





We believe it is because not nearly enough capable people with resources in this region have heeded our plea that we have reached this crisis point of complete breakdown, when the St. Louis region has entered the world's spotlight, not as one of its great places to live and work, but as one of its war zones. We need peace. But first, we need justice and equity, so that Michael Brown's death is not wasted, like so many young black lives before his, and with them the future prospects of this region and nation."

*Editorial Board of the St. Louis American  
August 14, 2014*

On the afternoon of Saturday, August 9, 2014, no one in the small community of Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis City, was prepared for the events and fever-pitch reactions that would follow the altercation and the subsequent fatal shooting of an unarmed 18-year-old Black teenager by a White Ferguson police officer. Reactions to the teen's death tested the town's 21,000 residents, as well as its elected officials, policies, and governmental structure.

The weeks and months that followed brought forth numerous events that would impact city council chambers throughout the region, houses of faith, and the legislature of Missouri, as well as individuals and families, across age, geographic, and socio-economic borders. A single four-minute encounter between a Ferguson resident and one of the city's sworn police officers sparked a fire of social uprising, public demonstration, government reactions, and national dialogue like the United States had not experienced in over 40 years.

This document seeks to map out the underlying conditions that led to the events in Ferguson in August 2014, highlight the community's response, and share some of the key lessons learned in the process.

Here in St. Louis, segregation and inequity have been an integral part of our reality for generations. They also provide the context for the events of Ferguson, which not only pushed us into the national spotlight, but forced all of us to confront our reality and acknowledge uncomfortable truths.

With this document, we hope other communities can learn from our experiences, and that, as a nation, we can work together to create a more equitable future for all citizens.

While the document includes a range of voices from across the St. Louis region, it leans heavily on the experience of the Ferguson Commission, which was appointed to examine these issues, and Forward Through Ferguson, the organization that was created to carry on its work.

This toolkit was created for the 2017 National Urban League Conference. To learn more, please visit [ulstl.com](http://ulstl.com).

To learn more about the Ferguson Commission or Forward Through Ferguson, please visit [forwardthroughferguson.org](http://forwardthroughferguson.org).

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# UNEQUAL OUTCOMES: THE STATE OF ST. LOUIS, THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA

## The State of St. Louis

As far back as the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which permitted slavery in Missouri while prohibiting it in the unorganized territory of the Great Plains, St. Louis has had a complicated, ugly history regarding race.

Nearly a century later, in 1916, two-thirds of St. Louisans voted in favor of a ballot referendum that became the first in the nation to legalize housing segregation. When that was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1917, St. Louis turned to “restrictive covenants.” These were clauses attached to property deeds and neighborhood association contracts drafted by real estate agents and White homeowners that prevented homebuyers from selling or renting to African Americans.

It wasn’t until the Supreme Court prohibited these covenants in 1948 that African Americans were even allowed to live in most of the towns in St. Louis County. As “White flight” changed the demographics of St. Louis City, restrictive covenants in the city gave way to exclusionary zoning policies in the suburbs, and segregation continued—a pattern that can be observed in major metropolitan regions across the country.

St. Louis was one of the last cities to desegregate its schools following *Brown v. Board of Education*, with the implementation of the St. Louis Interdistrict Transfer Program coming in 1983, nearly 30 years after that landmark ruling.

Not surprisingly, the effects of centuries of segregation and unequal treatment show up in the data today. When the Ferguson Commission looked at data sets examining health, education, employment, criminal justice, and more, in nearly every set of outcomes, Black St. Louisans fared worse than their White neighbors.

And for many, these disparities feel almost inescapable, as St. Louis ranks 42nd out of the 50 largest metro areas in the country in economic mobility, the likelihood that a family will move up the income ladder from one generation to the next (Raj Chetty, “Improving opportunities for economic mobility in the United States,” 2014).

These were among the harsh underlying conditions in the St. Louis region on August 8, 2014. But they were hardly unique to St. Louis.

## The State of Black of America

As outlined in *The State of Black America*®, the National Urban League’s seminal annual publication, now in its 41st edition, these outcome disparities exist across the United States. To track these disparities the Urban League created its National Equality Index™.

This Index summarizes how well African Americans and Hispanics are doing compared to White people in the areas of economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement. In 2017, the index found that rather than having a whole pie (100%), which would indicate full equality with Whites, African Americans are missing about 28% of the pie. Similarly, a Hispanic Index finding of 78.4% indicates that more than 20% of the pie is missing for Hispanics.

A recent study from the Institute for Policy Studies and the Corporation for Enterprise Development found that if average Black family wealth continues to grow at the same pace it has over the past three decades, it will take the average Black family until the year 2244 to build the wealth the average White family had in 2016. For the average Latino family, it will take until 2097. (“The Ever-Growing Gap,” Institute for Policy Studies and the Corporation for Enterprise Development, 2016)

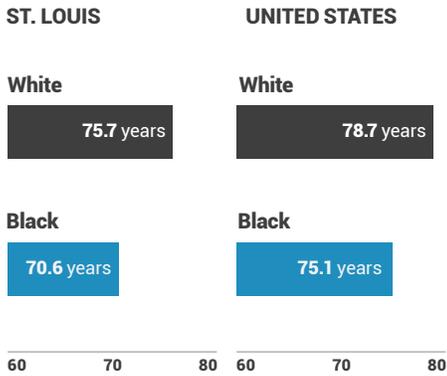


The conditions that led to unrest in Ferguson are not unique to Ferguson, or to St. Louis — they are similar to conditions in 150 cities across the United States. This is our shared challenge and our shared opportunity. We must respond with our best solutions and economic investments, not only in Ferguson, but in communities across the nation.”

Michael F. Neidorff, Chair, National Urban League

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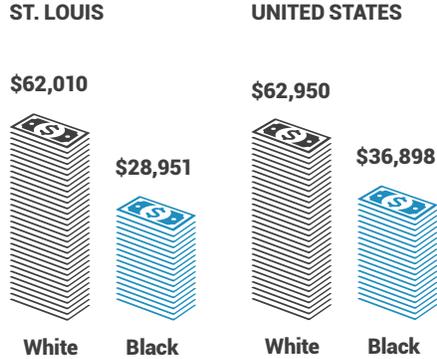
## LIFE EXPECTANCY



At almost twice the national gap, life expectancy for Black St. Louisans is five years less than their fellow White residents.

STL: Missouri Dept. of Health and Senior Services; US: CDC

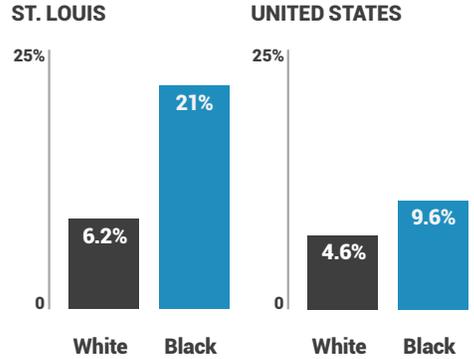
## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Nationally, average Black household income is only 58% of average White household income. But in St. Louis, it's even less—just 46%.

STL & US: US Census Bureau

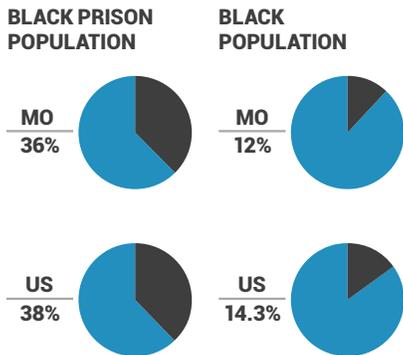
## UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



As the unemployment rate nationally sinks to historic lows, the rate for Black St. Louisans sits at 21%—closer to the 25% unemployment rate at the height of the Great Depression.

