EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT FRAMEWORK (EIAF; DRAFT OCT ‘21)

CONTEXT:

Racism pervades social research and design. As a social research organisation, we at Dartington Service Design Lab (Dartington) have been reflecting on how we perpetuate racism and inequality – but also how we can challenge it.

In the summer of 2021, we published a position paper on [embedding an anti-racist approach to our research and design activities](file:///s/Our-Anti-Racist-research-approach-a-position-paper.pdf). This paper considered some of the ways in which racism is manifest in social research and design. It also set out what we are going to do about it: some concrete actions we are taking and can be held accountable to – organisationally and in our interactions with the wider sectors we inhabit.

One of our actions is to develop and embed an Equality Impact Assessment Framework (EIAF) as a routine part of all our research and design activities. The intention is to shift from a position of implicit bias towards one with an explicit focus on equity (as illustrated in the table below).

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| Implicit Bias | Explicit Equity |
| Unaware of decision-making opportunities that influence outcomes | Builds in decision-making guides that evoke consideration of equality |
| Exclusive of stakeholders, namely community members and young people who traditionally experience racism/hold less power? | Fosters active engagement and empowerment of stakeholders |
| Not attentive to race, gender, income and other inequalities | Gives distinct, specific and sufficient attention to key disparities/inequalities |
| Does not recognise barriers to access | Identifies, supports, and implements strategies to remove barriers |
| Does not consider racial impacts | Systematically analyses potential impacts on disadvantaged groups |

The EIAF will help our team systematically and collaboratively consider at an early stage the ways in which racism and bias could manifest in our work and actively take steps to eradicate racism and other forms of bias from our work.

There are numerous existing Equality Impact Assessments. In reviewing existing approaches, we were struck by how many adopt a rigidly structured approach which we feared would result in a tick-boxing exercise, rather than a deep and contextualised consideration of the issues pertinent to the specifics of our various projects and initiatives. We were inspired by approaches – such as the frameworks developed by [Advance HE](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/model-process-undertaking-strategic-eia) and [We All Count](https://weallcount.com/the-data-process/) – that encourage thoughtful and deeper reflection of issues as the relate to the specifics of a given situation, policy or activity.

As such, the approach we are adapting and experimenting with is an active stepped approach. It acts as a structured guide to help project teams consider issues of racism and other intersecting inequalities as they relate to a specific project or initiative. It encourages careful thought, intentional collaboration and a process that should be routinely revisited over the course of a project or activity.

STEP 1: ORIENTATION AND PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION

This first step is an opportunity for the project lead and team to get orientated to issues related to anti-racist research and design, and how they pertain to the specific project or initiative in question.

This preliminary step is an internal organisational step, in advance of subsequent more collaborative steps.

The main aims of step one is to:

* Orientate members of the Dartington project team to anti-racist research and design principles as they relate to the specific project or initiative.
* Consider whether undertaking this EIA is appropriate for the specific project or initiative (and if not, why not and what else might be more appropriate).
* If undertaking an EIA, it is appropriate to do some preliminary scoping work to identify some likely issues for further consideration and identify wider stakeholders and partners who should be involved going forwards.

Stages in the orientation:

**Questions to consider:**

* If completing this EIA is not suitable or appropriate for your specific project, how else will you ensure an anti-racist approach to your research or design project?
* Ideally this EIA will be undertaken in early design / proposal stages, so that anti-racist activities can be built into proposed work and adequately costed. If this EIA is being undertaken after a funding award is made, what constraints or opportunities do you have to alter plans?
* Team members should orientate themselves to [Dartington’s anti-racism position paper](file:///s/Our-Anti-Racist-research-approach-a-position-paper.pdf) and associated reading.
* Given the specific focus of the idea or project, consider at a general level:
  + Are the outcomes and experiences of those served by this project likely to vary for different racial or ethnic groups?
  + How might different racial and ethnic groups experience this project?
  + What social, economic or contextual factors might contribute to these differences? This may include other forms of discrimination that can intersect with racism.
* For each, how do you know? Summarise any available sources of data and evidence related to the potential differences identified above.
  + Be aware of potential bias within academic and government publications.
* As you progress into the next steps of further exploration and priority-setting, who else might you involve to further explore the issues and determine priorities for anti-racist and anti-discriminatory research and design? Who else needs to be involved to help identify and tackle bias and discrimination?
  1. Funders or commissioners?
  2. Delivery partners?
  3. Collaborators?
  4. Specific community or ‘user groups’?

