organizational transformation this sweeping requires a major commitment in time, managerial resources and money—more than anyone at Dēmos expected at the outset. Yet it was time and money well spent. One of the most common refrains from staff members about our Racial Equity Transformation was that it felt like a "gift" to people who had, no matter their race, rarely received explicit investments in what may be the most important set of knowledge and skills a person can have in our diverse and still-unequal society.

Introduction: The How, The What, and The Who

In 2014, under the leadership of Heather McGhee, a then-new president (and a 33 year-old African-American woman), Dēmos launched a Racial Equity Transformation (RET). This transformation was initiated out of shared recognition that racial bias and racial discrimination are key barriers to fulfilling Dēmos’ organizational mission of working for an America where all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy. Striving to dismantle white supremacy and the political exploitation of racist beliefs is necessary if Dēmos is to win progressive policy change that increases economic and political equality for all.

The goal of Dēmos’ ongoing, organization-wide Racial Equity Transformation is to build the racial equity skills and practices of our staff to equip them to effectively tackle racism and center race in all of their work. This report outlines the key components of this transformation, the overall process and lessons learned.

From the transformation’s inception, Dēmos took a multi-faceted approach, addressing the “how” of our work—the organizational culture and interpersonal components—as well as the “what” of our work—the programmatic content and strategies. In conversations with other organizations, it became clear that many organizations had done one or the other—for example, focused on the racial diversity of their staff, or elevated the issue of race in their programmatic work—but there were few that had tackled both simultaneously. Even fewer organizations had invested in and sustained positive culture change and ongoing learning to develop the new skills and competencies that make it possible to retain a rich mix of staff and truly embed racial equity into programmatic work. Given our belief that the “how” and the “what” were inseparable, from the start, Dēmos used the term “racial equity” transformation, instead of “diversity, equity and inclusion” that is more commonly used in the field. From our perspective, racial equity was the most ambitious of the three terms, and could only be achieved with the necessary components of racial diversity and meaningful inclusion of perspectives.

It is important to note the demographics of Dēmos' leadership in 2014, and its history. The organization was founded in 2000 by a group of mostly white men who had a vision for a “think-and-do-tank” that would address economic inequality in conjunction with political inequality. Its two presidents prior to Heather McGhee were Stephen Heintz and Miles Rapoport, both white men. When Dēmos launched this transformation in 2014, 73 percent of staff identified as white, and Heather was the only person of color on the Executive Team (4 out of 5 members of the Executive Team were women). Despite the relative lack of racial diversity, the staff and board embraced Heather's vision, hungry to engage in the analytical and interpersonal learning and evolution that it would require. Four years after the launch of our Racial Equity Transformation, Dēmos is a vastly different organization. We are still pursuing the same mission, but with race authentically centered in all we do and with a much more racially diverse staff that shares a strong foundation of knowledge and skills for living out the organization's racial equity values.

At the time of publication, Dēmos has a staff that is majority people of color—60 percent so identify—and is known publicly as a racial equity organization. This change was achieved over slightly less than four years and it took far more resources, financial and managerial, than anyone at Dēmos initially imagined. In retrospect, the level of investment required should not have been a surprise, given the white supremacist doctrine that explicitly and implicitly governs our nation's norms, to which the progressive movement is not immune. While Dēmos has learned many lessons along the way—all shared throughout this report—the greatest lesson is that to do these kinds of organizational transformations right, they need to be given adequate time and money. This is without doubt time and money well spent.

Stakeholders

As with any organizational change effort, the success depended upon the alignment and engagement of the organization's people: champions both internal and external; leaders both formal and informal. The following section touches on the various individuals and groups who would become essential stakeholders in the effort.

Outside Consultant

Angela Park, an outside consultant, worked with key Dēmos staff to develop and implement the overall transformation strategy and subsequent implementation. Angela both shared Dēmos' racial equity vision and understood the organization's mission and work environment, after a former career as a policy advisor. Angela has been absolutely instrumental to Dēmos' entire racial equity transformation, designing the overall strategy and engaging deeply in implementation, including creating first drafts of our policy changes and internal documents, in particular during the first two years.

Dēmos Executive Team

A unique and critical part of Dēmos' RET was the complete support and buy-in from the most senior leaders in the organization—the president and the entire Executive Team. The transformation was spearheaded by the new president, Heather McGhee, who provided the vision for the transformation, made it an organizational priority, built the will and secured the funding to make it possible. Throughout the process she provided thought leadership as well as nitty-gritty input and guidance.

In addition, Dēmos' Executive Team deeply felt the need for this kind of transformation and was willing to do whatever it took—including dedicating time in team retreats and regular meetings to discuss and own the RET, engaging in their own personal work, and coaching their staff through their personal work and new professional responsibilities—to achieve the change outcomes Dēmos was seeking. This was particularly remarkable given that the Executive Team was

all-white at the outset, and had little experience with racially-focused organizational change work of this depth.

The overall management of the effort was assigned to the second-most senior staff member at the organization, Senior Vice President of Organizational Development Lucy Mayo. Housing the transformation at this senior level sent an important signal to staff: It would be getting the highest level of attention and was a top priority for the organization. Throughout the course of the first two years, the Senior Vice President devoted close to 90 percent of her time to the transformation.

Angela counseled Dēmos to place the transformation's design and decision-making in the most senior management body of the organization, despite this group's lack of racial diversity at the outset. She had experienced first-hand the shortcomings of organizations' executives delegating race-related initiatives to a "diversity committee," often made up of staff of color, young employees, and others mostly with subordinated group identities who are passionate about the issue but lack decision-making power and day-to-day engagement with senior leaders. The results of this power differential include tension over implementation (the committee has to "lobby" the executives for changes) and lack of clarity about roles and ownership. Dēmos decided to make the Executive Team responsible for driving the transformation and created a committee of staff members, with a clear advisory role, to provide essential input.

Racial Equity Advisory Group

This committee consisted of 14 staff members representing a cross-section of the organization, charged to advise the Executive Team and Angela on Dēmos' racial equity transformation. This group was carefully selected to ensure gender, racial, functional and positional diversity (including some staff who were not experts in racial equity or natural cheerleaders for the effort, since they could offer insights into how to engage the full spectrum of staff). Rather than meeting in isolation, the group met regularly with the Executive Team throughout the assessment and intensive learning phases to provide input into the overall strategy, and feedback on particular modules and learning plans. Obtaining this kind of input and feedback from a broad range of staff and ensuring consistent engagement with the Executive Team was critical to creating a true organizational transformation.

KEY LESSON

Ownership and engagement, not just buy-in, from leadership is essential. Ideally, the most senior leadership at an organization (those who have the power to set policies and hold staff accountable for progress) are a driving force behind transformation efforts. At the same time, all staff engagement and substantive input need to be planned with care and attention to power dynamics. Positional authority can distort decision-makers' awareness of the impacts of their choices, no matter their race. At Dēmos, counsel from the Advisory Group was essential for vetting program decisions and raising important needs of staff outside of the leadership body.

Funders

It is a familiar story in the non-profit world that funding becomes more difficult to secure from mostly white philanthropists when leaders of color take the helm, or when issues of racial justice become prominent in an organization. However, Dēmos was fortunate to experience a confluence of tailwinds that allowed funding to be a help, not a hindrance, to this effort. First was the integration of racial equity into the new president's vision from the outset; Heather used the momentum around her appointment to make the case widely for the transformation. Second was the historical timing; our staff retreat launching the effort occurred just weeks before the killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson that ignited the Black Lives Matter movement and shifted popular attention to racial injustice. Over the following months and years, the movement forced many progressive funders to reconsider their role in perpetuating racial disparities.

