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Learning Habits for Equity

Bringing an equity
and values-based
lens to five learning
habits.

DEVELOPED BY
Julia Coffman
Dr. Albertina Lopez

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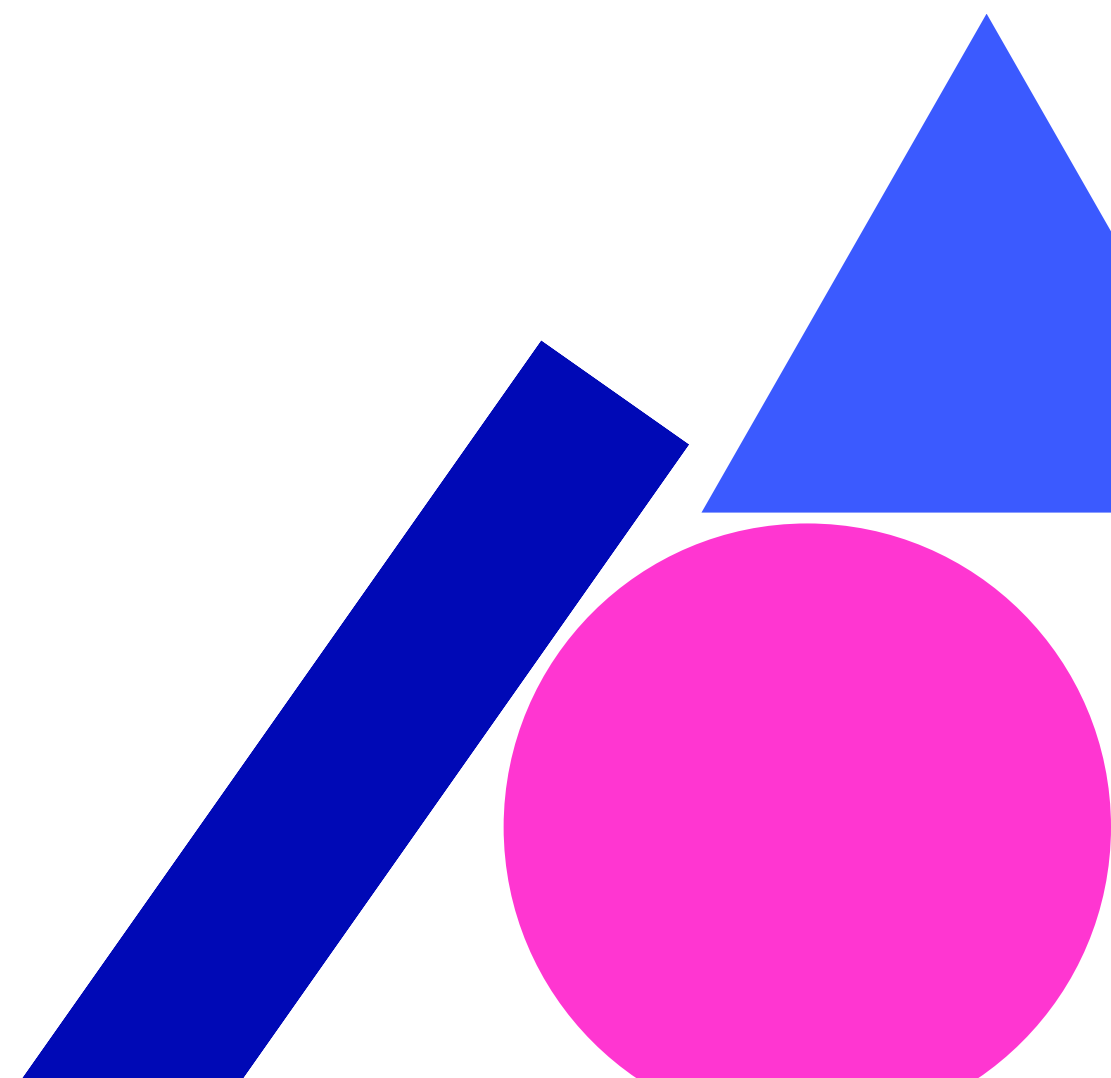


Introduction

This equity tool is a complementary addition to CEI's article, [5-A-Day: Learning By Force of Habit](#).

