



## **OVERVIEW**

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) launched a two-year Racial Equity Commitment Pilot Program (the Commitment Program) in May 2022 following a period of open enrollment for interested APTA member organizations. Program participants follow a roadmap for advancing racial equity on behalf of their organizations. This document provides background information on the Commitment Program including describing the roadmap and associated core principles and outlining the operational components of the pilot program, and calling on APTA members to formally commit to racial equity.

## **BACKGROUND**

Improving diversity, equity and inclusion in the transit profession and association is one of APTA's strategic priorities. Over the years, APTA has demonstrated this commitment by establishing a Diversity and Inclusion Council and, in July 2020, the Racial Equity Working Group. The Diversity and Inclusion Council produced a strategic plan in 2017.

In recognition of the disparate health and economic impacts of the ongoing pandemic, the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and so many others, and the systemic racism and long-standing racial inequities that are deeply ingrained in our society - the APTA Board of Directors approved a Racial Equity Action Plan on April 1, 2021. The Action Plan outlines how APTA can make a transformational impact on racial equity and best support members in their efforts. It establishes five goals, one of which is to provide APTA members with a pathway for advancing racial equity. To that end, the APTA Racial Equity Commitment pilot program has been developed.

## **PURPOSE**

APTA's Racial Equity Commitment Program provides members with a tangible roadmap for advancing racial equity as part of a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion framework, beyond legal compliance and with a view to continuous improvement. It is designed to meet

members where they are, whether they already have a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion program in place with a clear focus on racial equity or are just taking their first steps toward that goal. In that context, the roadmap, based on the five core principles below, provides guidelines for initiating a racial equity plan, while offering enough flexibility to tailor the roadmap to each member's unique organizational and geographic characteristics.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

The five core principles are:

1. Make racial equity an explicit strategic priority for your organization.

*This could include the adoption of a commitment to action on racial equity by the Board and/or executive leadership, and assessing what financial, operational, programmatic, and human capital will be placed towards achieving racial equity and ensuring it is part of the organizational sustained fabric and culture.*

2. Undertake an annual diversity, equity, and inclusion climate assessment of your organization on the perceived employee experience of existing policies, practices, and procedures from the perspective of diversity, racial equity, and inclusion.

*This can include surveys, focus groups and listening sessions.*

3. Review and analyze demographic data covering both what is internal to an organization (e.g., employees, resources, business partners etc.) as well as external (e.g., revenue service, products and projects, ridership, community partnerships etc.) to develop a baseline on how existing policies, practices and programs impact racial equity.

*This could include but is not limited to the following data points:*

- *the current demographics of the workforce for front-line, managerial, and executive and board leadership levels*
- *the extent to which workforce demographics reflects customer and community demographics*
- *vendor diversity, including the level of access to and involvement of Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs)*

4. Put in place evidence-informed policies, practices, programs, and processes for creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable environment for workers, and customers,

including identifying best practices for responding to the use of hate-related behavior/language/signs.

*Institute training and discussion forums on racial equity to promote understanding and actively shape organizational culture. Clearly define hate-related behavior and establish and publicize related penalties, and appeals processes for each identified policy violation(s). Establishing policies would require working with collective bargaining groups/labor, employee codes of conduct, employee training programs and understanding what is enforceable based on local and state law.*

5. Establish programs, tools and dedicated resources that engage executive and board leadership and staff at all levels on the meaning and importance of racial equity and how they can help realize the organization's racial equity strategy as part of a broader effort on diversity, equity and inclusion.

*Define the meaning and importance of racial equity and highlight the moral, legal, and business cases for advancing racial equity. Determine how programs, tools and resources can be tailored to the size of the organization and adapted over time as organizational needs change.*

## DEFINITIONS

To facilitate effective communication and ensure clarity, the Commitment Program also identified seven key terms that may be used often when discussing this pilot program: social identity, intersectionality, diversity, inclusion, equity, racial equity, and anti-racism. Each term is defined below:

- The term “social identities” means how we see ourselves and how others see us with respect to major social categories. Their meanings are not fixed but take shape in particular social contexts. They can be self-claimed and are frequently ascribed by others. Examples of social identities include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, class, disability status. Source: Vanderbilt University.
- The term “intersectionality” means the complex, cumulative ways in which the effects of multiple social identities and related forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. – *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. April 2017, Merriam-Webster Incorporated.