Finally, an unrelated trend in philanthropy—shifting from project-based funding towards multi-year general operating support (led by funders such as the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Open Society Foundations)—allowed Dēmos to support organizational development investments generally. Overall, the support Dēmos' Racial Equity Transformation received took multiple forms: transition funding for the new president; earmarked project funding from individual donors and foundations; increased funding for programmatic work even as it became more explicitly focused on race; and even funder organizing to boost racial equity interventions Dēmos led in the field (for more on this, see the case study on the Inclusive Democracy Project). In sum, it was crucial to align donors and funders on the strategic imperative of our racial equity effort.

Board

Dēmos enjoys a strong and engaged Board of Trustees. Many leaders with whom we shared notes about racial equity efforts counted their boards as impediments to change. Fortunately, the Dēmos board was supportive of the Racial Equity Transformation from the outset, seeing it as strategically important and of a piece with their support for the new president. The board had two retreats dedicated to the work. Some organizations may find that they need a transformation process with their board, doing evaluation, deep learning and group work with them in order to build competency and support among trustees before launching the effort with staff. We did not; rather, we kept our board informed of the major milestones and relied on them for advice and guidance.

Components of the Transformation

Dēmos' Racial Equity Transformation included four major components:

- Foundational Analysis
- Organizational Assessment
- Learning
- Implementation

The first phases of the strategy included developing a foundational analysis of why this transformation was necessary to the organization's mission and strategy, and assessing the organization to create a baseline understanding of our starting point. Those assessment findings then directed subsequent learning and implementation activities.

Foundational Analysis: Mission Critical

A crucial starting point for Dēmos' RET was to develop a foundational analysis of why Dēmos was investing in intensive learning and skill-building around the issue of race, and to make this process a “must-have,” not a “nice-to-have,” intervention. Even with a staff that supported elevating the issue of racial equity, it was imperative that Dēmos document and clearly articulate to staff *why* the organization could not fulfill its mission without learning how to lead on race and building the skills necessary to effectively work across difference. We strongly believe that if an organization doesn't have a well-articulated and -adopted rationale for why racial equity is mission critical, the effort is unlikely to succeed.

Dēmos' *Statement of Rationale for our Racial Equity Transformation* was drafted by the president and reviewed by Angela and the Executive Team. It articulates the organization's foundational analysis and was shared and discussed with all staff in the early stages of our transformation. This 2014 rationale statement remains the intellectual backbone of Dēmos' transformation and has been regularly referred to as the work unfolds. The document provides the following analysis, in brief (available in full in *Attachment A*):

Progressives are increasingly coming to terms with a political analysis that sees race as the organizing principle of American politics—not just historically, but also in the Obama era, and most likely prospectively, as our country grows even more diverse. It’s particularly important for us as progressives to understand how racial anxieties and divisions undercut our political and economic goals. Call it the Sweden problem: it’s a lot easier for progressives to win a strong social contract in a homogenous state. In the U.S., progressive policies must face up to the fear that a strong social contract will lift up non-white people at the expense of whites. Addressing and de-legitimizing that fear must be a priority for Dēmos to meet our strategic goals.

- 1. We Suffer Together.** *A deeper understanding of racism doesn’t just equip Dēmos to focus on communities of color; it helps Dēmos better understand what we have already identified as America’s two central problems—inequality in our democracy and in our economy.*
- 2. Progressive Class Politics Fall Apart on Race.** *Class consciousness has always been formulated racially in America. Landless European immigrants and their descendants in the early days of the multicultural colony were given a new identity that undermined allegiance with black slaves by offering the promise of mobility to the aristocracy based on skin color, not heredity. Throughout American history, populist movements have been destroyed because the illusion of racial difference and hierarchy have overridden class solidarity. The golden postwar era of shared prosperity was built as a social contract among white men, and when the contract expanded in the 1970s to include everybody else, white men overwhelmingly left the progressive coalition and the contract was torn.*
- 3. More Than a Black-White Story.** *America’s racial past and present have always been more pluralistic than our dominant historical narrative suggests. The learning process at Dēmos will include readings and discussions on the history and current political context for Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Pacific Islanders (categories that are already overbroad).*
- 4. Intersections Between Race and Other Group Identities.** *Dēmos believes that it’s important to understand how power*

KEY LESSON

Clearly articulating, in writing, the rationale for racial equity has been absolutely critical to the success of this organizational transformation. Dēmos created a new take on its core story of the problems we seek to solve. Regularly referring back to the racial equity rationale was an important part of re-grounding staff in the work. Cascading the rationale by having each department articulate their own team-specific rationale was important to ensuring racial equity would be fully integrated throughout the organization.

dynamics of dominance and subordination function with group identities that both relate to and are distinct from race and ethnicity, such as gender, sexuality and religion. Dēmos chose to focus on race first, but Dēmos learning will include readings and discussions on other identity groups after the foundational understanding of racial hierarchy and racism has been set.

In addition to this organization-wide rationale, each team within the organization—research, legal, campaigns, communications, development, finance and administration—developed team-specific racial equity rationales. These were developed by team directors with input from team members, and articulated why well-developed racial equity skills and practices were critical to the success of the work of their specific teams.

Organizational Assessment

We knew that racial equity learning and growth was needed throughout the organization, but it was important to get more detailed information about the learning and practice gaps in order to develop relevant skill-building plans and interventions. Accordingly, one of the first phases of the effort was a comprehensive organizational assessment. This assessment was designed and led by Angela and spanned four months, from November 2014 through February 2015. The goals of the organizational assessment phase were: to evaluate staff support for and understanding of key racial equity concepts, assess how staff were integrating racial equity into their work and interactions with colleagues and external partners, understand how staff experienced Dēmos' organizational and workplace culture, and solicit input on the overall RET.

The organizational assessment included a mandatory, anonymous all-staff survey, individual interviews with key staff, and focus groups with select groups of staff. The findings from the assessment were first shared with senior leaders and the Racial Equity Advisory Group, and then shared with the board and the entire staff at an all-staff gathering. Key assessment findings included:

- Widespread support for racial equity, diversity, and inclusion as Dēmos priorities;
- Lack of rigorous, consistent attention to, and integration of, racial equity in programmatic work;
- Individual competencies and skills did not yet fully match the support, interest, and intellectual understanding of the importance

of racial equity;

- The Dēmos culture was experienced as white-normative and white-centric;
- The Dēmos culture included an aversion to conflict and fear of critical interpersonal feedback;
- The vast majority of staff felt included, valued, and fairly treated, but nearly half had experienced micro-aggressions based on their subordinated group identities.

These assessment findings directed the learning curriculum we developed for the next phase.

Racial Equity Competencies

Shortly following the assessment phase, we worked to develop new racial equity competencies that would be expected of all staff. We recognized that in order to be a race-conscious, inclusive and equitable organization, Dēmos would need to operate differently and change our expectations of our staff members. Racial equity skills and practices were not going to remain a “nice to have” but were shifted to a “must have” for all staff.

These competencies were developed collaboratively between Angela, the Executive Team and all staff. They went through many iterations and were informed by the assessment findings and by what we deemed necessary to ensure an inclusive and respectful work environment. We settled on four competencies:

- **Equity Analysis.** Clearly and consistently articulate a sophisticated understanding of racial equity and structural racism, and the centrality of this analysis to the work we do and how we operate at Dēmos. Integrate that knowledge into work projects and interactions by addressing structural implications and disproportionate impacts of policies, activities, and decisions on race, class and other group identities within the context of job responsibilities and projects.
- **Self-Awareness.** Demonstrate awareness of multiple group identities and their attendant dynamics, and consistently bring a high level of self-awareness, empathy, and social skills to work and interpersonal interactions.
- **Direct Communication.** Communicate clearly and directly with colleagues, working to match intent and impact

KEY LESSON

Developing new expectations on racial equity demonstrated that the skills and practices we wanted staff to build were not “nice to have” but “must have.” It made knowledge and skills on racial equity a mandatory qualification for working at Dēmos; the new competencies were incorporated into job descriptions and embedded in performance evaluations. This reinforced the foundational analysis that Dēmos cannot achieve its organizational goals without directly addressing the issue of racial inequity, and that staff could not be successful at Dēmos if they did not have a well-developed racial equity analysis and the interpersonal skills needed to work and lead across difference.

in interactions, and be proactive to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings, especially across difference. Consistently give both positive and developmental feedback to support learning, excellence, and personal growth.