Outputs from Step 1:

1. A preliminary summary of how issues of racism and inequality related to the specific project that can be shared with partners and collaborators.
2. A list of partners to engage with in the subsequent Scoping and Priority setting step.

STEP 2: SCOPING AND PRIORITISING

**Characteristics to consider:**

The following protected characteristics specified in the Equality Act 2010:

* Age
* Disability
* Gender reassignment
* Marriage and civil partnership
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race
* Religion or belief
* Sex
* Sexual orientation

In addition to these legally protected characteristics, you might also consider:

1. Looked-after status
2. Gender identity
3. Those with caring responsibilities

At this step, you should convene those partners or key stakeholders you identified in Step 1 to build upon your preliminary exploration and undertake a more comprehensive and collaborative scoping and prioritisation exercise. The collaborative nature of this step is important as it is unlikely that our own staff team will be sufficiently attuned to the ways in which racism may manifest for those involved in or affected by the project.

Project leads should design the most appropriate way to work collaboratively, given project and partner constraints. This could be done synchronously via a call or workshop, or a-synchronously via a virtual white-board or email correspondence.

Similarly, who is involved should be determined by the project partnership and composition. However, it is recommended that, where possible: (a) funders/commissioners; and (b) either young people or community members directly affected by the work, or partners working closely with these groups are involved.

Stages in Scoping and Prioritisation:

* Share the preliminary explorations developed in Step 1 as a starting point. Build upon these to more deeply consider the questions explored previously:
  + Are the outcomes and experiences of those served by this project likely to vary for different racial or ethnic groups?
  + How might different racial and ethnic groups experience this project?
  + What social, economic or contextual factors might contribute to these differences? This may include other forms of discrimination that can intersect with racism.
* Create a long-list of inequality areas and intersections, along with supporting evidence.
* With partners facilitate a process of shortlisting and agreeing the priority inequality/intersection areas for subsequent EIA and project delivery focus.
* Add those prioritised areas (discrete or intersecting) into the first column of the table below. It may be that the finalised list is the same as the long-list (i.e. all are included). You are encouraged to focus down on areas of most impact and likelihood of inequality or discrimination.

Questions to guide Step 2:

1. Which racial/ethnic groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by the issues this project seeks to address?
2. Are the outcomes and experiences of those served by this project likely to vary for different racial or ethnic groups?
3. How might different racial and ethnic groups experience this project?
4. What quantitative and qualitative evidence of inequality exists?
5. Are there gaps in evidence? What is missing or needed, and can it be reasonably obtained?
6. What social, economic, political, or contextual factors may be producing and perpetuating racial inequalities associated with the issue this project seeks to address?

Outputs from Step 2:

1. A further developed summary of how issues of racism and inequality relate to the specific project, with supporting data and evidence.
2. An agreed shortlist of inequalities (independent or intersecting) or discriminated groups, specific to your specific idea or project, each with supporting evidence or data related to inequalities. This list should be entered into the first column of the table below.

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| **Project-specific priorities for addressing inequality and discrimination** |  | | |  |  |
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STEP 3: ASSESSING HOW INEQUALITIES MAY BE EXACERBATED THROUGH RESEARCH OR DESIGN

In this step, you will consider how racism, bias and intersecting inequalities may manifest at different stages of the research or design initiative – from project initiation and design, through to delivery, analysis and reporting (as summarised in the Dartington anti-racism position paper). This step is not about designing responses, rather identifying where racism and bias manifest.

**Resources to draw upon:**

1. Dartington’s [Anti-racism position paper](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c86931b4d87114c07db1adb/t/60c88c02d15cef2df003c223/1623755779674/Our+Anti-Racist+research+approach%2C+a+position+paper.pdf) splits out a typical research/design initiative into three broad phases, and considers some broad ways in which racism may be manifest. Consider these.
2. Also take a look at ‘We All Count’ [Data Equity Framework](https://weallcount.com/the-data-process/), which provides a more fine-grained break-down of project stages and equality considerations.