For each of the five learning habits, we have included a short description, ways that you can use the habit to advance equity, and practice questions for you and your team to grapple with.

Explore away.



Making our thinking visible

We need to identify the hypotheses and assumptions that undergird our thinking and pinpoint about what we need to learn. This habit helps us to identify where we have the most uncertainty in our strategies or thinking, and therefore where we have the best opportunities for learning.

USE THIS HABIT TO ADVANCE EQUITY BY:

- ▶ Making underlying assumptions and mental models about how change happens visible so that they can be contested by others within and outside the organization.
- ▶ Providing working definitions for what we mean by concepts related to equity and justice (e.g., racial equity, systemic racism, decolonization, people of color, ally, white privilege, culture, intersectionality, oppression, etc).
- ▶ Creating space to be inclusive of different kinds of expertise so that everyone's views are invited and considered credible and legitimate.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ▶ Who shares their thoughts, to whom, and for what purpose?
- ▶ How are alternative perspectives received and respected?

Asking powerful questions

The kinds of questions we typically pose may lead to information that is a useful input into learning, but they often don't help us determine what to do next. This habit results in questions that, if answered, will make a difference in how we do our work.

USE THIS HABIT TO ADVANCE EQUITY BY:

- ▶ Giving an opportunity to grapple with who the strategists are and therefore who gets to pose the questions. Questions should be relevant to equity- and justice-oriented actors and what they are grappling with externally, or to the foundation's role in trying to make their visions possible.
- ▶ Collaboratively making decisions about which questions matter and will be prioritized with resources and reflection time.
- ▶ Allowing for answers that represent multiple truths from different perspectives.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ▶ Who determines the questions of significance and do they address differential outcomes and power dynamics?
- ▶ How do the questions constrain what solutions are considered?

Combating our biases

Analysis made without attention to our biases and disconnected from quality data can lead us to learn the wrong thing and make uninformed or even bad decisions. This habit ensures the inputs we use for learning are rigorous and systematic and not just based on what we have gathered from our own limited vantage points.

USE THIS HABIT TO ADVANCE EQUITY BY:

- ▶ Interrogating how dominant frames—white racial, colonizer, patriarchal—are influencing our thinking and behaviors.
- ▶ Including voices that are normally discounted or ignored.
- ▶ Using methods and tools that prevent internal groupthink and create meaningful channels for the voices of staff with less power to challenge perspectives and assumptions of dominant voices (e.g., tools such as devil's advocacy or seven hats).

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ▶ What social biases do we have?
- ▶ How do we actively challenge biases tied to social identities like race, gender, class, ability, and others?

Attending to causal inferences

We need to explore the relationship between our actions and their outcomes—intended and unintended—in order to learn about the choices we have made or could make. This habit helps us pay attention to what did or did not happen as a result of what we did, and to explore alternative explanations for the changes we observe.

USE THIS HABIT TO ADVANCE EQUITY BY:

- ▶ Digging into root causes of racial and other social inequities beyond surface-level explanations and being attuned to contextual specificity instead of big generalizations.
- ▶ Including a diverse variety of ways of knowing and thinking about how change happens.
- ▶ Recognizing that examining causal inferences may point toward certain actions that can be taken, but these actions should not be seen as "solutions." Instead, the rationale for taking one action or another will be based on the perspective of the individual or team making the inference.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ▶ How deeply are people exploring root causes and systemic factors that reproduce or combat oppression?
- ▶ How is your organization's power affecting the systems in which it intervenes?

Answering the “now what” question

After we have experienced an event or received new information, ensuring we learn from it requires asking ourselves what happened, why it was important, and what it implies about our future actions (What? So What? Now What?). This habit ensures we don't skip the third question—it forces us to identify how insights generated will be applied.

USE THIS HABIT TO ADVANCE EQUITY BY:

- ▶ Being intentional and transparent about who gets to sit at the “now what” table, why they are included, and why other parties may be excluded.
- ▶ Expanding answering the “now what” question to include community and other organizations working on and toward racial equity.
- ▶ Exploring the implications of different “now whats” for different people before a “now what” is settled on.
- ▶ Considering what it means to have inclusive and equitable decision-making processes in tension with not asking too much of nonprofits' time.
- ▶ Trusting in other decision makers' motives and competence.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ▶ Whose interests are considered in decision-making, and who holds decision-makers accountable?



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