STL: US Census Bureau; US: Bureau of Labor Statistics

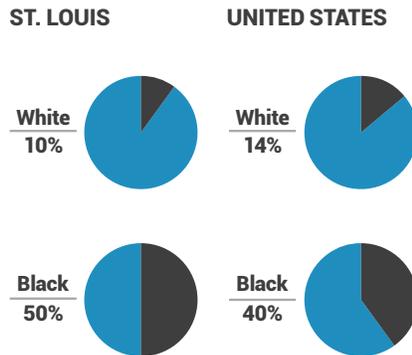
## RATES OF INCARCERATION



Black Missourians are incarcerated 3 times more often than would be expected based on population data.

US Department of Justice, US Census Bureau

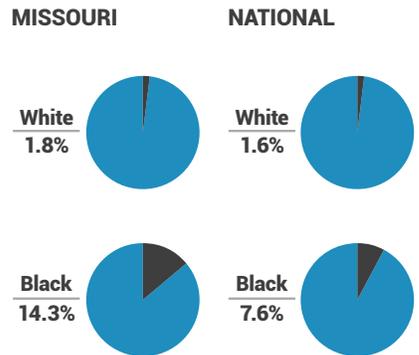
## CHILDHOOD POVERTY (UNDER AGE OF 6)



1 in 2 young Black children in St. Louis live in poverty, 10% higher than the national rate. 1 in 10 young White children in St. Louis live in poverty, a 4% decrease compared to the national rate.

US Census Bureau

## OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION



Black elementary students in Missouri schools are 8x more likely to be given an out-of-school suspension than their White classmates

The Civil Rights Project UCLA



The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis was founded following race riots in East St. Louis in 1917. The death of Michael Brown catalyzed the creation of Forward Through Ferguson nearly 100 years later. Both events revealed the systemic disadvantages and violence faced by Black Americans everyday. We know, however, that others in our country have experienced similar disadvantages and we believe that the strategies and lessons contained in this toolkit can be used to support the equity efforts of a variety of groups.

# The Catalyst for Action: August 9, 2014

## A Condensed Ferguson Timeline

This timeline is not a comprehensive listing of events, but a brief summary of how Ferguson became a shorthand for racial unrest, and how that unrest in St. Louis drove specific efforts for change. In the subsequent months, this sequence of events also became familiar as similar incidents and protests unfolded in other communities, including Baltimore, Chicago, New York, Charleston, St. Paul, and Cleveland.

**August 9th, 2014**

### **MICHAEL BROWN JR. KILLED**

In Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, Jr., an unarmed Black teenager, is shot and killed by a White police officer just eight days after his high school graduation. His body lay in the street for over four hours.

**August 9th, 2014**

### **FIRST PROTESTS OCCUR**

The night of Aug. 9th and in the weeks and months to come, community members respond with protests like the region had never seen before. These protests continued for over a year following his death.

**August 10th, 2014**

### **MILITARIZED POLICE RESPONSE**

Sustained use of militarized vehicles and tactics, including tear gas, by law enforcement agencies attracts national and international attention, putting racial division and police practices in the media spotlight.

**August 14th, 2014**

### **POLICE LEADERSHIP SHIFTS**

Governor Jay Nixon gives control of law enforcement operations in Ferguson to the Missouri State Highway Patrol. President Obama delivers his second address on Ferguson, urging peaceful protest and denouncing excessive use of force by police.

**August 20th, 2014**

### **GRAND JURY CONVENED**

Following a decision by the St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney, a grand jury convenes to begin determining whether to criminally charge Darren Wilson, the White police officer who shot Michael Brown.

**November 16th, 2014**

### **CONTINUED PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS**

Marking 100 days since Brown's death, hundreds of demonstrators stage a "die in" in downtown St. Louis, briefly blocking a major intersection by lying in the street surrounded by chalk outlines.

**November 18th, 2014**

### **FERGUSON COMMISSION APPOINTED**

As St. Louis awaits word of the grand jury investigation, Governor Nixon appoints the Ferguson Commission to conduct a "thorough, wide-ranging, and unflinching study of the social and economic conditions that impede progress, equality and safety in the St. Louis region."

## A SHARED FOCUS FOR THE WORK

A shared focus for this work is vital for any community that wants to address issues of inequity. In response to the events of Ferguson, many individuals and organizations in the St. Louis region were moved to act but unsure how to engage. The Ferguson Commission served as the focal point for change efforts in the region, and became a clear place where people could direct energy, resources, and actions. It also set a clear direction for the intense discussions that took place throughout late 2014 and early 2015 about moving the region forward.

### THE COMMISSION'S CHARGE

- To examine the underlying causes of these conditions, including poverty, education, governance, and law enforcement;
- To engage with local citizens, area organizations, national thought leaders, institutions, and experts to develop a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the concerns related to these conditions; and
- To issue an unflinching report containing specific, practical policy recommendations for making the region a stronger, fairer place for everyone to live.

### **"We have not moved beyond race."**

From the start, the Commission pledged to not just prepare another report that would gather dust in the Governor's office, but to develop a blueprint for action that would improve conditions in the region. Early in the process, the Commission's members knew they had to be bold about acknowledging race if their work was to lead to sustainable change.

In its report, the Commission cites author Lindsey Lupo, who had examined five commissions appointed in response to race riots between 1919 and 1992. She argues that historically, these commissions are appointed to calm the public and create the impression that the government is doing something. They "give the appearance of action but are little more than a tool to maintain the status quo," and, "social and racial issues in the cities are not actually addressed by the commission" (Lindsey Lupo, "Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America," 2010).

Lupo says that past commissions focused on economic revitalization "to the exclusion of social issues, such as racial tension, segregation, and discrimination. It is as though the commissions are arguing that our society has moved beyond race, thus the problems must be purely economic. But race remains at the root of the violence, as evidenced by its very inception with

every riot studied here being the result of white law enforcement harming a black civilian" (Lupo, 2010).

As the Commission put in its report, "We have not moved beyond race."

By so frankly acknowledging race—not only its impacts nationally, but specifically in St. Louis, which is the fifth most segregated metropolitan area in the country—the Commission signaled a willingness to confront the uncomfortable truths that regional leaders had too long ignored (Lois M. Quinn and John Pawasarat, "Racial Integration in Urban America: A Block Level Analysis of African American and White Housing Patterns," 2002).

### **An Emphasis on Policy**

To execute its charge, the Commission convened and listened to more than 3,000 community members, subject matter experts, and practitioners, who invested more than 30,000 hours exploring the root causes of the region's racial inequities. From their input, experience, and expertise, it became clear that the Commission had to focus on policy. It needed to understand existing policies and how they had contributed to the current state. And, in considering its recommendations, it had to identify what policies held the best hope for sustainable change.

Policy, after all, played an inarguable role in establishing the racial disparities the region was facing. The accepted

narrative of St. Louis' segregation was "White flight." But as Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute wrote in October of 2014, this explanation misses the whole truth.



No doubt, private prejudice and suburbanites' desire for homogenous affluent environments contributed to segregation in St. Louis and other metropolitan areas. But these explanations are too partial, and too conveniently excuse public policy from responsibility. A more powerful cause of metropolitan segregation in St. Louis and nationwide has been the explicit intents of federal, state, and local governments to create racially segregated metropolises."