- **Authentic Relationships.** Proactively build and sustain robust, authentic, productive working relationships with colleagues across race and other group identities, including Dēmos staff and external partners.

These competencies were added to all staff job descriptions in the spring of 2015. Staff were also informed that they would be evaluated against these new competencies during the performance review cycle in the summer of 2016, after they had spent a year increasing their knowledge, skills and practice. During the summer 2015 annual review cycle, staff assessed themselves (*Attachment B*) on the new racial equity competencies and developed plans for growth and learning with their supervisors.

The above competencies apply to all Dēmos staff, regardless of role or department. The learning curriculum of readings and workshops during the initial intensive learning phase (see below) was focused on building these racial equity competencies. In recognition of the fact that staff on different teams needed to have additional racial equity skills that were specific to their teams, team directors worked with their staff to develop team-specific racial equity competencies. Teams then developed their own learning plans focused on building the skills needed to fulfill their team racial equity competencies. As team leaders, directors are responsible for driving this team learning.

Learning

The intensive learning phase of the Dēmos effort started in March 2015 and continued through early 2016. Dēmos' learning, however, continues and always will, given the nature of the issues being addressed, and Dēmos' enduring commitment to racial equity.

We developed a comprehensive learning curriculum based on the racial equity competencies we adopted. Recognizing that people learn differently, learning was conducted in a number

KEY LESSON

Upon reflection, engaging Dēmos' senior leaders in the curriculum prior to rolling it out to the rest of the staff would have been preferable. At the start of this effort, our staff, including senior staff, had varying levels of racial equity skills and practices. We needed our senior leaders to lead their teams through this learning, and asking them to lead while also learning themselves proved difficult. If possible, it's best to have senior leaders complete an intensive learning curriculum before the rest of the staff so they can effectively lead their teams through the transformation. This is more expensive because you're offering content twice, but it provides time and the opportunity for managers to grow into their leadership roles.



The work that we have done on racial equity and inclusion has been meaningful in our interpersonal interactions. However, it has made a profound difference in our work. Our work in democracy and economic justice issues leads with a deep and explicit racial equity analysis, and we are pulling other policy shops toward such an analysis.

– **CONNIE RAZZA**

Vice President, Policy & Research

of ways including through reading and discussions, trainings and workshops, and racial equity learning groups (see page 15). Some of the issues that were explored during the intensive learning phase included:

- **Equity Analysis:**
 - Levels of racism
 - Social constructions & history of race
 - Color-blind racism
 - Universal vs. targeted policy-making
- **Interpersonal Skills:**
 - Group identity & power dynamics
 - Implicit bias
 - White privilege & white fragility
 - Racial anxiety & stereotype threat
 - Feedback & direct communication

From the summer of 2014 to the spring of 2016, Dēmos conducted the following (not including team-specific activities) learning and skill-building activities:

- 11 staff trainings/workshops (includes trainings for all staff & targeted staff, i.e., supervisors & directors).
- 3 reading modules (over 600 pages of readings). A full list of the readings all staff completed can be found in *Attachment C*. Note that this list does not include team-specific readings.
- 4 racial equity learning group discussions (see below).

While it's problematic to make assumptions about the level of racial equity analysis, skills and practice of people of color or white people, there is no question that people of color and white people have different lived experiences with racism. Because of this, the types of conversations and interventions that are needed to learn and grow for white people may look very different from those needed for people of color. Accordingly, Dēmos created “racial equity small learning groups,” commonly known as affinity groups, which were a key component of Dēmos’ intensive learning phase.

These learning groups were comprised of 8-10 staff and organized according to race, with staff who identified as white

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This has seeped into every aspect of my life as I push back against the sameness that my whiteness can create if I am not consciously resisting it. Now I look at the art I surround myself with, the books I read, music I listen to, and shows I watch...by integrating the spaces I am in physically, and mentally, I have found that I see and experience so much more... I was really missing something and I am excited to see what else I can find.

– **TRISHA HAHN**
Executive Assistant

KEY LESSON

In addition to workshops, the primary vehicle for learning during Dēmos’ intensive learning phase was reading and discussion. In retrospect, to account for workload and differences in learning approaches, the curriculum should have included more multi-media learning tools, such as videos, other forms of visual presentations, and speakers.

meeting together, and staff who identified as people of color meeting together. They were facilitated by Angela and attendance was required. The discussions at these meetings primarily focused on the interpersonal dynamics of race, and on personal transformation and growth. Providing staff a space to discuss issues with other staff who share a similar group identity allowed for more open engagement. In addition, it was an intentional intervention designed to disrupt the problematic dynamic of white staff turning to staff of color for insights into the experience of the issues we were exploring.

Some white staff, in particular, initially questioned the affinity groups and expressed that the groups felt excluding and segregated. This reaction is common, especially among people with dominant group identities who rarely see themselves as members of a group. Ultimately, the affinity groups proved to be a very powerful learning tool, one that ended up being widely valued by staff.

The impact of our intensive learning phase was substantial. Staff expanded their understanding of the history and construct of race in America and the impacts of structural racism, and white staff in particular came to terms, in deep ways, with their white privilege, unconscious bias and their roles in racially problematic group dynamics. Long-standing organizational and interpersonal norms were analyzed and questioned, and old and new frustrations were voiced. Given the massive change Dēmos was undertaking around such a charged and sensitive topic, none of this was unexpected. But Dēmos needed to equip staff quickly with the skills to engage in difficult conversations in ways that would lead to understanding, growth and learning, as opposed to misunderstanding, disengagement and resentment.

With a long-standing culture of conflict aversion, as verified by the initial organizational assessment, building staff skills around conflict resolution was critical and urgent. Accordingly, Dēmos devoted parts of early trainings and workshops to how to constructively navigate conflict, and importantly, how to intervene in problematic racial dynamics (i.e., microaggressions) and engage in courageous conversations around race. We developed a written “intervention protocol” clearly articulating the steps staff should take when navigating conflict, taking into account the unique circumstances around positional authority in the workplace.

Because Dēmos staff started this effort with different levels of

KEY LESSON

The cultural norm around conflict aversion is not unique to Dēmos. Many see conflict aversion as a commonly shared human trait, others see it as a core trait of white-centric cultures. Regardless, Dēmos continues to struggle with conflict aversion and staff continue to fear directly engaging in difficult conversations. Dēmos can never do enough training and learning around this, and skills in this area always need to be refreshed. Senior leaders modeling skills in looking for and receiving feedback and productive difficult conversations is key, as is deep personal learning about identifying and managing triggers.

KEY LESSON

The learning and growth experience differs for staff of color and white staff. Creating spaces for staff of color and white staff to meet separately can be a powerful part of a racial equity transformation effort. Carefully articulating the rationale for this and being thoughtful about the purpose and outcomes of these spaces is critical. It's also imperative to identify the right facilitator for those kinds of engagements. Having staff facilitate can be problematic given the skill level needed. However, turning to an outside facilitator for each group meeting can get very costly very quickly.

knowledge and practice, for some people the learning phase was a refresher, and they strengthened and continued their pre-existing racial equity practices. For others, it was life-changing, and they obtained and put into practice new racial equity learning and skills. Then there were others, albeit very few, who even though they embraced the overall effort, had a difficult time with the personal learning and growth, and struggled with developing new racial equity skills and practices. Dēmos required these staff (they were exclusively white staff) to engage in one-on-one, focused coaching with Angela. This was coordinated in conjunction with our Senior Vice President of Organizational Development and the staff members' supervisors, and consisted of additional readings and regular coaching calls with Angela to address targeted areas of growth.