- The term “diversity” means the representation of all our varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking and communication styles, etc.), collectively and as individuals. Source: Ford Foundation.
- The term “inclusion” builds a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all people. We believe every person’s voice adds value, and we strive to create balance in the face of power differences. We believe that no one person can or should be called upon to represent an entire community. Source: Ford Foundation.
- The term “equity” means fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources for all in an environment built on respect and dignity.
- The term “racial equity” means the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares in key life outcomes such as education, health and economic status. Racial equity is viewed as one part of racial justice, and thus also includes work to address root causes of inequities not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them. Source: Center for Assessment and Policy Development.
- The term “anti-racism” means to work actively to oppose racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. An anti-racist idea is any idea that suggests racial groups are equals in all of their apparent differences and that there is nothing wrong with any racial group. Antiracists argue that racist policies are the cause of racial inequity, Source: *How to Be An Anti-Racist*, Ibrahim X. Kendi. One World, 2019, p. 24.

## **PILOT PROGRAM**

APTA launched the Commitment Program as a two-year pilot in May of 2022. This section outlines the operational and logistical details of the Commitment Program including the purpose of the pilot, eligibility for participating, commitments made by participating members and the organizational benefits to participating in the pilot program.

Through this pilot, APTA aims to test the efficacy of the five core principles as a roadmap for racial equity in the transit industry, establish a baseline on racial equity measures and identify self-assessment strategies to help an organization determine its readiness for each step of the roadmap.

Following the two-year pilot program, APTA will publish a report with analysis of the initial experience and recommendations for improving the commitment program, including establishing standardized metrics, identifying essential resources, and determining how to structure recognition levels to measure and reward progress in advancing racial equity. In addition, APTA will continue to populate its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resource Hub with resources, reports, and other information to assist APTA members.

Pilot program success will be measured on the level of member engagement, the effectiveness of peer learning mechanisms and educational resources provided and the ability to document tangible racial equity outcomes based on implementation of the core principles.

### Commitments

Members who volunteered to participate in the Commitment Program are committing to taking the following actions in Year 1 and Year 2 of the pilot:

#### Year 1

- Determine the scope of the pilot and whether the member organization will focus on advancing racial equity among one or more of the following stakeholder groups: employees, customers, business partners and/or community partners
- Conduct climate assessments and review and analyze demographic data for the selected stakeholder group(s)
- Develop a tailored working definition of racial equity that is relevant and measurable in the context of the member organization's work
- Identify measurable goals and a related action plan based on findings from the climate assessment and review of data
- Communicate with the relevant stakeholder group(s) about the assessment findings, demographic data, goals, and action plan
- Identify and dedicate the resources required to both advance and sustain racial equity, including staff time and training for staff at all levels
- Submit an interim progress report at the end of the first year that includes:
  - Identification of stakeholder groups
  - Status of climate assessment
  - Definition of racial equity
  - Measurable goals for advancing racial equity based on findings of climate assessment
  - Communication efforts with stakeholders
  - Resources utilized, including number of staff hours and training provided, to advance racial equity

## Year 2

- Develop a working group, committee, or other structure to implement the goals and action plan, including a mix of staff at various levels of the organization and executive leaders who can serve as sponsors and mobilize resources toward a specific goal
- Implement the organization-specific action plan for advancing racial equity
- Track and communicate key milestones, challenges, lessons learned and other key takeaways from implementing each goal and identify training provided over pilot period
- Submit a final report at the end of the second year that includes:
  - Describe efforts to advance action plan including identification of those involved, the challenges encountered, and lessons learned, other takeaways, training provided and outcomes to date
  - Description of communication efforts regarding milestones

## Benefits

The Commitment Pilot Program aims to directly contribute to the body of knowledge on advancing racial equity in the transit industry, networking, and peer-to-peer learning with other APTA members. Pilot program signatories will be considered founding signatories of the commitment program.