*Richard Rothstein, "The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of its Troubles," Economic Policy Institute, October 15, 2014*

Rothstein adds that St. Louis was not exceptional.



I do not mean to imply that there is anything special about racial history in Ferguson, St. Louis, or the St. Louis metropolitan area. Every policy and practice segregating St. Louis over the last century was duplicated in almost every metropolis nationwide. Yet this story of racial isolation and disadvantage, enforced by federal, state, and local policies, many of which are no longer practiced, is central to an appreciation of what occurred in Ferguson in August 2014 ... Policies that are no longer in effect and seemingly have been reformed still cast a long shadow."

It was with this understanding of the potential power of policy to advance or impede progress towards Racial Equity that the Commission set about making its recommendations. With a focus on affecting change through policy, the Commission's report, titled *Forward Through Ferguson: A Path Toward Racial Equity*, advanced 189 calls to action that it believed would help

create a more equitable region. Each of those calls to action named accountable bodies, acknowledging the specific policymaking bodies with the capacity to make the recommended changes.

## Signature Priority Areas

The Ferguson Commission's 189 calls to action were organized around four signature priority areas—Justice for All, Youth at the Center, Opportunity to Thrive, and Racial Equity.

### Justice For All

The events in Ferguson shone a bright, national spotlight on law enforcement and the municipal courts, not just in Ferguson, but throughout the St. Louis region. The Commission identified priority calls to action for police reform, court reform, and consolidation of the region's fragmented police departments and municipal courts.

### Youth at the Center

Our region's youth present our greatest opportunity to impact positive and lasting change, in this and future generations. These signature calls to action speak to holistically supporting children, youth, and families.

### Opportunity to Thrive

Many factors impact an individual's opportunity to thrive. Key among them are health, housing, transportation, and financial stability. Unfortunately, for many in the St. Louis region and across the nation, these are not a given.

### Racial Equity

When the Ferguson Commission examined statistical outcomes on quality-of-life issues, Black people universally fared worse than Whites. Analysis showed that centuries of policy-level discrimination and institutional bias had created an environment toxic to people of color, and harmful to the region as a whole. This understanding clarified the Commission's goal of **Racial Equity: a state in which outcomes cannot be predicted by race.**

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*The question that equity raises is, "Do we give everyone the same thing, or realize that because of our history, policy, biases, and culture, we have to invest in giving everyone the best opportunity to lead happy, healthy, and fulfilled lives?"*

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“

I have people that came into my store and asked, 'Why are you not out here protesting?' That's not where I shine. I shine in being a help and offering employment to the young people of Ferguson, so they can make better decisions. I have 16 youth on my payroll. I just want to be their cheerleader. It lets them go down some avenues that they've never had the experience to go down. If you don't have the ability to dream outside that box, you'll only grow as far as what you can see. I'm praying and hoping that other businesses would see that, and that they would adopt the same type of relationship with the youth of their communities."

*Natalie Isaacs  
Founder  
Natalie's Cakes & More*

*Natalie (left) posing in her store with her daughter. The store was damaged in the Ferguson uprisings, but community members banded together to raise money and offer their labor to help her rebuild it.*



“

I've been cooking for a long time. Thirty-seven years to be exact. When you break bread, you break down walls. You feed the body, you feed the spirit. And when you feed that spirit, you can feed the fight therein. I remember the first time I started cooking out in Ferguson for a bunch of young folks out there. And I asked them, 'Why are you all out here lying on the ground?' They said, 'We ain't going home until we get justice for Mike Brown.' So I said, 'Whatever I can do to help you all, just let me know.' And one of them leaned over and he said, 'A little home-cooked meal wouldn't hurt nothin.' He must have known who he was talking to."

*Cathy "Mama Cat" Daniels  
Honoree at the Urban League of Metro  
St. Louis' 2017 Salute to Women in  
Leadership Awards*



# THE COMMISSION'S CALLS TO ACTION

Listed below are all 189 calls to action recommended by the Ferguson Commission. **The 47 Signature Priority calls are indicated in bold.** In blue are the calls that align with the Urban League's Main Street Marshall Plan for moving communities from poverty to prosperity. To read the full text of the calls to action, please visit [forwardthroughferguson.org](http://forwardthroughferguson.org). To read the Main Street Marshall Plan, please visit [soba.iamempowered.com](http://soba.iamempowered.com).

## JUSTICE FOR ALL

[Update Use of Force Statute for Fleeing Suspects](#)

[Revise Use of Force Policies and Training](#)

[Prioritize De-Escalation and Tactical Withdrawal](#)

[Establish Use of Force Database](#)

Minimize Use of Militarized Weaponry

[Assign Attorney General As Special Prosecutor in Use of Force Cases](#)

[Appoint Special Prosecutor in Use of Force Cases Short-Term](#)

**Assign Missouri Highway Patrol to Investigate Use of Force**

[Create Task Forces for Short-Term Investigation of Use of Force](#)

Pass the Protecting Communities and Police Act

Develop Policies for Use of Technology to Serve Special Needs and Disabled Populations

Use Technology to Limit Use of Force

Ensure Adequate Bandwidth for Use of Technology

Fund Technology Storage

Engage Community Advisory Boards for Technology Policy

Evaluate Effectiveness of Technology

Create Technology Clearinghouse

Clarify Public Record Laws

Fund Existing and New Laws

Formalize and Standardize Court Documenting Procedures

Clearly Define Municipal Court Procedures

Eliminate Sharing of Municipal Files

Conduct Annual Municipal Court Audits

Ensure Staffing of Annual Court Audits

**Create Civilian Review Boards at the Municipal Level**

**Create Civilian Review Boards at the County Level**

Handle Serious Incidents Swiftly, Openly, and Neutrally

**Consolidate Law Enforcement Agencies**

Evaluate Consolidated Departments

Hold Non-Consolidated Agencies to Shared Standards

Consolidate Dispatch Centers

**Consolidate Municipal Courts**

**Consolidate Police Training Centers**

Increase Funding and Support for POST

**Increase Police Training Hours**

Create a Municipal Courts "Bill of Rights"

Communicate Rights to Defendants in Person

Provide Defendants with Clear Written Notice of Court Hearing Details

Open Municipal Court Sessions

**Inform Defendants of Right to Counsel**

**Assign Public Defenders for Criminally-Charged Minors**

**Prevent Conflicts of Interest Among Judges**

**Prevent Conflicts of Interest Among Prosecutors**

Apply Conflict-of-Interest Rules Universally

Prevent Targeting and Collusion in the Municipal Governance System

Conduct Peer Review of Critical Incidents

Provide Mental Health Services for Officers

Support Officer Well-Being

[Require Psychological and Bias Screenings](#)

Notify Parents of Detained Minors

Change Rules for Municipalities Holding

Defendants for Other Municipalities

Provide Medical Services for People in Custody

Eliminate Punitive Impounding of Vehicles

**Train Municipal Court, Jail, and City Government**

**Employees in Constitutional Rights**

**Develop a Comprehensive Demonstration Response Plan**

Protocol for Demonstrations

Train for Incidents Requiring Multiple Law Enforcement Agencies

**Eliminate Incarceration for Minor Offenses**

**Treat Nonviolent Offenses as Civil Violations**

Close Records of Non-Violent Offenses by Minors

Expunge Old Convictions of Non-Repeat Offenders

Cancel "Failure to Appear" Warrants

Develop New Process to Review and Cancel Outstanding Warrants

Schedule Regular Warrant Reviews

**Collect Municipal Court Debts Like Civil Debts**

Determine Defendants' Ability to Pay

Assess Ability to Pay at Nonpayment Hearings

Consider Payment Plans and Fine Revocation

Facilitate More Positive Police-Community Interactions

Engage Civilians in Police Operations

Foster Police-Community Interactions in Schools

Seek Civilian Input on Police Programs and Policies

Engage Youth in Joint Training

Reform Juvenile Disciplinary Procedures and Practices

Adopt Alternative Strategies for Juvenile Interventions

Foster Positive, Proactive Police Interactions with Youth

Build Trust Among Youth

[Train Police to Better Engage Citizens](#)

