

RACIAL EQUITY

MOVING COMPANIES FROM PROMISE TO ACTION

To accelerate the progress and impact of business efforts to address racial equity, **Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP)**, **Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP)**, **The Council on Foundations**, and **Points of Light** collaborated to host a two-day conference titled, **“Racial Equity: Moving Companies from Promise to Action”** in December of 2020. Designed for corporate social responsibility (CSR) professionals, philanthropy leaders, and their cross-functional colleagues from across lines of business, the event brought together diverse perspectives from thought leaders representing academia, business, nonprofits, and philanthropy. Attendees listened to voices in the movement for racial equity, learned what peer companies are doing, identified actions to advance corporate anti-racism commitments, and framed strategies for sector accountability in a supportive community.

Key take-aways from the event included:

- Ending 400 years of systemic racism is a journey, not a quick fix. Companies and leaders have to approach this movement for change with a long-term time horizon and with grace — requiring empathy and a willingness to accept criticism.
 - *See related video: **A Movement vs. A Moment** (Edgar Villanueva)*
- Employees are an important litmus test. Leaders should listen to and act on the feedback provided by employee resource groups. Companies must learn from their employees’ lived experiences and perceptions.
- Companies cannot separate themselves from the communities in which they operate. Real progress will come from showing up authentically, building trust, and taking cues from what the community says it needs.
- Corporate leaders should unlock change. Progress at a company occurs when CEOs commit to creating space for conversation, taking action, and owning and leading measurable change within their company. Diversity in boards of directors and senior leadership teams can hold companies accountable and strengthen the business outcomes from addressing racial equity.
 - *See related video: **Role of Companies in Addressing Racial Inequity** (Darren Walker)*
- Businesses know how to build markets and advocate for laws and regulations. They now must apply that same muscle and their capacity for innovation to address systemic racism.

10 ACTIONS COMPANIES CAN TAKE

Drawing from the two-day event, clear action steps emerged:

- 1.** Create a **racial equity playbook**: this is not the same as your crisis communications or corporate playbook. Create agile social justice teams to be innovative and think differently. Companies need to expand the voices in the conversation when talking about societal challenges within and outside of the company.
 - *See related video: [Update your DEI Playbook Changing Systems to Address Racism](#)*
- 2.** Create **feedback** loops with employees, community, and customers to listen deeply; that is where the solutions lie. Support ERGs, hold town halls, and conduct surveys to create opportunities to listen.
 - *See related video: [The Internal Reckoning](#)*
- 3.** Focus on **middle management** as a place to focus on true buy-in, create sustainable change, and foster empathy and humanity. Utilize **bias interrupters**.
- 4.** “Keep score” with **measurement** metrics for implementing and making progress. Report publicly to be accountable and authentic. Share pay equity numbers. Create people scorecards. Use the same measurement and goal setting rigor used in the rest of the business.
 - *See related video: [Accountability: Shifting Measurement and Evaluation](#)*
- 5.** Seek out a **new, diverse network** to get closer to the community and bring new voices to the conversation: vendors/supply chain (BIPOC businesses), advisors, board, advisory committees, ERGs. Companies cannot separate themselves from their communities and they should recognize and consider their role as part of the community. People who live in these communities are the solution, but they are too far removed from the solutions to make them real. Companies need to let them take the lead, listen to their counsel, and work with them to move forward.
- 6.** Increase **investments** in and commitments to BIPOC-led or -serving organizations: now is the time to overrepresent Latinx and Black-led organizations. Determine what that percentage of your giving and investments is now and make a plan to increase it. Look for smaller organizations to fund that corporations may have missed before because they didn’t have the scope and scale they required. Shift who has influence. Have conversations instead of reporting requirements (or reduce reporting requirements). Be additive not extractive; limit done-in-a-day volunteering, foster longer term partnerships that meet mutual needs. Practice trust-based philanthropy.
- 7.** Use the **brand** to advance racial equity and educate the public: 58% of the public support this, based on Edelman Data. Say something in your ads and on your websites. Connect your brand to issues that matter to you and your stakeholders.
- 8. Business Strategy:** identify policies, procedures, and systems in your company that are biased and inequitable. Talk to investors about your racial equity work. Companies can and should deploy their expertise — around innovation, problem solving, and managing through change — to support change in their communities.
- 9. Institute fair chance hiring** — 1) get data to support it, 2) find NGO partners, 3) start with a well-designed pilot, and 4) have buy-in across the board — C-suite, human resources, operations. This is a hiring tool.
- 10. Educate:** underscore the importance of understanding the history of our country and the origins of systemic racism as part of the important work of the company. Focus on “equity”, which is the highest bar.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

This event builds upon collaborative work that started when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020. During that time, ACCP, CECF, Council on Foundations, and Points of Light came together to support leaders of corporate purpose in acting with courage and determination to respond to the compounding health and economic crises. Throughout a Corporate Peer Discussion series co-hosted by the four partner organizations, many companies emphasized the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on communities of color and considered how to redirect their strategies to focus on more equitable outcomes. The urgency of the moment was amplified after the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent national movement for racial justice. “Racial Equity: Moving Companies from Promise to Action” was a continuation of the partnership and intends to support and equip companies with the knowledge and insights to progress on their journeys.

Speakers represented a cross-section of disciplines, including:

- Ana Marie Argilagos, President and CEO, **Hispanics in Philanthropy**;
- Susan Taylor Batten, President and CEO, **ABFE: A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities**;
- Liz Dozier, Founder and CEO, **Chicago Beyond**;
- Lisa Hamilton, President and CEO, **Annie E. Casey Foundation**;
- Fagan Harris, President & CEO, **Baltimore Corps**;
- Michael McAfee, CEO, **PolicyLink**;
- Marcus Owens, Executive Director, **African American Leadership Forum**;
- Edgar Villanueva, Founder and Chief Strategist, **Decolonizing Wealth Project**;
- Darren Walker, President, **Ford Foundation**;
- Joan Williams, Distinguished Professor and Director, **Center for WorkLife Law, University of California, Hastings Law**;
- Representatives from the **National Millennial & GenZ Community**;

In addition, corporate leaders who are framing change efforts inside their organizations shared their experiences and lessons learned to date.

Sessions were geared toward **CSR, corporate philanthropy, human resources, and diversity, equity, and inclusion professionals**, as well as **C-Suite leaders** and **cross-organization executives**. The agenda, speakers, and content for this convening received feedback from an independent review panel of experts from many sectors so the event could inform and guide both racial equity practice and decisions for corporate leaders. The focus of the content was to elevate voices in the community, with opportunities for attendees to assess and test their companies’ paths forward with peers. [See full agenda here.](#)

For more information, visit: accp.org | cecp.co | cof.org | pointsoflight.org

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