Implementation

The assessment, learning and implementation phases overlapped, with the learning and implementation phases ongoing, as “forever work.” The changes Dēmos made impacted both how staff work together and what the actual work is. With new competencies required of all staff that related both to racial equity analysis and interpersonal skills, significant organizational change was inevitable. Below is an overview of some of the most concrete organizational changes Dēmos put into place, and what outcomes they achieved.

Organizational Policies & Practices

During the learning phase, Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Administration Joe DiNorcia and Senior Director of Operations Kalin Drzewiecki-Sezer worked with Angela to take a fresh look at Dēmos' organizational systems and policies through a racial equity lens. This resulted in changes throughout the employee handbook, including to policies around paid holidays, dress code, pay advances, travel and sick leave. Most significantly, however, we overhauled our hiring practices. Prior to our RET, Dēmos' hiring practices varied throughout the organization. With a majority white staff, who had majority white networks, Dēmos continued to predominantly hire white people. Dēmos' new hiring protocol—which was spearheaded by Senior Director of Operations Kalin Drzewiecki-Sezer—was created to reduce bias and was designed to push back against the structural racism

KEY LESSON

For some staff, the organizational and team-based learning and skill-building achieved the transformation we were seeking. In a few cases, it was not enough and individual coaching was needed. Having high-quality and trusted racial equity coaching available as a resource when needed is absolutely critical. Some people simply need more individualized attention, and a learning and skill-building plan more catered to the specific issues with which they're struggling. This can be a considerable expense, and limiting this only to senior leaders may need to be considered.



Our internal focus on racial equity provided me with opportunities to deepen my understanding of systemic racism and implicit bias and to apply that knowledge in thinking about shifts we could make to our policies and practices. I'm proud of Dēmos' work to apply a racial equity lens both internally and externally. That holistic approach makes the work more authentic and impactful.

— KALIN DRZEWIECKI-SEZER
Senior Director, Operations

that has made it difficult for candidates of color to enter and rise in the field.

The core components of Dēmos' Hiring Handbook (a very detailed hiring guide outlining all requirements and stages of Dēmos' hiring process, as well as supporting research; available upon request) include the following:

- **Standardized Interview Process.** Employing the same interview process—i.e., ensuring uniformity in screening procedures, interviews, exercises and questions—for every job candidate is a key way to ensure equity and fairness throughout all hiring processes.
- **Screening for Racial Equity Competencies.** As per the above, Dēmos expects racial equity competencies from all our staff; these are incorporated into job descriptions. Dēmos believes that our expectations around fulfilling these competencies should be calibrated according to the level of staff. Accordingly, we include level-specific racial equity expectations in job postings (*Attachment D*).
- **Standardized Interview Questions.** Research shows that asking candidates the same interview questions at each stage of the hiring process limits implicit bias. Dēmos' Hiring Handbook provides sample interview questions for each team, and importantly, required racial equity interview questions for different levels of staff (*Attachment E*).
- **Hiring Committees.** Hiring by committee is an important way to ensure staff with different backgrounds and perspectives provide input into hiring decisions. We aim for hiring committees to include between 2-4 staff members with gender and racial diversity as a priority.
- **Racially Diverse Interview Pools.** Dēmos believes that there are qualified people of color for every position we're looking to fill. Many different kinds of racism—structural, interpersonal, etc.—have enacted barriers to employment for candidates of color. Importantly, many forms of preferential treatment also privilege white candidates. To combat this racism and preferential treatment, and recognizing that a more diverse staff is a stronger staff, Dēmos requires all pools of candidates

KEY LESSON

Equity and fairness in how staff are hired matters, a lot. An employee's existence within an organization has to be grounded in a process that is consistent, transparent, and fair. Issues of equity are at their peak when assessing candidates for employment. Implicit and explicit bias can play out when determining whether someone is qualified to do a particular job, and unspoken organizational norms can influence and dictate hiring decisions. Accordingly, developing hiring practices that are focused on reducing bias is key. In addition, before the hiring process begins, robust recruitment is essential. People often rely on their networks to hire staff. With a majority white staff that had majority white networks, creating a systematic process to recruit qualified candidates of color was critical to Dēmos' success in finding a wider range of talent.

coming in for first-round interviews to be comprised of 50 percent candidates of color. Dēmos has a detailed policy around how the racial diversity of this pool is assessed, as well as a rarely-used exception to this policy (allowing for a lower than 50-percent pool, though never an all-white pool) when a hiring manager can show they have exhausted all recruitment efforts.

Dēmos implemented these new hiring practices in the fall of 2015. The new practices, as well as our increased programmatic focus on race (more on this below) inspired more interest from candidates of color, and resulted in our shift from a majority white to a majority person-of-color organization in just over 3 years. At the start of the RET, 27 percent of Dēmos staff were people of color and 73 percent were white. Three years later, 60 percent of Dēmos staff are people of color and 40 percent are white.

Programmatic Work

Dēmos used our regularly-scheduled annual work planning in fall of 2015 to develop fresh programmatic project plans that centered race in new ways. Staff brought new racial equity skills to this work planning session, and a deepened and more comprehensive analysis of the problems Dēmos as an organization was seeking to address. They developed work-planning tools, including new project decision-making criteria, that prompted staff to proactively assess how each project was addressing racial equity.

Dēmos' programmatic work changed significantly as a result of our racial equity learning and skill-building, and the race-centered planning tools we created. We engaged in new research centered on race; entered new partnerships with organizations that share our racial equity values; and took on new kinds of legal work that directly addressed racial inequities. Fundamentally, our understanding of structural racism has translated into all of our external work. To demonstrate the scope and impact of our programmatic changes, below are two case studies of new bodies of work implemented as a result of our RET.

Racial Equity Transformation in Action – the Inclusive Democracy Project:

Since its founding, Dēmos has worked to increase democratic

KEY LESSON

Demos' new hiring practices do not require many more steps than hiring processes at other organizations or companies. However, given the historic underrepresentation of people of color in their field and in related educational institutions, building racially diverse pools can be time-consuming. Demos no longer allows "no qualified people of color applied" to serve as an excuse to end the recruitment process. We have been working to encourage staff to diversify their networks and to consider recruitment an ongoing responsibility, building relationships with future candidates of color and connectors to candidates of color. Staff who have racially diverse networks, and devote real time to tapping those networks, tend to build diverse pools very quickly; staff who don't, struggle to meet this requirement. Finally, hiring staff does indeed take more time now, but that is time well spent. Our story bears that out. As work doesn't wait for new hires to be made, we do bring on temps or consultants to fill capacity gaps.

participation and reduce political inequality. We partnered with other democracy reform organizations at the national and state levels to advance pro-voter practices and legislation. Like Dēmos at the time, these organizations were predominantly staffed and led by white people with limited connections to the primarily black and brown communities that would benefit most from these policy reforms, which limited the organizations' scope and impact. These white-led democracy reform organizations also lacked connections with the economic and racial justice organizations that stood to gain policymaking efficacy if barriers to political participation were eliminated or reduced.