[Include New Approaches in Anti-Bias Training for Police](#)

**Include Social Interaction Training in POST**

Enact Officer Identification Policies

[Prohibit Profiling and Discrimination](#)

**Include Implicit Bias and Cultural Responsiveness Training in POST**

Establish Search and Seizure Procedures for LGBTQ Populations

**Create Community Justice Centers**

Provide Municipal Court Support Services

**Establish Alternative Sentencing Options**

## OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE

### **Enhance Collaboration Between Educational Institutions and Employers**

#### **Ensure Employer-Educator Collaborations Build a Love of Learning**

Support Federal "Gainful Employment" Regulations

[Expand Funding for Public Colleges that Serve Disadvantaged Students](#)

Strengthen the Community Reinvestment Act

Embed Public Banking Models into Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)

[Build the Capacity of CDFIs](#)

[Invest in High Functioning CDFIs](#)

#### **Concentrate Financial Services through Empowerment Sites**

##### **Raise the Minimum wage**

##### **End Predatory Lending**

[Implement Earned Income and Child Tax Credits](#)

#### **Develop a State Supported Funding Plan for Public Transit**

#### **Identify Priority Transportation Projects for the St. Louis Region**

Promote Use of Public Transit

##### **Expand Medicaid Eligibility**

Provide Gap Coverage

[Increase ACA Marketplace Enrollment](#)

Protect Rights of Local Government

Protect the Rights of Workers to Organize

[Implement a Statewide M/WBE Program](#)

Launch an Employer Grading System for Economic Mobility

[Develop and Implement an Economic Inclusion Infrastructure](#)

[Prioritize Tax Incentives for Youth-Serving Job Programs](#)

Evaluate Job Training Success and Award Funding Accordingly

[Build a Poverty-to-Professional Model for Youth Serving Organizations](#)

##### **Create Universal Child Development Accounts**

Raise Awareness of Development Accounts

Encourage Savings With Tax-Refund Matching

Teach Financial Literacy to Section 8 Housing Beneficiaries

##### **Create Individual and Family Development Accounts**

Implement a State Section 3 Hiring Program

[Launch Best Practice-Driven Job Training Programs](#)

Assess Tax Incentives to Ensure that They Serve the Intended Population

Create Pathways for Lower Skilled Employees

[Expand Funding for Job Training and Wage Support Programs](#)

Modify Procurements Systems to Encourage

Hiring of Targeted Employees

##### **Preferentially Fund Job Training Programs that Show Impact**

[Implement Work-Based Learning Opportunities](#)

Identify Job Training Best Practices

##### **Build Healthy, Affordable Housing**

Use Federal Funds in Strategic Maximally Impactful Ways

[Expand the Statewide Housing Trust Fund](#)

[Expand the City of St. Louis Housing Trust Fund](#)

##### **Enact Inclusionary Zoning Ordinances**

Create a St. Louis County Land Bank

Stabilize Middle-Market Neighborhoods

[Institute Fair Housing Protections](#)

Prioritize Transit-Oriented Development

Encourage CDCs to Collaborate or Merge

Align Funding to Build Capacity of CDCs

## YOUTH AT THE CENTER

Deliver Trauma-Informed Care

Build Safe Neighborhoods

End Shame and Stigma

##### **End Hunger for Children and Families**

Review the Missouri Family Support Division

Adopt a Self-Sufficiency Model

Create a Discounted Youth Transit Pass

Encourage Paid Time Off for Volunteering

[Expand the Access Missouri Program](#)

[Review All State Scholarship Programs](#)

Support Post-Secondary Access for DACA Students

Create the Spirit of Missouri Fund

##### **Create an Innovative Education Hub**

Fund Organizational Capacity and Client Outcomes

##### **Create an Education Design and Financing Task Force**

Increase Health Insurance Coverage and Access

##### **Establish School-Based Health Centers & Trauma-Informed Schools**

Create School-Based Early Warning Systems

[Coordinate Support Efforts](#)

Measure Child Well-Being

[Create Annual Reporting Process](#)

Identify Convenient Transfer Schools

Hold Schools Accepting Transfer Students Accountable

Adopt the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) Calculation

Limit Criteria for Denial of Transfers

Amend Role of Assistance Teams

Negotiate Reasonable and Equitable Transfer Rates

##### **Revise School Accreditation System**

Veto HB42 [2015 Missouri House bill modifying the school transfer law]

##### **Support Early Childhood Education**

[Ensure Equitable Access to Rigorous High School Courses](#)

[Ensure College Counseling for All High School Students](#)

[Develop School Leader and Teacher Support Infrastructure](#)

##### **Reform School Discipline Policies**

[Expand Internship and Apprenticeship Opportunities](#)

## RACIAL EQUITY

##### **Broadly Apply a Racial Equity Framework**

##### **Create a 25-year Managed Fund**

Utilize Shared Guidelines

Ensure Language Access

Create Region-wide Benchmarking Process

Establish Regional Baselines

Disaggregate Data

Create a Rating System

Provide Trauma-Informed & Anti-Bias Training for Media

Train Moderators

##### **Engage the Faith Community in the Racial Equity Mission**

Create a Clearinghouse

Support and Encourage Creative Spaces

Create Incentive Programs

Design an Accreditation System

Create Neutral Space

## Toward Racial Equity

The events of Ferguson, the work of the Ferguson Commission, and the efforts of organizers, activists, and organizations like the Urban League proved to be a catalyst for the region. People and organizations have started seeking ways to engage in this work, sparking fresh dialogue and forging new alliances. While much work remains on the path to Racial Equity, there have been advancements in many arenas, including local and national legislation, the courts, and in the response of some nonprofits and businesses.

A new generation of leadership has emerged, with young people across the region creating new organizations, taking on key roles in established institutions, and calling on existing groups to redouble their efforts. Working together, youth, community stakeholders and residents have advanced a number of positive changes thus far, including a partnership with the St. Louis Promise Zone, the opening of a new Ferguson community empowerment center by the Urban League, and the “Keep Our Kids in the Classroom” campaign.



In my analysis of the Ferguson Commission –albeit in the incipient stages–I have found that genuine attempts have been made to truly understand, wrestle with, and work through social issues and racial tension. In particular, the Ferguson Commission’s focus on racial equity turns the modus operandi of other riot commissions on their head – where others, such as the commissions that followed the 1992 Los Angeles riot, tried to remove race from their study, the Ferguson Commission has boldly pushed for sweeping reforms that would promote racial equity in the St. Louis region.

*Lindsey Lupo, author, “Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America”*

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### St. Louis Promise Zone & Forward Through Ferguson Partnership

The St. Louis Promise Zone is a federally-designated geographic area that includes nearly 200,000 residents in North St. Louis City and North St. Louis County. In 2016,

the Promise Zone began a partnership with Forward Through Ferguson to advance both its work and Racial Equity in the region. “The premise behind the Promise Zone is collaboration, and we want to be intentional around gathering partners to ensure a successful process,” said Erica Henderson, Promise Zone Director at the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership.