Questions to consider in step 3:

1. What decisions or actions may be reinforcing the status quo, implicit bias, and/or current inequalities?
2. What adverse impacts or unintended consequences could result from this project or research?
3. Is there a particular racial/ethnic group that could experience greater adverse impacts or unintended consequences?
4. What positive impacts on equality and inclusion can result from this project, and are those positive impacts appropriately targeted?

Stages:

1. Once project-specific priorities are agreed, the next step is to carefully consider how the proposed approach to research or design might either ignore or exacerbate these inequalities.
   1. For each prioritised area in the table, consider how racism or inequality may manifest at each of the three broad stages of a typical project (Columns 2 A-C in table below).
   2. The focus at this step is to identify the risks and areas, not the mitigating steps (this is the next step).
2. Ideally this will be done collaboratively with partners. Partners may be involved, either as active participants in identifying sources of racism or discrimination, or at least in reviewing risks and the full EIAF at a later stage.
   1. Involvement of project executive, lead, specialists, and/or researchers is imperative at this stage to ensure awareness and understanding across all phases of the project, and across different levels of the team.

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| **1. Project-specific priorities for addressing inequality and discrimination** | **2. Risks of racism, discrimination of perpetuation of inequality** | | |  |  |
| **A. Project and partnership formation** | **B. Project design, engagements and implementation** | **C. Project analysis, reporting and dissemination** |
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STEP 4: DESIGNING MITIGATING ACTIONS AND AGREEING WAY FORWARD

Stages:

1. Once risks of racism, discrimination or perpetuation of inequalities are identified at each stage of the research or design initiative, then the project team (and ideally partners) should identify actions designed to mitigate these risks.

**Questions to consider:**

* What reminders, supports, and accountability systems can be structured into routine practice to keep equality as a high priority?
* What alternative reasonable actions could produce different outcomes?
* How can existing provisions to ensure ongoing data collection, public reporting, stakeholder participation and public accountability be improved with a focus on racial equality?

1. These should be listed, along with any time or resourcing implications. Ideally most actions should be incorporated as part of routine practice. However, some may have more significant timing or resource implications. These should be flagged.
2. At this point, depending on the timing of the EIA, a decision – with the project Executive and ideally funder/partner - should be made as to what steps are feasible to implement, within the constraints of project or initiative.
   1. If at an early design stage (pre-award), then these costs should be factored into proposals or resourcing plans.
   2. If at a post-award stage (i.e. after funding for the project is secured), then teams and Project Executive (in liaison with funder and partner) can consider whether to:
      1. Incorporate actions at cost to Dartington and proceed
      2. Incorporate actions at increased cost to funder and proceed
      3. Proceed without incorporating actions (if benefits are deemed to outweigh risks)
      4. Chose not to proceed with work (if risks outweigh benefits).

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| **1. Project-specific priorities for addressing inequality and discrimination** | **2. Risks of racism, discrimination of perpetuation of inequality** | | | **3. Planned actions to mitigate risks of perpetuating inequalities and discrimination** |  |
| **A. Project and partnership formation** | **B. Project design, engagements and implementation** | **C. Project analysis, reporting and dissemination** |
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STEP 5: IMPLEMENTING, MONITORING AND LEARNING

Stages:

**Questions to consider:**

* What are the success indicators and progress benchmarks?
* How will impacts be documented and evaluated?
* How will the level, diversity, and quality of ongoing stakeholder engagement be assessed?

1. Once the EIA plan of action is agreed, a designated implementation and learning lead should be identified for each action, along with timescales against which progress will be monitored.
2. Successes and challenges in relation to implementation of actions should be considered at regular project reflection and learning sessions (at least quarterly, ideally monthly).
3. This should include a review as to whether any new risks of racism, discrimination or perpetuation of inequality are identified (and if so, how these will be mitigated against, as per Step 4).
4. This reflective review should document key successes, challenges and learning in a project-specific anti-racism and discrimination learning log.
5. This learning should then the shared at team-wide quarterly learning meetings (incorporated into a shared organisational learning log for anti-racist research and design practice).

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