Newly armed with the analysis that racism is the driving force behind political inequality, Dēmos launched its Inclusive Democracy Project (IDP) in 2015. As part of this project, Dēmos works with two dozen partner organizations to incorporate a racial, economic, and gender justice perspective into the pro-democracy movement. The IDP is a majority person-of-color cohort of powerful state-based leaders and their organizations committed to strengthening infrastructure, building a national network of supportive partners, and moving multi-issue inclusive democracy agendas in compelling state-level campaigns. It is a field intervention to desegregate the democracy field, by helping develop new leaders, conducting new research and advancing a race-forward narrative on money in politics and voting. The IDP regrants critical dollars to these organizations, recognizing them as experts and putting money quickly into important work on the ground.

As part of the IDP, Dēmos provides policy, research, and legal support to advocates in states and cities where we have partner organizations. Dēmos helps groups develop capacities for multi-issue democracy reform agendas that includes public financing of elections, disclosure, and affirmative voting reforms such as Automatic Voter Registration. Through the leadership-development aspects of the IDP cohort, Dēmos has helped shift funders' support to ascendant grassroots leaders of color and addressed longstanding racial power dynamics in the field. The race-conscious strategy has worked: IDP members have launched numerous successful state and

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I was initially attracted to Dēmos because it's important to me to work for an organization that centers racial equity in both its internal and external work. Throughout my interview process I was asked questions exploring my understanding of issues of racial equity and asked to consider my role in centering racial equity as a potential employee of the organization. In over 15 years of working in the non-profit sector, this was the first time I was asked direct questions about racial equity as part of an interview process. This is just one small and critical example of the ways that Dēmos embeds and operationalizes racial equity in its policies and practices.

— JOSÉ GONZALEZ

Director of Talent Management
and Learning

local campaigns that have built power for working-class communities of color.

The Inclusive Democracy Project was a direct result of Dēmos' RET. The Dēmos of five years ago would not have developed the foundational racial analysis that launched this effort, nor would staff have been equipped with the racial equity competencies to directly address racial power dynamics, have courageous conversations and organize cross-racial, race-conscious coalitions.

Racial Equity Transformation in Action – Debt-Free College:

One of Dēmos' longstanding bodies of work is research and advocacy on issues of college affordability, student debt, and state investment in higher education. In 2014, Dēmos put forward a new plan, The Affordable College Compact, that ideally would serve as the infrastructure for federal policymakers to solve the student debt crisis by ensuring anyone could graduate from a two- or four-year public college without the need to borrow.

This plan, though, was completed prior to the RET, and thus we were in the unenviable position of proposing a “solution” to a crisis that we had not sufficiently analyzed through a race-forward lens. While Dēmos had often acknowledged that the burdens preventing upward mobility, college affordability, and the ability to repay debt were disproportionately borne by people of color, it was not until the RET that the racial dynamics of student debt became an explicit part of our research agenda.

From the outset of the RET, Dēmos committed to applying a racial equity lens to all research. Doing so exposed serious gaps in the policy discussion around the issue of college affordability. To fill in some of these gaps, Dēmos put together a first-of-its-kind analysis, *The Debt Divide: The Racial and Class Bias behind the New Normal of Student Borrowing*, which outlined the burden of student debt and rising college prices on black and brown students relative to white students. Specifically, we found that over 8 in 10 black students must borrow for a bachelor's degree, and nearly 6 in 10 borrow for an associate degree—rates that far exceed white students' borrowing. This is particularly troubling in light of the fact that college-educated people of color face greater barriers to building wealth than white people with only a high school degree. This racial equity analysis revealed the connection between student debt and the longstanding racial wealth divide, as today's black and brown students must borrow due to a lack of intergenerational wealth, where similarly situated white students can rely on wealth accumulated through racist 20th and 19th century policies. This insight helped shape the design of a debt-elimination policy (co-authored with the Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis); the aim was to find the best mechanism for reducing student debt that would have the biggest impact on the racial wealth divide. After the RET began, Dēmos' entire body of college affordability research and commentary included an explicit discussion of the racial dynamics and the need to design policies to address racial, and not just economic, disparities.

Informed by the research agenda, we began to be much more intentional in

advocating for policymaker adoption of the concept of debt-free college. Having the racial equity analysis strengthened our ability to convince the Democratic congressional leadership and both 2016 Democratic presidential contenders to endorse our policy vision. Dēmos emphasized the need to understand how the issue, though cross-cutting, had different valences among different demographic groups. One small but salient example is a switch in language from talking about a “return” to the debt-free college norm of the 20th century to talking about the need for an equal commitment of debt-free college “for the most diverse generation of students in American history.” Dēmos’ racial justice partners were understandably skeptical of painting the mid-20th century as a time of unalloyed good. In fact, many of our country’s largest investments in students and families—including the GI bill and the expansion of public colleges—were blocked off for students of color, and talking about a return to those times was problematic in moving the issue forward among the groups we most needed.

In line with our core understanding of how racism undermines public goods, we linked racially-motivated anti-government ideas with the decline in public investment, which raised college costs for students of all races. In 2017, we embarked on an ambitious set of public opinion polling and messaging to find language that most resonates with people of color and also helps build cross-racial solidarity. The research found that big investments in public higher education and a guarantee of college without debt are popular and galvanizing with voters and would-be voters of color, and that lawmakers should consider it an issue that builds power and solidarity across racial lines.

Through this explicit shift in strategy and by ensuring that every research project, data byte, convening, media appearance, or speaking engagement touched on how this issue is different across race, Dēmos has become a trusted resource in the higher education field as one of the only groups that explicitly focuses on racial equity.

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Demos’ racial equity transformation had a profound effect on me as a progressive advocate and a person. As a white male living in the U.S., I have necessarily been blinded by multiple forms of privilege. Learning basic concepts such as dominant vs. subordinated identities and the tensions between comfort (for the majority) and safety (for others) has opened my eyes and given me a powerful set of tools...[to] show up as a leader...in ways I could not have been able to before.

— ADAM LIOZ
Political Director

The Ongoing Work

Dēmos has developed several strategies to ensure that our focus on racial equity endures beyond the initial learning phase and the creation of new tools in the implementation phase. Internally, staff are evaluated against our racial equity competencies during annual performance reviews. These competencies are baked into review forms and allow supervisors to assess how staff are centering race in their work and interactions with colleagues and partners across difference. Dēmos assesses job candidates for their racial equity analysis and practice, and we also require all new staff to participate in a two-day racial equity onboarding process. This is facilitated by Angela Park twice a year and includes follow-up readings. The program condenses the learning Dēmos did as a full community during our intensive learning phase in 2015 and ensures that new staff are aware of, and prepared to fulfill, their shared racial equity competencies.

We also strengthened and clarified our orientation process, recognizing that how staff enter the organization is crucial to their sense of belonging, inclusion, and efficacy. Onboarding is a critically important foundation for an employee's experience within and contributions to an organization. For organizations that have made racial equity a priority, orientation is complicated by the need to provide important context for the organization's work. Beyond the usual documents, Dēmos shares a set of foundational racial equity documents with all new staff. These include the organization's initial rationale statement, the department's rationale statement, and an overview of the RET to date. A senior leader meets to share the racial equity work with new staff; in addition to the two-day racial equity orientation sessions, supervisors create a schedule for new staff to catch up on racial equity readings.

Dēmos' learning continues, and always will. The organization continues to develop and roll out new racial equity learning modules. Our original intensive learning phase was followed

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By having racial equity front and center and one of the essentials of the onboarding process of the organization, it was clear to me that Dēmos was not only a safer space, but a place in which I was expected to bring my culture, my experiences and my deep beliefs to every aspect of the organization.

– RODNEY MCKENZIE

Vice President, Campaigns
and Partnerships

by learning modules on different identity groups, including the Latinx community and Native Americans and Hawaiians, and upcoming modules will focus on revisiting the core concept of white supremacy and refreshing our skills around direct communication and conflict resolution, something that is always needed.