The partnership included the creation of a Promise Zone Catalyst, dedicated to building capacity and supporting implementation of Racial Equity projects at the intersection of the Promise Zone’s goals and the Ferguson Commission’s report. It also included leading an application for 100&Change, a \$100 million grant competition from the MacArthur Foundation. More than 70 organizations and partners collaborated to prepare the application, which also spurred the creation of a collaborative grant-writing resource designed to help the St. Louis region secure more grant funding in the future.

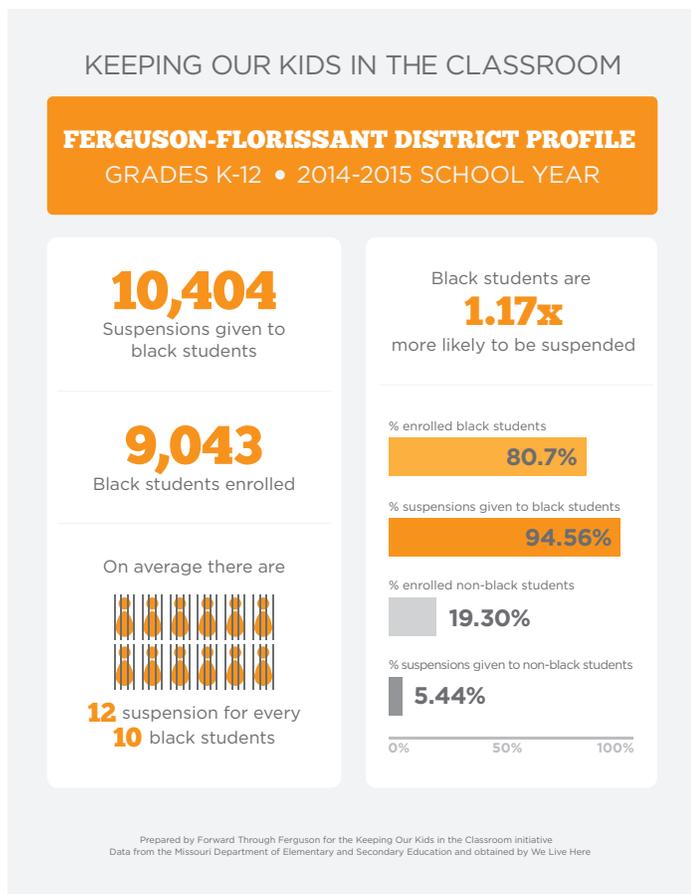
### Urban League’s Community Empowerment Center of Ferguson

In July 2017, the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis will open the Community Empowerment Center of Ferguson on the site of the QuikTrip convenience store that was burned down in Ferguson following the death of Michael Brown, Jr., nearly three years earlier. The center will house the Urban League’s “Save Our Sons” workforce program and offer job training and placement services. The Salvation Army, which co-owns the building, will offer after-school tutoring, financial assistance, and re-entry services.

The collaboration that made the Center possible reflects the coming together that St. Louis has seen in the last several years, with financial support for the project coming from multiple members of the corporate and civic communities, including QuikTrip, Centene, Edward Jones, Ameren, Emerson, Enterprise Holdings, Civic Progress, and the Regional Business Council. The project also employed minority workers for approximately 75 percent of the contracts involved in construction. “This extraordinary display of community spirit will allow us to serve even more North County residents and strengthen our ability to improve the quality of life for our neighbors,” said Michael McMillan, president and CEO of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis.

## Keep Our Kids in the Classroom

One of the priority areas where data revealed significant racial disparities was in out-of-school suspensions. This data is significant because a connection has been established between suspensions and incarceration, also known as the school-to-prison pipeline. To bring awareness to this issue and to help eliminate out-of-school suspensions for pre-kindergarten through third-grade students, Forward Through Ferguson partnered with Ready by 21 St. Louis, Metropolitan Congregations United, West County Community Action Network, and FOCUS St. Louis Impact Fellows. Together, the partners convened more than 600 community members, educators, and change makers from across the St. Louis region for a watershed public event—the Regional School Assembly – Keeping Our Kids in the Classroom.



During the public event, representatives from more than 25 school districts shared their ongoing work to reduce and eliminate out-of-school suspensions and made public commitments to change racially disparate practices. Profiles were also generated to disaggregate and visualize K-12 suspension data at school districts across the St. Louis region.

## Next Steps

### A Culture of Trying

In its report, the Ferguson Commission wrote:

If change is to happen, we first have to have a culture of trying.

In trying, new coalitions will be built, and a new sense of community will be developed. As the region tries together, people will learn new things from each other, and generate new ideas they never would have come up with if they'd said, "That's too risky to try," or, "Better to leave well enough alone," or worst of all, "That'll never work here."

We are working to build, support, and reinforce that culture of trying, because we know that without it, real progress is impossible.

### Critical Questions

As we engage in this work, we have tried to keep these critical questions in mind:

1. Are we remaining accountable to the report? To the voices in the report? To historically under-represented people and people of color?
2. Are we keeping our eye on how our efforts are closing the gap on our racial inequities?
3. Are we putting the work that needs to be done first and leaving "business as usual," invisible lines in the sand, and turf-protecting competition at the door?
4. Is the work being done in a way that is sustainable, institutional (as opposed to based on a single or set of charismatic leader(s)), and will live on past us?

We know that change can happen here—we have seen promising progress in a relatively short period of time. We know that change can be sustainable, and that St. Louis can model positive transformation for communities nationwide.

# A CHECKLIST FOR CATALYZING CHANGE: TOOLS FOR COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NATION

This section presents some of the key lessons we have learned in our work toward Racial Equity. We cover four strategies for positive change—Prepare for the Work, Engage with Community, Think Systemically, and Tell the Story of the Work.

A CHECKLIST FOR CATALYZING CHANGE			
Prepare for the Work	Engage with Community	Think Systemically	Tell the Story of the Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Build an Inclusive Team <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Core Values <input type="checkbox"/> Establish Process Principles <input type="checkbox"/> Set Shared Expectations	<input type="checkbox"/> Listen to Community Voices <input type="checkbox"/> Convene and Catalyze	<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge Race <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Make the Work Accessible <input type="checkbox"/> Create Communications Scaffolding

## Prepare for the Work

### Build an Inclusive Team

Make no mistake: effecting systemic change takes a team effort. In St. Louis, the first step was building the Ferguson Commission team. Next came building a network of smaller teams across institutions, sectors, and the region to advance the work. Some teams were short-term and project-based, while other teams operated over longer time periods, with team members stepping in and out as needed. But no matter the type, size, or longevity, it's important to be intentional about who makes up the team.

**Ensure Diverse Voices Around the Table.** When building teams, include a wide range of backgrounds and views, some at opposite extremes. Though this can make consensus difficult to achieve, it helps ensure a broad range of perspectives are considered, and vets proposed solutions with some of your toughest critics. It also strengthens the team's credibility and fosters community trust, because even if stakeholders are not happy with a decision, they can know their voices are represented in the decision-making process. Consider including voices from grassroots organizers, law enforcement, education, economic development, healthcare, government, clergy, small and large businesses, non-profits, and academia.

**Build a Network of Bridges.** Teams need and benefit from collaboration with many individuals, groups and organizations. Take a broad and inclusive approach to identifying partners, seeking them out in government agencies, among public officials, in the corporate community, with civic groups, in the nonprofit and foundation sectors, and in grassroots organizing and activist communities. "Dig your well before you're thirsty," developing relationships with potential allies and partners before you need something from them. As partners come to understand the nature of your work, they may suggest ways they might help, and lend their particular skills, resources, expertise, or networks to the effort.

