



The History of MACDC's Racial Equity Pledge

Written by Tiana Lawrence, May 2023

The MACDC Racial Equity Pledge is rooted in acknowledging the four levels of racism: internalized racism within individuals, interpersonal racism that occurs between individuals, institutional racism with our institutions and systems of power, and structural racism across our society and is centered around addressing four areas including: root causes, representation of staff, representation of the board, and representation in our work. To access the Racial Equity Pledge webpage click [HERE](#) and for the full pledge document, please click [HERE](#). To capture the vision of the Racial Equity Pledge, MACDC developed a theory of change to showcase the methodology of our work. Please see the Theory of Change [HERE](#).

Designing the Pledge

A response to the painful reality of decades worth of racial injustice was required from an organization both supporting a field born out of the Civil Rights Movement and dedicated to the journey of racial equity. Once in the hands of MACDC, staff pulled together an Advisory Committee to support the development and finalization of the pledge. Voices were brought in from various CDC staff roles, creating an ideal space for grappling with the dynamic and nuanced reality of racial equity work. The process proved to be challenging at times, with varied perspectives on values, actions, verbiage, etc. With All Aces Inc. a racial equity consultant group on board to assist in the facilitation of the committee dialogue, the conversations were intentional and grounded in the existing larger racial justice movement. The moment was ripe for collaboration, reflection, and transformative dialogue that pulled the veil on inequitable culture and practices.

The process of revision required the Advisory Committee to ask big picture questions and grapple with themes of accountability, transparency, and directly confront values and actions that were integral to implementing racial equity within an organizational context. With the language, suggested actions, and values finalized, the committee was ready to begin outreach with a select group of CDC's, many of whom had a presence on the MACDC Board. Prior to the official launch of the pledge, the advisory committee actively encouraged early adoption, to showcase the commitment to racial equity work amongst the membership. Adopting the Racial Equity Pledge requires a board vote, and ideally a thoughtful and contextualized discussion of racial equity and how the CDC will integrate the work. MACDC staff prepared a robust web page with a sample CDC Board discussion agenda and guidelines, a slide deck with talking points and an overview of the Pledge areas. We found that some members had established REDI committees in their organizations and others, where the Board and staff were at different understandings of racial equity and its importance to the mission. Leaders, board and staff engaged with MACDC during their process of adoption. Questions and concerns

included not wanting to just sign onto a Pledge, more so wanting to explore building in accountability. MACDC successfully recruited 11 CDC's who were early adopters of the pledge.

Launching the Pledge

With the backing of the 11 organizations as early pledge adopters and the push for the MACDC board of directors to adopt, there was a momentum that reinforced the significance of the pledge, creating a ripe moment for the official launch in November 2021. Following the official launch, a workshop designed for peer-to-peer engagement around the Racial Equity Pledge created the necessary space for the membership to reflect, set intentions around next steps, and confront what challenges appeared to be in the way of getting started. Many CDC's were already actively integrating racial equity into their work, for others this was a moment to pause and reassess their direction and responsibility to racial equity.

It was time for the larger CDC membership to take ownership in the field wide racial equity journey. It was clear to those leading the implementation of the pledge that this was going to be a challenging task. As the acknowledgement of the pledge deepened, many CDCs had become stumped on where and how they were to begin and how to prioritize the seriousness of racial equity in relation to all the other work they did. Initially, organizations struggled with the idea that their racial equity journey had to be planned out before they could adopt the pledge. This presented various challenges with recruitment as CDC's were hesitant to adopt as they wanted to be sure their adoption would be reflected through their actions and implementation. While CDC's were taking their pledge adoption seriously, it was crucial to emphasize that the pledge was two-fold. The first part of the pledge was an adoption of values, while the second part was filled with suggested action steps that CDC's may take to implement pledge values. Many CDC's initially struggled with the idea that to get started, they had to have their plan all figured out, which is never the case.

To address these challenges, MACDC staff held various information and pledge adopter sessions that both worked to support those already committed to the pledge and those seeking to become involved. Check out our initial pledge information session [HERE](#). The reality was, not every CDC was ready to partake in a journey that would cause great discomfort, disruptions, and require a level of discord. Rooted in the four levels of racism, the pledge actively worked to support organizations to acknowledge and understand how these levels of racism existed and impacted their own eco-systems.

Racial Equity Pledge Structure

As a part of the larger implementation, MACDC has convened multiple spaces for peer-to-peer engagement, relationship building, and sharing of knowledge and resources. These spaces have evolved into the following quarterly offerings: Racial Equity Pledge Implementation Team, Pledge Adopter Meetings, and Pledge Open Roundtables. Along with these offerings, MACDC partnered with Promoting Good Inc to offer a yearlong learning equity cohort with pledge adopters. Amongst the 30 pledge adopters, 11 organizations participated in the learning equity cohort, assisting them in the process of choosing and implementing strategic actions. To assist with the ongoing learning necessary to sustain racial equity work, the Mel King Institute

has offered several subsidized Racial Equity Institute trainings that address Root Causes, one of the four pledge areas.

The Racial Equity Pledge currently has 30 adopting members including MACDC. Over the last year of implementation, a focus has been placed on engaging the leadership of CDC's in prioritizing the work. While folks in various CDC roles typically hold the burden of championing racial equity work, we found it crucial that leadership visibly commit to journey. As MACDC shifted their recruitment efforts to requiring adopters to submit their action goals, we found it crucial to highlight the process of CDC's doing so.

As we continue to support the action goals of our membership, MACDC is actively working with its Implementation Team to think through best practices for ongoing tracking, metrics, and innovative avenues for learning and support. We recognize that we live in a world where racial equity does not yet exist, and therefore we encourage folks to continue challenging the status quo, build community, and commit to a journey that will make great strides in creating a field and a world in which the values of our Racial Equity Pledge are fulfilled.