

Racial Equity Conversation Tool for Fundraisers

At Greater Twin Cities United Way, part of each fundraiser's role is to engage donors in our organizational value of equity, with the goal of furthering their understanding of and investment in our strategies to disrupt racial inequities. This includes responding to sometimes challenging questions from donors holding a wide spectrum of perspectives – from questioning what race has to do with prosperity, to calling on United Way to address racism more boldly.

We accept the risk that some donors may not choose to invest in racial equity, while embracing the abundance of opportunities that lie in authentic, one-to-one conversations on challenging topics.

To assist fundraisers leading one-on-one conversations with donors, this tool includes four examples of donor questions relating to our racial equity work. For each, we provide recommendations on how to answer the donor's query while leading them into a deeper conversation about United Way's strategies. We hope this tool helps fundraisers feel equipped to practice leading enriching conversations.

TIPS IN USING THIS TOOL

Make it personal: While we've done our best to make these scenarios conversational and realistic, this is not meant as a script that you must memorize and recite verbatim. Eric Nguyen, a colleague experienced in fielding tough questions on the fly, advises that integrating examples that resonate with you personally – either from this text or other sources in your life and work – will not only help you remember what you want to say, but will also let your passion shine through for donors, making your conversations more relatable and effective.

Take care: Conversations about racism can be mentally and emotionally taxing. Example donor comments draw from real conversations, and some may be difficult to read, including statements that deny the reality of systemic racism or resist changes to the status quo. Please engage in the self-care that works for you to stay focused and well.



Greater Twin Cities
United Way

SCENARIO 1

Steven, a longtime major donor who is white: United Way talks about systemic racism creating barriers for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander and other People of Color. You even prioritize funding to organizations with leaders of color and that focus on serving communities of color. Isn't this racist against white people? A lot of white people face poverty in the Twin Cities, and it sure doesn't feel like the deck is stacked in their favor when they struggle to pay bills. I'm successful because of my hard work and sacrifice – it hasn't been easy for me just because I'm white. I'm not sure I want to give to United Way anymore when I hear stuff like this.

Any donor can stop giving at any time without comment. In this case, Steven has invited conversation and a chance for us to share why we have the priorities we do. We may be tempted to simply correct Steven and seek the perfect facts and data to cause an epiphany. But abrupt challenges will likely shut down the conversation. Although it might feel uncomfortable, our best path to reveal what's great about our work to Steven is to be welcoming and highlight commonalities.

Fundraiser: First of all, Steven, thank you for these questions. As a longtime United Way supporter and a member of our community, you deserve to know the reasoning behind our investments. I also want to specifically thank you for addressing race and for sharing part of your personal story. I know these conversations can be difficult and this is clearly important to you and very relevant to your giving decisions.

May I take a few minutes to respond to the points you brought up? I might not magically secure your future support, but I am here to help you make an informed decision.

If your conversation is live, wait for Steven's permission.

What you shared about hard work and sacrifice really resonates with me, because I think you and me and United Way all share that value of hard work and feeling that everyone should be able to enter the workforce and feed their families, and all students should be set up for success.

If a white mom calls 211 because she needs access to a food shelf, she will get help. And if a nonprofit with mostly white leadership is the best partner to meet the most pressing needs in a particular community, we will partner with them. Our priorities consider race because Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and other People of Color face specific barriers.

To address poverty for our whole region, we have to put the medicine where the hurt is. Our strategy is to disrupt inequities based on income, race, and place, because these factors are the most critical to individuals' and families' ability to thrive. That means focusing on:

- Those with the lowest incomes, because everyone deserves a chance to eat healthy food in a safe, stable home, and get education and training to earn family-sustaining wages.
- Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and People of Color. Because these individuals face specific barriers in education and the workforce, even compared with white people of similar income and education levels. That doesn't mean it's easy for a white father to work his way out of poverty. It's hard. We just acknowledge that there are compounding challenges for a similar father who is Black or Indigenous, for example. So

when we combine addressing low income with addressing racial inequities, our impact can be much greater.

- Geographies where resources are scarce – for example, many areas of the nine-county metro where it's hard to find affordable groceries or child care. Because when you combine low income with racial inequities and living in a disinvested area, it makes it much harder for families to meet basic needs. That's where our investments can have an incredible impact.

So for me, this comes back to: Does hard work translate to stability and prosperity, for everyone? We invest the way we do to make sure it does.

I know I've been talking a lot, Steven, and I'd much rather listen. What are your thoughts and lingering questions?

If Steven chooses to engage more deeply, the following scenarios may be helpful in bringing him closer to our work.

SCENARIO 2

Kathy, a longtime leadership donor and recent major donor, who is white: I'm excited that United Way seems to be talking more boldly about equity in the past couple of years, but I still don't totally understand why race is a factor in your investments. If People of Color disproportionately experience poverty, can't United Way just focus equally on all families with low incomes? That way, you'd be addressing poverty without getting too wrapped up in conversations about race, which can rub people the wrong way. Everyone has the same basic needs, right? I like to give to United Way but I can't really explain to my friends why you focus so much on race. Donors want to focus on positive messages, and I worry that United Way could be seen as too political.