**Invite Engagement.** Issue an open call for collaborators, whether team members or strategic partners, and promote this call widely and frequently. Opening the invitation for individuals and organizations to join in working on these issues breaks with the convention of limiting collaboration to the "usual suspects." It also helps ensure, both in action and perception, that proposed solutions aren't simply rehashed versions of old approaches.

**Leverage Existing Expertise.** Identify local, regional, and national experts who have examined these issues in-depth. In addition to reading their reports, invite these experts to meet with and advise your team. But also look beyond traditional expertise. Much learning about people's struggles and the human-scale impact of policy can come from non-traditional experts whose life experiences provide deep insight.

## Adopt Core Values

While this work is consistently difficult, approaching the work the right way increases the opportunities for success. The core values articulated below have come to define doing the work the right way.

**Honesty.** Be honest with yourselves, with collaborators, with the public, and with those who may least want to hear the uncomfortable truth.

**Authenticity.** Be true to your mission. Face the uncomfortable truths.

**Accountability.** Hold yourselves accountable for abiding by your core principles and adhering to those values as you do this work. Hold accountable bodies responsible for their contribution to the current state of affairs, and to their role in the work that lies ahead.

**Transparency.** Make your process open and visible. Transparency is critical to trust, accountability, and credibility.

**Vulnerability.** Be strong, for the work demands strength, but be vulnerable, too. Do not pretend to have all the answers. Acknowledge that this work is hard, and be willing to ask for help.

**Humility.** Remember that it is an honor and a privilege to do this work. Always remember that this work is bigger than any one of us.

## Establish Process Principles

Working towards generational change can be overwhelming. Establishing principles for your process can help you stay on track day-to-day, project-by-project.

**Adopt a Discovery Mindset.** In working toward Racial Equity, expect to discover things you could not have known when you set out, such as the extent, connectedness, and origins of systemic issues. To remain flexible in your thinking about both challenges and solutions, adopt a discovery mindset: expect surprises, and assume there will be major learnings at every step.

**See Plans as Useful Starting Points.** Even though it may change, a plan is still valuable—it provides a starting point and a way to get things moving. So make plans, but don't cling to them too rigidly or fall in love with them. As you engage in the work and listen to community voices, you'll be flustered, run into unexpected roadblocks, and things you think will

work won't. As your understanding of the challenges evolves, plans have to change accordingly.

**Prototype and Iterate.** While there are many theories behind this work, the work is not theoretical. In other words, you can map out plans, projects, and ideas on a whiteboard forever, but until you bring them into the real world, you'll never know if they work. Develop an idea, evolve it into a prototype, and put it in front of an audience to see what works and what doesn't. Then go back to the drawing board, evolve and adapt it, and go through the process again. Be prepared to work through multiple iterations of a concept before landing upon the right solution.

**Abandon Failed Ideas.** Embrace failure as an essential part of the process. This doesn't mean giving up quickly; prototype and iterate on an idea until you've given it a fair shot. But if after multiple iterations it still isn't working, abandon it. There is value in learning definitively what *doesn't* work. In addition, ideas, phrases, concepts, and other snippets of work developed for a failed effort will often resurface later, in a new approach, a new idea, or a new framing of an old idea.

**Drive Towards Execution.** In pursuing generational change, it's essential to keep an eye on the future. Future planning often involves big-picture, high-concept ideas. But to make progress and maintain momentum in the present, seek to strike a balance of long-term vision and a practical, pragmatic approach to concrete next steps.

**Remember that Process is Product.** The end results you seek may be years away, but the processes developed in pursuit of these results are themselves a product that can be valuable in the long term. So invest in strengthening and recording your processes. When working on problems that have never been solved, there may be best practices and research to aid you, but there is no complete guidebook. The process you innovate, utilize, build on, occasionally fail with, and ultimately learn from, is a key product of your work. Build in checkpoints for asking how the process is going. Document your process along the way.

## Set Shared Expectations

While you can't know what you will find as you begin this work—what will you hear from citizens once you truly listen? Who will support your work, and who will resist?—setting shared expectations for how you will approach the work and what might lie ahead can prepare you to meet challenges as they arise.

**Challenge Assumptions.** Our assumptions frame how we diagnose problems and consider solutions. They dictate who we ask for help and who we don't. Too often, these assumptions are based on old narratives that no longer hold true. To find innovative solutions, challenge your assumptions about the current state—what's working as well as what's not. Start with a question: What are we assuming is true about our current reality? Examine those assumptions. For example, do you assume most in your region are aware of the different rates of traffic stops for Black vs. White residents? What is your assumption based on? If you assume yes, you may attribute lack of action to address the gap to indifference. But if you assume no, lack of action can be attributed to lack of awareness—and you can then think of ways to address that problem.

**Define Multiple Successes.** We have defined success as achieving Racial Equity: a state in which outcomes are no longer predictable by race. That clear definition helps shape the work to be done and the metrics used to measure it. But a generational goal like that won't be achieved quickly or easily. So establish short-term definitions of success as well, to measure progress and effectiveness now, and determine where strategic or tactical adjustment is needed.

**Expect and Embrace Chaos.** Executing the kind of collaboration needed to change structures that have been built up over centuries is by definition going to be harder and messier than working in silos. Lean into that discomfort. Prepare to be adaptable and flexible. Large-scale collaboration introduces variables that will throw wrenches into your work. Despite this extra level of complication, what can be achieved through collaboration is worth the trouble.

**Plan to Build New Muscles.** This work is hard—no surprise—and while resistance to change is a predictable difficulty, a less-obvious challenge is the seemingly basic task of creating an operational infrastructure that allows everyone who wants to contribute to find the right role and have an impact. Though many people and organizations may raise their hands to help, turning that goodwill into tangible outcomes takes coordination, collaboration, communication, and experimentation. It also requires trust, persistence, and patience. You need to build and strengthen these “muscles” to do this work well. Achieving systemic change means developing these muscles continually, region-wide.

## Engage with Community

### Listen to Community Voices

To truly serve, meet people where they are and serve them there.

**Begin with Radical Listening.** The uprisings in Ferguson made clear just how many community members had felt invisible and unheard for so long. Fellow citizens were hurt, frustrated, and angry. This crisis, and the process it initiated, was a call to truly listen, so that actions could be inclusive of all voices, not just privileged or politically-connected ones. We say “radical listening” as a reminder to listen openly and patiently; to seek first to understand, then to understand some more. Focus on listening not to respond or explain, but so those who have historically and consistently not been heard can actually feel heard, valued, understood, and validated. This kind of listening often brings forth uncomfortable truths. That's the truth you need to hear, and be accountable to.

**Commit to a Trauma-informed Approach.** Trauma and toxic stress can be thought of as a one-time or ongoing deeply disturbing experience, often brought on by physical, economic, cultural, emotional or environmental assault. The passion and emotion seen throughout the region was rooted in generations of significant trauma and toxic stress. Thus, while seeking systems-level, policy-driven change, commit also to serving and supporting those experiencing trauma because of systems-level, policy-rooted problems. Making healing a community priority opens access to new resources, and creates new connections to help people deal with the trauma in their communities and lives.

### Convene and Catalyze

One of the most significant outcomes of the region's response to Ferguson has been the many ways people have come together to address the issues underlying generations of racial inequity.