Finally, in 2018 the development and oversight of the ongoing transformation has evolved. As we have greatly increased staff racial equity skills and practice, we have shifted the overall organizational management of the RET to include a newly formed body, the Equity & Inclusion Advancement Team. This team is comprised of a cross-section of multi-racial staff members who partner with leadership to continue to shape and move our racial equity learning and growth. This team is chaired by our Director of Talent Management & Learning, José Gonzalez. Decentralization of the transformation effort from mostly senior staff and Angela to a broader group of racially diverse staff marks an important and exciting turning point in the work.

KEY LESSON

With Demos assessing for racial equity skills in our hiring process, new staff at Demos bring a higher level of knowledge and professional experience on racial equity. Given this, we are reviewing our foundational trainings and readings to meet the needs of these new staff. We aim to continue to provide the same learning content that created the foundation for our work on racial equity, while adapting our onboarding curricula based on the needs, knowledge, and experience of new staff.

Conclusion

This story of organizational transformation is specific to Dēmos’ culture, mission, leadership, staff makeup and history. Every organization is a unique ecosystem that requires its own tailored approach. When Dēmos’ transformation began, the leaders assumed that there was a handbook somewhere out there to light the way for an effort as comprehensive as this one. There was not. We hope some of our experiences and key lessons can be helpful as others work to transform their institutions.

Some readers may wonder whether an effort like this is necessary for their organization. Undoubtedly there are workplaces that are “farther along” than Dēmos was at the outset on any number of measures. However, no institution is immune to the dynamics that permeate American society. Our society has been organized to reinforce a racial hierarchy since its founding, and any workforce drawn from the population carries the beliefs, traumas and burdens of our collective inheritance. Fortunately, Dēmos’ experience has reinforced the idea that transformation is possible. The process was challenging, but the organization’s impact, funding and reach have grown in no small part due to leadership on this central issue. One of the most common refrains from staff members about the Racial Equity Transformation at Dēmos was that it felt like a “gift” to people who had, no matter their color, rarely received explicit investments in what may be the most important set of knowledge and skills a person can have to contribute and flourish today.

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The board of Demos sees examples of our racial equity focus in every board meeting, most especially in our work on voter protections... We have a new appreciation for how each affront to racial equity to assure an ‘equal say in our democracy’ demeans our values. That Demos works so diligently and cooperatively to address these inequities makes me proud to be a director of this organization.

– RUTH WOODEN

Board Member

Author Bios

Heather C. McGhee, Distinguished Senior Fellow, Dēmos

Heather C. McGhee joined Dēmos in 2002 and served as its president from 2014 through June, 2018. A recognized thought leader on the national stage, McGhee is now a Distinguished Senior Fellow, advancing the vision of an equal say and an equal chance through her writing, public speaking and media appearances.

McGhee is writing a major book to be published in 2019 about the personal, economic and societal costs of racism to everyone in America, including white people. She serves as a contributor to NBC News and frequently appears on shows such as “Meet the Press.” Her opinions, writing and research have appeared in numerous outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, and *Politico*. She is the co-author, with Sherilyn Ifill of the NAACP LDF, of a report with racial equity recommendations for Starbucks and other major corporations.

McGhee currently serves on the boards of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Color of Change, Indivisible and the Black Economic Alliance. She holds a B.A. in American Studies from Yale University and a J.D. from the University of California at Berkeley School of Law.

Lucy Mayo, Senior Vice President, Organizational Development, Dēmos

Lucy Mayo has 20 years of experience working in the non-profit and government sectors on public policy and organizational development issues. Lucy first joined Dēmos in 2005 and served in leadership roles in Dēmos’ former Democracy and Economic Opportunity Programs before taking on her current role as Senior Vice President of Organizational Development in 2012.

Prior to coming to Dēmos, Lucy was Vice President of Development for Teach For America—New York City. Previously, she was the Policy Director for New York City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, where she led a team that created and implemented Speaker Quinn’s policy agenda. Under Lucy’s leadership, the Policy and Investigation Division pushed through many innovative initiatives including increasing access to primary health care services in low-income neighborhoods, expanding full-day universal pre-kindergarten, increasing access to healthy food for all New Yorkers, and strengthening public middle schools. Before that, Lucy served as then-Council Member Christine Quinn’s first Legislative Director, building and managing Quinn’s City Hall office and developing and implementing her legislative and policy agenda, including participating in the passage of New York City’s 2003 smoking ban.

Angela Park, Independent Consultant

Angela Park is a consultant, researcher, and writer dedicated to making social justice and equity hallmarks of progressive institutions—across advocacy, policymaking, philanthropy, education, and business. She helps mission-driven organizations embed social justice and equity throughout their operations and programs, bringing three decades of experience on sustainable development policy, environmental justice, equity and diversity, and organizational and leadership development.

Angela has testified before Congress and state legislatures and lectures at universities, and keynotes conferences across the United States. She researched and wrote *Equity in Sustainability* (2014) and *Everybody's Movement: Environmental Justice and Climate Change* (2009) and her work has been published by *The Diversity Factor*, *Grist*, and Yale University and featured in *The Washington Post* and *Audubon*.

Previously, Angela worked at The White House in both terms of the Clinton-Gore administration, managing sustainable communities policy and constituency engagement at the President's Council on Sustainable Development. She led research and recommendations to the President on wide-ranging issues from civic participation and environmental justice to sustainable economic development and smart growth. At the Center for Policy Alternatives, she coordinated state-level sustainable development initiatives focusing on legislation to promote renewable energy, public transportation, energy efficiency, and environmental justice. Angela co-founded and served as deputy director of the Environmental Leadership Program where she created its leadership development programming and launched and facilitated two collaborative peer learning networks on leadership and diversity in the environmental field.

To contact Angela, please email ruby.apconsulting@gmail.com.

Attachment A

Dēmos Racial Equity Transformation Rational

To: All Staff

Re: An Initial Statement of the Rationale for our Racial Equity Transformation

Why do we need to understand how race affects our politics and policymaking?

A common refrain from staff throughout this process has been that we cannot make the right decisions about how to achieve our mission without fully understanding how race operates in our democracy and our economy. This memo offers some initial illustrations of how heightening our strategic race analysis will improve our work, followed by some key questions that have arisen about the process.

- We Suffer Together
- Progressive Class Politics Fall Apart on Race
- More Than a Black-White Story
- Intersections Between Race and Other Group Identities

We Suffer Together. A deeper understanding of racism doesn't just equip Dēmos to focus on communities of color; it helps Dēmos better understand what we have already identified as America's two central problems. For example, Dēmos aims to lower barriers to civic participation, virtually all of which were **erected in an attempt to maintain a white electorate and political power structure**. The fact that not every person who is disenfranchised individually or disempowered as a class is a person of color does not mitigate this need; in fact, it demonstrates that racially motivated exclusion destroys democracy for all of us. Likewise, an enduring example of the centrality of race to our economic system can be found in the millions of workers of all races

who are excluded today from labor protections and social insurance because of **New Deal-era political decisions** designed to exclude African Americans, women and Latinos. More recently, lenders created **toxic subprime financial products** in the 1990s to target communities of color, but they spread up the income and racial hierarchies to poison our entire financial system.