Kathy is competent at finding commonalities. But she's struggling to identify and value the extent to which Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and other People of Color in the Twin Cities experience poverty differently than white individuals and families, and the systemic inequities that we must address.

Fundraiser: Kathy, thank you so much for raising these important questions. I know it can be difficult to talk about race, so I want to also thank you specifically for engaging me in this conversation. I hope I can help you feel confident that our equity strategies are well reasoned, and that you feel equipped to be a changemaker and amplify our impact among your friends.

It's so true that on a very basic level, everyone shares the same needs: healthy food, a safe, stable home, education, and opportunities to participate in the workforce and build wealth. But it's also true that race and ethnicity are the largest predictors of inequity in our region. So we can't address poverty without specifically addressing racial inequities.

Kathy has asked some deep questions and is likely prepared for (and maybe craving) a substantial response. Invite her permission to dive in:

Kathy, I'd like to take a few minutes to answer your question on three levels where United Way works: individuals and families, organizations, and big systems. Does that sound OK?

If Kathy is in a rush, ask whether there's one area she's most interested in, and offer to provide the rest over email.

When we think about **individuals and families**: Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and other People of Color face specific opportunity gaps in education and the workforce, and experience housing and food insecurity differently vs. white families in similar situations. For example:

- In education, Minnesota has some of the worst racial inequities in the nation. And one small piece of that is, students are more likely to navigate high school and college and land in wealth-building careers if they're surrounded by adults who've already succeeded in our education and workforce systems. This is because gaps in our education and workforce systems make it hard to know what classes and experiences really count toward high-wage careers. Youth programs that center New Americans and first-generation college students can bridge those gaps, and changes to our education and workforce systems can fix those gaps for good.
- And in food security, a Latina mom might encounter additional challenges in providing healthy food for her family, if the food shelf she visits doesn't have the culturally appropriate food that her children will recognize and love.
- Further, let's say that same Latina mom lives in a ZIP code with a high percentage of Residents of Color. It's likely she'll find fewer wealth-building jobs in her neighborhood and that resources like grocery stores, housing, and transportation are in poor condition. This is not the result of any individual choice, but the impact of decades of regional disinvestment. So that mom has multiple real barriers to overcome as she works to support her family.

These inequities are why we prioritize programming that centers the lived experiences of People of Color when we build partnerships.

Racial inequities show up **at the organizational level**, too. Even though research shows that culturally specific nonprofits produce better outcomes in their communities, nonprofit leaders of color are less likely to have access to broad philanthropic networks and dollars. This is why we prioritize organizations whose leadership is reflective of and deeply engaged with the communities they support – to ensure the most effective nonprofits have a seat at the philanthropic table.

And **on a systemic level**, we can only make progress when we face the tough truth that disparate learning, earning, and housing outcomes are not the result of happenstance. Public policies have resulted in the disparity we see today. For example, racially exclusive land deeds were common into the 1950s, Indigenous family separation was routine through the 1970s (and Indigenous children still face extremely high rates of removal from their families), and disinvestment in diverse neighborhoods is still evident today. Recently, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these disparities, by disproportionately harming those who face the greatest barriers. Investing equally across all racial groups would simply perpetuate persistent disparities.

I bring all this up not to say that we should feel guilty about it or dwell on the negative. Rather, we acknowledge that United Way has a unique role that interfaces with the individuals, organizations, and systems. And therefore, because of your support, we have not only the power but also the responsibility to push for systemic changes. This is why we invest in initiatives like Justice for All and Pathways Home, to engage stakeholders like the Department

of Corrections and counties in disrupting unacceptable racial inequities in systems like criminal justice and foster care and housing, all of which contribute to the root causes of poverty in our region. This is part of how we can have a large-scale, lasting impact with your dollars.

We do all this because we have hope! We are certain a better future is possible, because changemakers like you are supporting us to disrupt the extent to which income, race, and place predict a person's ability to thrive.

Kathy, I know I just shared a whole lot, and I much prefer to listen. How are some of these strategies resonating with you? Where would you like more detail? Where do you have lingering questions?

SCENARIO 3

Anil, an executive in his 40s who became a major donor three years ago through his workplace campaign, and is Indian American: How can an old, white-led organization like United Way really advance racial equity? And when the vast majority of your donors are white, doesn't that disincentivize you from disrupting the status quo? Also, aren't you demanding more from your nonprofit partners than you are of yourselves, when you ask them to have leadership representative of the communities they support?

Fundraiser: Anil, thank you for raising these questions. Greater Twin Cities United Way is absolutely on a journey, along with many of our corporate partners, donors, and nonprofit partners. We have a lot of work left to do, but we also can't wait until our internal house is perfectly in order before investing in racial equity – it's both/and, and we embrace that.