**Bring New People to the Table.** This work involves convening a lot of tables and catalyzing a lot of conversations. To make those meetings inclusive and productive, find ways to bring new people to the table. Work to bring people to a common table who have never been at the same table before. Bringing new voices to the table, and bringing new perspectives together, brings new questions, new insights, and new awareness of blind spots that can lead to new solutions. Even if you think someone won't accept an invitation to

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How are we perpetuating these systems of inequity and, basically, the school-to-prison pipeline? I'm seeing minds open more and more to accept that this is a systemic problem that cannot be changed by giving teachers a curriculum or specific strategies. If the majority's mindset is the way it is, and they never question it, then nothing's going to change no matter how much the curriculum is changed.”

*April Fulstone  
Teacher  
Wydown Middle School*



“

Time and time again what we find is that the legal system is just taking an already bad situation—folks against whom all the odds are already stacked—making it worse, and doing so under the guise of law and order or equal application of the rules. Our clients are disproportionately stopped, disproportionately arrested, disproportionately charged, and disproportionately sentenced every step along the way. You can't make any sense of it other than to say that the system has a life of its own and it has always operated that way.”

*Blake Strobe  
Skadden Fellow, Staff Attorney  
ArchCity Defenders*



your table, ask anyway—when pursuing big, ambitious goals, many organizations, including those who have often been left out of previous coalitions, will be interested in rolling up their sleeves and participating.

**Lean In to Radical Collaboration.** Collaboration means more than just having others sign on to help do the work you want to lead. True collaboration means applying creative thinking to who is invited to the table, what work is addressed at that table, and how those at the table will approach the work. We say “radical collaboration” as a reminder to think beyond obvious links and consider unexpected connections; when you see the links between housing, schools, law enforcement, municipal courts, economic opportunity, transportation, and health, it’s easy to see how incomplete past efforts have been, and how much more robust and inclusive collaboration needs to be. “Radical collaboration” is also a reminder to set egos aside and suppress the instinct to protect our own turf.

**Align Efforts Toward Action.** The Ferguson Commission report advanced 189 calls to action, all aimed at creating a more equitable region. These calls to action provide a clear index against which to measure Racial Equity efforts. We encourage anyone working to advance Racial Equity to align their efforts with these calls to action by conducting an alignment analysis. Alignment in strategy and approach is critical to optimal resource investment and is the fastest route to achieving the transformational change envisioned by the Commission and demanded by the region.

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Alignment analyses are an essential tool to:

- Facilitate coordinated action on a common agenda.
- Identify areas of synergy.
- Suggest areas for potential growth and opportunities for enhanced alignment.
- Ensure core principles are embedded in the recipient’s work.

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**Keep People at the Table.** Opening up decision-making to include new people is vital. Keeping people engaged, even when the conversation gets uncomfortable or when solutions seem far away, is essential for real progress. No single meeting will be enough to make sustainable change. It’s essential to keep bringing people back to the table, to keep collaborating, to keep making those tables productive spaces for the work.



The Racial Equity Roundtable is a dynamic example of accountability through vulnerability and shared knowledge. It’s easy for organizations to feel isolated—like they’re the only ones trying to develop a Racial Equity lens or implement racially equitable policies. Yet when they get together, they can see that there is no straight line for this work, and become more comfortable pushing themselves to move forward rather than remaining inequitable.”

*Dr. Kira Hudson Banks  
Professor, St. Louis University  
Facilitator, Racial Equity Roundtable*

# Think Systemically

## Acknowledge Race

“We know that talking about race makes a lot of people uncomfortable. But make no mistake: this is about race.” - Ferguson Commission Report

**Disaggregate Data.** As the Ferguson Commission examined disaggregated data—findings in which large data sets were separated out into smaller sets that indicated how outcomes differed for different groups—racial disparities in outcomes became clear, even when controlling for income and economic conditions. To be able to effectively solve the problem, you have to be able to accurately name the problem. To accurately name the problem, you need to disaggregate the data.

**Lean Into the Discomfort.** Talking about race, inequity, and privilege makes people uncomfortable. And even when some people at the table are comfortable talking about these issues, not everyone else is. Instead of

backing away and avoiding these topics, acknowledge the discomfort and talk about them anyway. The only way forward is to address race openly and honestly.

## Prioritize Policy

Our interest in effecting generational change has led us to focus on policy over programs.

**Embrace Complexity.** Can you understand education outcomes without examining housing segregation? Can you understand housing segregation without examining financial policy? Understanding the interconnectedness of issues leads to an understanding that real progress on any single issue can not be made without looking at the systems and structures in which that issue exists. Let this understanding drive you to convene stakeholders from all facets of the system to do work together.

**Emphasize Policy Change for Long-Term Impact.** Writing in *Governing* magazine, Ferguson Commission co-chair Starsky Wilson wrote, “Programs can’t eliminate the systemic injustices that any group faces.

## CREATING YOUR RUBRIC FOR POLICY CHANGE

As the number of calls to action produced by the Ferguson Commission neared 200, there became a need to identify and prioritize which specific policy recommendations would have the greatest impact toward equity.

A rubric was created to score the recommendations by a common measure. The Commission scored the calls to action based on whether they were transformative, urgent, and unflinching— three criteria it had emphasized throughout its process. To determine your criteria, review and discuss your effort's mission, principles, and values. Below is a sample of the Commission's scoring rubric.

	Transformative (0-4)	Urgent (0-4)	Unflinching (0-4)
	Will this call to action create a long-term impact or cause positive systems-level change? Is it innovative and effective?	Will this call to action address pressing issues or disparities?	Does this call to action present root cause-driven solutions that call out core issues or disparities?
Ex. 1: Direct police departments across the state to revise use of force policies and training to prioritize de-escalation.	3	4	4
Ex. 2: Create a discounted public transit pass for youth to get to services and jobs, regardless of whether or not they are in school or are employed.	2.5	3	2



“

Nationally, this is true, but especially in St. Louis – where you live and the color of your skin determine whether or not you can fully utilize and realize your financial dreams.”

*Paul Woodruff  
Executive Director  
Prosperity Connection*

They can help people manage the effects of these injustices, but they don't overcome or cure them.” While programs can help alleviate the community pain that exists today, effective policies help prevent pain from occurring in the future. But because most non-profits focus on program-level rather than systems-level change, challenge those partners to zoom out—to see how flawed policies have played a key role in creating a racially segregated and inequitable region, and to consider how policy change can lead to Racial Equity.

**Apply a Racial Equity Lens.** Applying a Racial Equity lens means examining existing and proposed policies, initiatives, programs, and projects to determine how they address and eliminate existing disparities for racial and ethnic populations. The following are initial questions to help to bring equity and disparity into clear focus:

- Who is this effort (policy/initiative/program/project) designed to benefit?
- How might different racial and ethnic groups be affected differently by this effort?
- What in this effort is designed, or can be intentionally realigned, to decrease or eliminate racial disparities?

## Tell the Story of the Work

### Make the Work Accessible

While some of our region's citizens were acutely aware of the costs and impacts of racial inequity when this work began, others were largely unaware. If the region remained as divided in its awareness and understanding

of the work as it was in so many other areas, real change would be impossible.

**Speak Human, Not Jargon.** The Ferguson Commission's charge was to return a report to the Governor, but the Commission did not see the Governor as its only audience. The Commission wanted to make its report “the people's report,” because it saw its work as accountable not just to the Governor, but to the people. With this audience in mind, the report aimed to minimize jargon and explain its ideas and recommendations in accessible language. We have continued this approach since the report's release.

**Remember the Learning Curve.** The deeper you get into this work, the easier it is to assume that everyone knows what you know—that they understand how to interpret the data, that they appreciate the history and context, that they understand complex policy, that they see these issues as you do. It's important, and humbling, to remember that you did not always know what you know—you had to learn it—and others may need you to (patiently) bring them up to speed. Speak to your audience where they are, not where you are.