Progressive Class Politics Fall Apart on Race. A recurring question at Dēmos concerns the relationship between class and race. The easiest justification for why race matters to a class strategy is the sheer demographic fact that 45% of the younger working class are people of color. A more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between race and class, however, reveals that class consciousness has always been formulated racially in America. Landless European immigrants and their descendants in the early days of the multicultural colony were given a new identity that **undermined allegiance with Black slaves by offering the promise of mobility** to the aristocracy based on skin color, not heredity. Throughout American history, populist movements have been destroyed because the illusion of racial difference and hierarchy have overridden class solidarity. The golden postwar era of shared prosperity was built as a social contract among white men, and when the contract expanded in the 1970s to include everybody else, white men overwhelmingly left the progressive coalition and the contract was torn. And today, the Right has so successfully linked government with “undeserving minorities” that virtually every progressive idea (from well-funded public schools to unions to environmental regulation) faces resistance from a political party that is 90 percent white and is **vulnerable to coded appeals** to an ambivalent white middle. Republican strategist Lee Atwater said it best: *“You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’ — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now [that] you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I’m not saying that. But I’m saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me — because obviously sitting around saying, ‘We want to cut this,’ is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than ‘Nigger, nigger.’”*

More Than a Black-White Story. America’s racial past and present have always been more pluralistic than our dominant historical

narrative suggests. The next year of our learning process at Dēmos must include readings and discussions on the history and current political context for Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Pacific Islanders (categories that are already overbroad). In addition, it's important to acknowledge that civil rights reform in our immigration laws have created dramatic shifts in our Black, Native American, Latino and Asian communities over the past two generations. The political significance of how new immigrants identify with – and, as is often the case, are externally identified with – these traditional American categories¹ is a rich and evolving issue.

Intersections Between Race and Other Group Identities. We also believe that it's important to understand how power dynamics of dominance and subordination function with group identities that both relate to and are distinct from race and ethnicity, such as gender, sexuality and religion. For example, while women have increased their economic power since the 1960s, their presence in the working class, as Tammy will argue in her upcoming book, has marginalized it politically. We are choosing to focus on race first, but our learning will include readings and discussions on other identity groups after the foundational understanding of racial hierarchy and racism has been set.

Key Questions

1. Why are we focusing on race?

- Progressives are increasingly coming to terms with a political analysis that sees race as the organizing principle of American politics – not just historically, but also in the Obama era, and most likely prospectively, as our country grows even more diverse. It's particularly important for us as progressives to understand how racial anxieties and divisions undercut our political and economic goals. Call it the Sweden problem: it's a lot easier for progressives to win a strong social contract in a homogenous state. In the U.S., progressive policies must face up to the fear that a strong social contract will lift up non-white people at the expense of whites. Addressing and de-legitimizing that fear must be a priority for Dēmos to meet our strategic goals.

¹ As we learned with the PBS documentary, our racial categories were themselves political creations to support the economic and political system of slavery: http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-09.htm

2. What is intersectionality?

- Intersectionality is the understanding that systems of oppression and discrimination are relational and interactive. Dēmos is an organization committed to social justice in its fullest manifestation. We recognize the complex, big picture and believe it must include an intentional focus on race to be complete. We want to be a workplace that respects and supports the growth of all and rejects all types of oppression, injustice, and group subordination. We want to bring a sophisticated racial equity lens to our work to address race and related forms of structural oppression. As a foundation toward these goals, we intend to have rich discussions and learnings about multiple group identities throughout the year and how power dynamics have been structured throughout society.
- Internally, we're focusing on race because, as early findings from our organizational assessment (interviews and survey conducted November-December 2014) confirm, our organizational culture has been demonstrably more welcoming of women, LGBT individuals, and a wide range of religious backgrounds than people of color. It's time to focus on the issues that have been the hardest for us. That said, many of us have experienced challenges at Dēmos based on other subordinated identities, or the intersection of multiple subordinated identities. The work we're doing in this process will strengthen our ability to take on all forms of oppression. Dēmos needs to be a safe space for all of us.
- Dēmos includes many people who have devoted their careers to fighting injustice, and so we understandably can be uncomfortable or resistant to identifying ourselves as part of a dominant group and acknowledging our privilege. We need to recognize that the desire to shift focus to other group identities is sometimes – not always, but sometimes – a resistance response.

3. What will this work look like this year?

- We have not stood still as our racial equity transformation process has begun. With each step we have taken, we have begun integrating input from staff into a range of activities. For example, the learning groups at the end of this month were planned in response to feedback from assessment interviews and survey responses. This is an overview of work to come:

Report Out and Recommendations from Organizational Assessment

At a March staff retreat we will focus on results from the Racial Equity Organizational Assessment, including recommendations.

Learning Process to Cultivate RE Competencies and Skills

As part of our organization-wide work, we will identify core competencies and skills necessary for achieving our racial equity goals. This includes knowledge that translates into our programmatic work and behaviors we want to practice to create an inclusive organizational culture. Dēmos will offer a wide range of learning opportunities and professional development—from small learning groups to formal trainings. We will integrate these competencies and skills into job descriptions and performance reviews as part of our commitment to racial equity.

Organization-Wide, Departmental, and Work Team Work Planning

Based on the assessment findings, we will identify RE goals and success measures and the organizational activities that will help us achieve them. All departments and work teams will integrate activities into their work plans toward achieving our goals and potential changes to policies and practices will be included in that process.

Ongoing Learning: Other Identity Groups

As stated above, we believe that it's important to understand how power dynamics of dominance and subordination function with group identities that both relate to and are distinct from race and ethnicity, such as gender, sexuality and religion. Accordingly, in the winter of 2016, we will be rolling out a new set of learning around other group identities. These learnings will focus on the following identity groups: Chicanos/Latinos; Asian Americans/Hawaiians; Native Americans; Arab Americans; Jewish Americans; Women; LGBTQ community.

4. Will Dēmos change its mission / become a “racial justice organization”?

- The Executive Team's current vision is that this organizational

transformation process is needed to truly fulfill our existing mission, the one that Dēmos articulated in the 2012 strategic planning process. That mission statement not only explicitly included advancing a racial equity narrative as one of three overarching goals, but also committed us to seemingly race-neutral goals that nevertheless require a strategic racial analysis in order to meaningfully advance (reducing inequality in our democracy and our economy). We're not a traditional civil rights organization, but we believe that Dēmos already is a racial justice organization, along with being an economic justice and pro-democracy organization. This process will help us develop a coherent, widely-held narrative about what that means for us and model for other progressive groups.

- However, the strength of an organization-wide learning process is that we may, as a staff, decide that Dēmos needs to change its mission based on what we learn over time. The learning process on which we've embarked does not have a pre-determined outcome; it is intended to bring forward the best thinking that all of us can contribute toward building an organization that can best achieve an equal say and an equal chance for all.

Attachment B

Dēmos 2015 Racial Equity Self-Assessment

Overview

Dēmos is strengthening the integration of racial equity throughout the organization's culture, policies, practices, and programmatic work. In 2015, racial equity competencies are being added to all job descriptions and the performance review process is being revised for the 2016 review cycle to include an evaluation of these new competencies. As part of the 2015 annual review process, all staff will complete a racial equity self-assessment.

While this self-assessment is being completed during this year's annual review process, it is not being considered a part of annual performance reviews. We assume and embrace the fact that staff have varying levels of skill and experience with racial equity issues. Setting your own benchmark of where you think you're "starting out" in this multi-year process is important to track your own progress and to help inform where organizational trainings should be targeted. It is important to remember that our internal work here at Dēmos is a microcosm of the work the country needs to do, and so we will best serve our mission by being honest about our starting points and ambitious about our ability to deepen and grow.

Racial Equity Assessment Questions

Competency 1: Equity Analysis

You clearly and consistently articulate a sophisticated understanding of racial equity and structural racism and the centrality of this analysis to the work we do and how we operate at Dēmos. You integrate that knowledge into work projects and interactions by addressing structural implications and disproportionate impacts of policies, activities, and decisions on race, class and other group identities within the context of your job responsibilities and projects.