We recognize that philanthropy is traditionally a white-dominated sector, so we're working to make our leadership, staff, and donors more reflective of the communities we support. We've revised board recruitment to better include people of color and those with lived experience with poverty or the corrections system. Forty percent of our board now self-identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (compared with 18% in 2018), and we expect that figure to continue to grow.

Among our staff, in line with equitable recruitment efforts, we have seen a steady increase in diversity 2018-2021, with the percentage of Staff of Color growing from 21% to 34%; we expect the trend to continue. Thirty-five percent of leaders director and above identify as people of color (vs. 11% in 2019).

But we are not relying on demographics alone to ensure our leadership is invested in racial equity. For example, we've engaged the Winters Group to lead our board of directors and staff leadership on a 9-month Racial Reckoning and Reconciliation journey. That journey helps our leaders to introduce and better recognize the characteristics of white supremacy culture and provides reflection and guidance on their own roles in addressing systemic racism.

And, Anil, you mentioned donors and to what extent a mostly white donor base will support disrupting the status quo. It is fair to say our donors are mostly white, and that we have more work to do to engage donors of color in our work. It's one of the goals that we identified in a recent equity audit, and since then we've taken the step of replacing our previous Campaign Cabinet with a new leadership body, the United Way Leadership Council, whose mandate is to develop strategies to diversify our donor base.

Anil, do some of these themes resonate with you? What parallels have you seen in the corporate world?

SCENARIO 4

Rosalind, a Black executive and major donor whose relationship has mainly been with United Way of King County in Seattle, but recently moved to St. Paul: I see Greater Twin Cities United Way talking about “racial equity” and “innovation.” How are you walking the walk? What has United Way actually done to address racism in the Twin Cities? And how are you honoring the innovation and expertise of communities of color?

Fundraiser: Rosalind, thank you for inviting this conversation. As a supporter and as a member of our community, you deserve to know about results. With your permission, I’d like to take several minutes to share specific changes and progress we’ve made over the past few years, and some areas where I believe we are set up to create even greater change. I’m going to talk about three areas: nonprofit amplification (aka grantmaking), innovation, and advocacy. Does that sound OK?

If Rosalind is rushed, offer to verbally focus on an area that’s most interesting to her, and to provide additional info over email.

In 2018, we adopted the strategy to disrupt the extent to which income, race or place predict a person’s ability to thrive. At that time, we introduced leadership representation aligning with supported communities as a factor in selecting multiyear partnerships – our largest area of investment. We also began granting general operating dollars, to honor our partners’ power to decide how they meet their goals.

It was a start, and **our multiyear funding priorities for 2022-25 go substantially further.** We recognize that investing more heavily in organizations led by and for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and other Communities of Color, and with a track record of results, leads to better outcomes. So we strongly prioritize those organizations. Part of what has propelled our grantmaking strategies forward is the fact that they’re deeply community informed. In addition to leveraging the expertise of our nonprofit partners, we engaged a community advisory group with professional and lived experience with homelessness, food insecurity, and inequities in education and economic opportunity. We will carry this community advisory practice forward into our innovation work.

In the innovation space, we’ve sunsetted our Culturally Powered Communities initiative, which provided grants and capacity building for nonprofits led by and serving People of Color. We did this because its success showed us that these priorities belong woven into our core investments – the best thing that can happen to an innovation initiative. Other innovations I’m proud of include:

- Full Lives, which has developed a model to partner with Communities of Color – specifically, with entrepreneurs and nonprofits – to support just, self-sufficient neighborhood food economies. The model grew out of North Minneapolis with support from United Way and has been replicated in Buffalo and Toronto. We’re raising funds for local replication.
- Career Academies, which is creating more equitable education and workforce systems by partnering with school districts and employers to build sustainable career pathways

that work for Students of Color. These 39 pathways in 16 districts engage Students of Color at *three times the rate* of similar concurrent-enrollment programs that were built without an intentional racial-equity lens.

- Pathways Home, which will launch in 2022 to break the pipeline into homelessness for children exiting foster care and adults exiting incarceration – two systems that contribute to our region’s extreme racial disparities in access to safe, stable homes.

And, if I could briefly add one more layer: **Our advocacy work** targets racial inequities, in part by developing our agenda in collaboration with nonprofit partners in a way that amplifies the voices of those with lived experience. Here are two examples:

- The Start Early Funders Coalition, which United Way leads to advance research and public policy to improve early childhood efforts in Minnesota. The coalition has adopted a commitment to racial equity and a strategic plan to “ensure all BIPOC children have access to high quality early care and education that is trauma-informed, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate.” One example of the coalition’s work is creating space for and preparing providers and Parents of Color to speak at the legislature, rather than speaking for them.
- Justice for All, which is a multiyear partnership with the St. Paul and Minnesota Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation, to transform a broken criminal justice system, starting with listening in conversations with those impacted by the system and together with systems players such as the Department of Corrections.

Rosalind, thank you for your patience while I shared a lot. Have any of the areas I’ve mentioned resonated with you? What lingering questions do you have? Are there areas where I can provide more detail?