**Tell Personal Stories.** Though there was ample data to demonstrate racial inequity in the region, too often data fails to change hearts and minds. We have adopted a storytelling strategy to put a face and a narrative to abstract issues, making them real, human, and concrete. Data can be easily dismissed, but you can use stories to challenge audiences to confront and engage with the people whose lives are reflected in that data. We tell stories in every media, and have learned that the most personal stories often resonate most broadly (and get the most clicks, likes, and shares).

## Create Communications Scaffolding

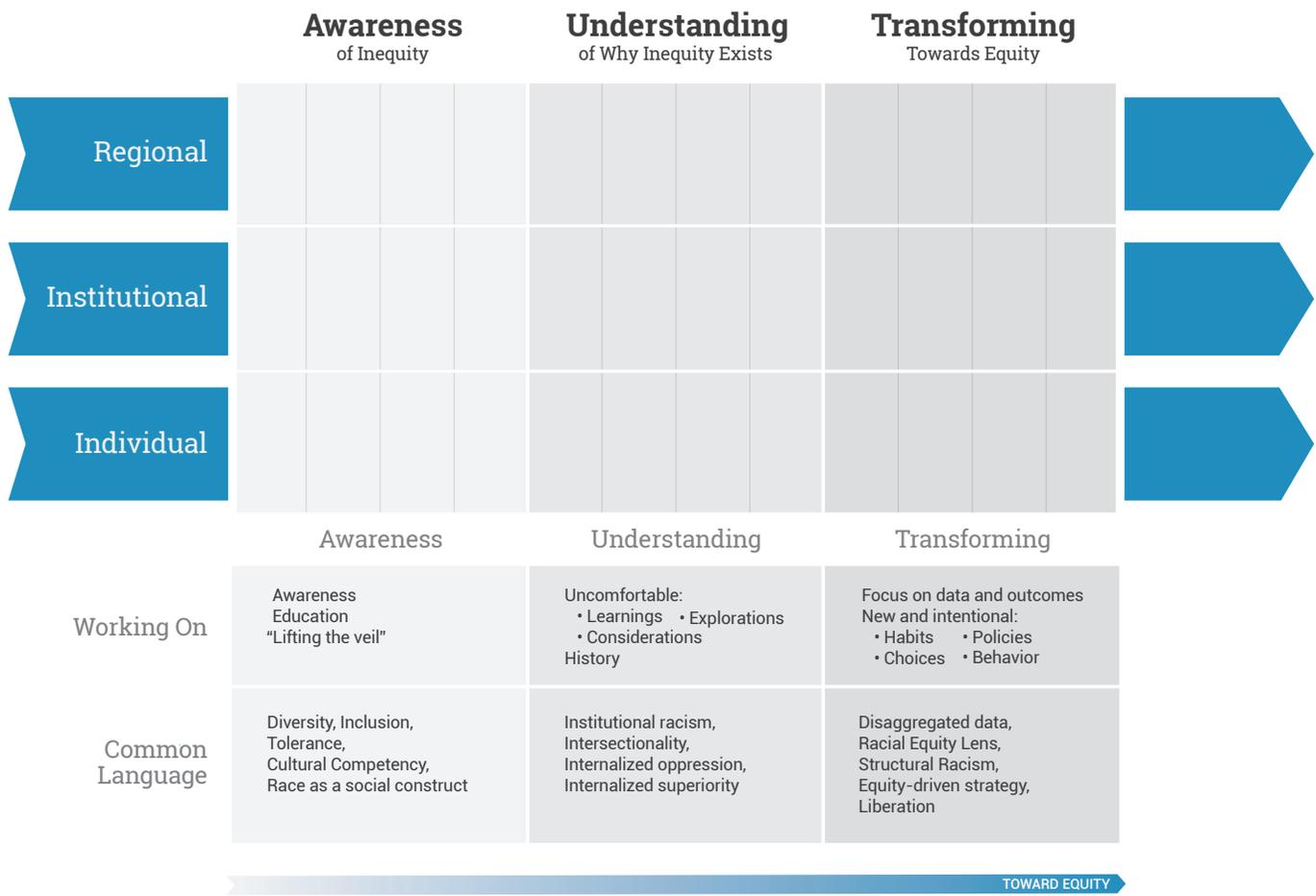
This work addresses a wide range of issues and concepts and can be incredibly complicated, even for those who work on it every day. Investing in communication infrastructure can help audiences engage with the work.

**Establish Shared Language.** When working on these issues, it's important for everyone to speak the same language. Establishing common vocabulary and consistent definitions can help get people on the same page. "Racial Equity" is a good example. When the Ferguson Commission report was released, regional understanding of the term was limited. Many people confused equity with equality, diversity, and inclusion. Efforts to create a clear shared definition—a state in which outcomes are not predictable by race—meant

continually explaining and clarifying the concept. By spring 2017, Racial Equity, as our work had defined it, had become a key issue in the City of St. Louis mayoral race.

**Provide Models.** Visualizing complex concepts can help people understand them more quickly, remember them, and share them with others. For example, we developed "A Path to Racial Equity," a model that helps people and organizations see the full path toward Racial Equity, distinguish between different stages, locate themselves and their projects along it, and identify steps to move forward. It also facilitates more productive conversations by presenting specific language and framing for ideas people have felt or sensed but not quite been able to put words to. Download the model at: <http://forwardthroughferguson.org/get-involved/pathtoraciaequitytool/>.

## A PATH TO RACIAL EQUITY



## **CLOSING THOUGHTS: COULD AN EFFORT LIKE THIS WORK PROACTIVELY?**

The death of Michael Brown Jr. and the community outcry in response to it created a movement in the St. Louis region. This movement generated an urgency and focus that translated into the work of the Ferguson Commission, community partners like the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, and numerous related groups. This urgency and focus mobilized individuals and organizations. It kept media and community attention on the Commission and on the issues it explored. It also gave the Commission leverage—to bring people to the table and keep them there. It generated action, not just discussion.

While the Ferguson Commission and many of the efforts connected to it arose in response to a specific situation, what happened in Ferguson didn't create that situation—it revealed difficult truths that had been the reality for many people for many decades; deep truths that were present and manifested almost 100 years ago in the East St. Louis race riots that sparked the creation of the Urban League affiliate in St. Louis. The underlying issues that led to these situations exist today, to varying degrees, in every metropolitan area in America.

But does a community need to wait for an inciting incident to have the urgency and focus this work requires? Put another way, can this work succeed without the backing of the Governor, and without the urgency or proximity of #Ferguson?

We believe a proactive approach to this work can be effective if a community can turn the pain of inequity from something common and accepted into something that is no longer mundane. If leaders in that community could make their collective history feel discrete and tangible, and convey the severity of trauma and the weight of toxic stress, perhaps an incident would not be necessary to incite change. Instead, the stark reality of the atrocities sustained by inequity—in terms of health, wealth, access to opportunity and any number of other indicators—would be polarizing enough to catalyze action.

To make this possible, key influencers as well as grassroots organizers would need to stand up and declare that this is an urgent issue that must be addressed now—before it becomes something the community is forced to react to. All this is, of course, challenging, but worthy of pursuit.

The relationship between communities and the systems that traumatize them is fraught with tension. But in this tension we can find the dynamic possibility for real change. We do not have to wait for our communities to explode before we work to align community members and institutions around a common set of shared priorities. We can come together today to address what is preventing us from thriving and undertake collective action that advances lasting, positive change.



# FORWARD THROUGH FERGUSON

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