1. How have you been fulfilling this competency? Please provide concrete examples.

2. Has fulfilling this competency has been challenging for you? If so, please explain how.
3. What action steps do you plan to take over the next year to increase your proficiency in this competency? Please be specific.

Competency 2: Self-Awareness

You demonstrate awareness of multiple group identities and their attendant dynamics and consistently bring a high level of self-awareness, empathy, and social skills to work and interpersonal interactions

1. How have you been fulfilling this competency? Please provide concrete examples.
2. Has fulfilling this competency has been challenging for you? If so, please explain how.
3. What action steps do you plan to take over the next year to increase your proficiency in this competency? Please be specific.

Competency: Direct Communication

You communicate clearly and directly with colleagues, working intentionally to match intent and impact in interactions, and being proactive to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings, especially across difference. You consistently give both positive and developmental feedback to support learning, excellence, and personal growth.

1. How have you been fulfilling this competency? Please provide concrete examples.
2. Has fulfilling this competency has been challenging for you? If so, please explain how.
3. What action steps do you plan to take over the next year to increase your proficiency in this competency? Please be specific.

Competency: Authentic Relationships

You proactively build and sustain robust, authentic, productive working relationships with colleagues across race and other group identities, including Dēmos staff and external partners.

1. How have you been fulfilling this competency? Please provide concrete examples.
2. Has fulfilling this competency has been challenging for you? If so, please explain how.
3. What action steps do you plan to take over the next year to increase your proficiency in this competency? Please be specific.

Attachment C

Dēmos Assigned Racial Equity Readings

REPORT—"Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race"

Independent Television Service

<http://resources.css.edu/diversityservices/docs/tenthingseveryoneshouldknowaboutrace.pdf>

ARTICLE—"The Historical Origins and Development of Racism"

George Frederickson

https://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-01.htm

BOOK—*The History of White People*

Nell Irvin Painter (excerpts)

ARTICLE—"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack"

Peggy McIntosh

<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>

ARTICLES—"How Immigrants Come to Be Seen as Americans"

<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/11/15/how-immigrants-come-to-be-seen-as-americans>

BOOK—*Race: Are We So Different?*

Alan Goodman, Yolanda Moses, Joseph Jones (excerpts)

BOOK—*Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society*

john a. powell (excerpts)

BOOK—*Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (excerpts)

BOOK—*Searching for Whitopia: An Improbably Journey to the Heart of White America*

Rich Benjamin (excerpts)

ARTICLE—"The Case for Reparations"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

ARTICLE—"A Dream Undone"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone>.

REPORT—"Whiter Jobs, Lower Wages: Occupational Segregation and the Lower Wages of Black Men"

<http://s1.epi.org/files/page/-/BriefingPaper288.pdf>

REPORT—"The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation and Race and Ethnicity"

<http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-gender-wage-gap-by-occupation-and-by-race-and-ethnicity-2013>

BOOK—*Freedom is Not Enough*

Nancy Maclean (excerpts)

BOOK—*Harvest of Empires*

Juan Gonzalez (excerpts)

BLOG—"On Two Year Anniversary of Blow to VRA, New Evidence That Voter ID Laws Are Racially Biased"

<http://www.demos.org/blog/6/4/15/two-year-anniversary-blow-vra-new-evidence-voter-id-laws-are-racially-biased>

BLOG—"Racism is Destroying the Right to Vote"

<http://www.demos.org/blog/5/18/15/racism-destroying-right-vote>

BOOK—*A Different Mirror*

Ronald Takaki (excerpts)

WEBSITE—Kana'iolo'owalu

Kana'iolo'owalu is a project of the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission. It is a campaign to reunify Native Hawaiians in the self-recognition of our unrelinquished sovereignty

<http://kanaiolowalu.org/about/>

ARTICLE—"Famous are the Flowers: Hawaiian Resistance Then—and Now"

Elinor Langer

<http://www.thenation.com/article/famous-are-flowers-hawaiian->

[resistance-then-and-now/](#)

REPORT— "Tribal Nations & The United States, National Congress of American Indians"

http://www.ncai.org/attachments/PolicyPaper_

ARTICLE— "Struggle for Chicano Liberation, Bill Gallegos"

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-8/lrs-chicano/index.htm>

BOOK— *Yellow*

Frank Wu (excerpts)

BOOK— *Everyday Bias*

Howard Ross (excerpts)

Attachment D

Dēmos Levels of Racial Equity Practice by Position

Junior-level staff (Intern, Assistant, Associate, Accountant, and Coordinator-level) positions must include the following:

- Interested in Racial Equity. You are interested in expanding your analysis and knowledge about the role that racial inequity plays in our society, and are committed to building and/or deepening your commitment to racial justice work.

Mid-level staff (Manager, Campaign Strategist, Policy Analyst, Counsel, Designer) positions must include the following:

- Understand Racial Equity. You have a demonstrated understanding of the role that racial inequity plays in our society and in movement-building, and have demonstrated an ability to effectively manage across difference.

Senior-level staff (Senior Manager, Senior Campaign Strategist, Senior Counsel, Economist, Senior Policy Analyst) positions must include the following:

- Working for Racial Equity. You consistently integrate your deep understanding of key racial equity concepts into work projects and interactions by addressing structural implications and disproportionate impacts of policies, activities, and decisions on race, class and other group identities within the context of job responsibilities and projects.

Director and Associate Director-level positions must include the following:

- Leading on Racial Equity: You have a sophisticated understanding of how race dynamics impact supervisory relationships, organizational culture, partnerships, campaigns and coalition work, and can demonstrate a history of successfully intervening in problematic dynamics and deepening a racial justice approach within an organization, team, or campaign.

Executive-level positions must include the following:

- Movement Building with Racial Equity. Along with the above, you are pushing movement partners and allies to incorporate racial equity into their work and are crafting and leading Dēmos' internal racial equity transformation effort.

Attachment E

Dēmos Racial Equity Interviews Questions

For phone screens, for all candidates:

1. In 2014, Dēmos began a long-term and ongoing internal effort to transform our integration of racial equity into our work and organization. This process involves all staff and every facet of the organization and incorporates comprehensive intellectual and interpersonal learning curricula aimed to help us negotiate the challenges that encompass this ambitious mission. While this work centers issues of race and ethnic identity, additional intersections critically inform our development--gender, sexuality, physical ability to name a few. Our intensive learning curriculum for all staff has focused on such issues as the history and construct of race; levels of racism; color-blind racism; group dynamics; dominant and subordinated group identities; white privilege; implicit bias; and, so on. We now require that staff demonstrate benchmark racial equity competencies and practices, as reflected in job descriptions and annual reviews. As you hear this, what impressions come to mind, and how might you envision yourself engaging with this process?
2. What is your perspective on the state of racial equity in the United States?

For 1st round interviews, for all candidates:

1. As you heard in the phone screen, Dēmos has elevated the issue of racial equity in all of our work. A very important component of racial equity is thinking about, and making changes to, how we work together. In particular, we have explored the concept of group dynamics and the concepts around dominant and subordinated group identities. For me personally, I have explored how my [XXX] identity influences my interactions with others. Within that context, in thinking about your own dominant

identity (ies), what is your experience working effectively across subordinated identity groups? What comes to mind when thinking about working across race, culture, gender, class, sexual orientation, language differences?

For 1st round interviews, for SLC-level positions:

1. As a senior leader at Dēmos, you will be expected to identify and effectively navigate challenging racial dynamics both internal and external to the organization. What specific professional experiences can you name that speak to this requirement? In giving one or a few examples, please set up the situational dynamics; detail your individual roles and action steps; summarize the outcomes--whether positive or otherwise; and tell us the lessons you learned.
2. What is your opinion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the progressive movement on the issue of racial equity? How do you feel progressives have functioned within this space?

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