We believe that in order to truly advance racial justice in a long-term and sustainable way, organizations must name and frame racism explicitly in their organizing.

What does it mean "to name & frame racism?"

To name & frame racism is to explicitly and publicly use language and analysis that describes an issue as a matter of racial justice. In other words, you are addressing an issue for which racism is one of the root causes, and you clearly explain how people of color are disproportionately impacted by the issue. This framing has to be done intentionally and consistently with your members and the public, even if that is not the only frame put on the issue.

Unless we clearly talk about and educate people about the existence of racism as a current and critical social justice issue, we will lose the culture war. In other words, we will allow racist institutions to perpetuate the myth throughout society that racism is no longer relevant, undermining our ability to dismantle it.

Naming and framing race and racism is about proactively creating opportunities within your organizing to do political education about racism.

In order to create a successful racial justice frame, we suggest the following:

- Develop a clear description of the racial inequity you want to address through your organizing and integrate it prominently in your messages to members, the media, and the public.
- Research the details of the disproportionate impact (inequity) on people of color in order to back your messaging up with strong facts.
- Look for opportunities in your framing to challenge the traditional racial divisions of labor and roles in our society.
- Try to provide a clear suggestions of how institutional racist practices can change.
- Of course, in order to do the above things, you need to pick an organizing issue that lends itself to naming and framing racism.

Why is it important to name & frame racism in our organizing and program work?

1. **In order to advance racial justice, it has become necessary to argue the existence of societal racism.**

Before the civil rights movement, more or less everyone in the United States agreed that there was an institutionalized system of racial inequality. People debated whether this system was <u>just</u>, not whether it existed. Since the mid-'60s, when sweeping federal laws were passed that largely instituted "equality under the law," there has been a steadily increasing denial of the existence of racism, or at least of institutionalized racism. White people increasingly believe that, while individual acts of meanness based on racial prejudice persist, racism as a system that oppresses all people of color is a problem of the past. Judging by the print in today's newspapers, the country's race problems seemingly have more to do with so-called reverse discrimination against white people and cultural defects of at least some peoples of color. Therefore, to advance racial justice, it is increasingly necessary to first argue and prove the <u>existence</u> of institutional racism.

2. Naming & framing racism reclaims our right to define our own reality.

One way racism and other forms of oppression are perpetuated within the dominant society is by institutions renaming and re-framing our reality. **By calling out and naming racism for what it is, we are engaging in a fundamental and critical form of resistance, reclaiming truth and reality.** How damaging is it when the media, schools, legislatures and other institutions call racist myths truth?

Example: Politicians and mainstream media have defined welfare reform as a way to protect hardworking taxpayers from mostly single, mostly women of color, mostly mothers of several children who are "abusing" the system. This definition of reality has been used to blame families in poverty for their lack of resources. When, instead, we choose to define this lack of resources as a result of racist, sexist and profit-driven institutions we take a first step toward creating real solutions. [*Note: it was only once welfare rights organizers began desegregating the welfare system – winning access for poor people of color who had been excluded – that the welfare system became a target. And, it's only in the last few years, as the system has been largely dismantled, that the "typical" recipient of assistance is now a women of color.*]

3. We cannot defeat (or at least contain) racism unless we name it for what it is.

It is not enough to work for reforms and policy initiatives that may positively impact people of color or move forward racial justice if we are not explicit about racism as a root cause of the problem. We must not only attack institutional racism but also the racist culture and beliefs that support and propagate racism. Ultimately, **if we are not educating and advocating for people and institutions to think and act in anti-racist ways, then we are NOT addressing the root causes and are allowing for inevitable rollbacks of any of our victories**. We aren't going to end racism by tricking racists and racist institutions.

Example: If we are working on an issue that is fundamentally about racial justice but our key frame for the issue is about economic efficiency - "it would save the city money" - we may be able to convince people it is the right thing to do today, but those same people could do away with the policy in a heartbeat based on some other argument tomorrow. Or those people could vote for a completely racist initiative on the same ballot because of the economic efficiency argument. We must move people politically, not just stick with what is expedient. Of course, this makes our work harder.

4. By naming & framing racism you can take the "mask" off of coded language and denial.

In organizing we're often taught to find broadly popular, "common denominator" issues and to avoid divisive ones. But when the issue is about racism, people generally respond to "coded" messages and ideas about race, even if that's not how you frame your messages or demands. Trying to make the issues about something else can make your arguments irrelevant to decision-makers and the public. By naming and framing racism, you may have a better chance of influencing your target audiences. If you name and frame the issue of racism, people can no longer be in denial and base their actions on myths that justify those actions.

Example: Washington voters overturned that state's affirmative action laws in 1998. Voters were able to justify their positions in a variety of ways, including that they were *supporting* civil rights! The ballot title was "Washington Civil Rights Initiative" and the case was not effectively made through mainstream media, etc. that institutional racism persists and that affirmative action is a necessary, if only partial, remedy. The *No on 200* campaign targeted white women voters who were seen as possibly going either way on the issue, and designed

messages that pointed out the benefits to them of affirmative action. But research has shown that affirmative action is widely perceived by whites across gender as a *race* issue, with Black men seen as the primary beneficiaries. By trying to make the issue about gender, the campaign seems to have missed the mark, failing to convince a majority of white women voters to reject the repeal of affirmative action.

5. Naming & framing racism can help us connect with our constituency, particularly people of color.

By naming racism and calling it out the way it is, you are more likely to connect with your constituency, if your constituency is people of color, because you are speaking to their *reality*. Amilcar Cabral, a revolutionary fighting Portuguese colonizers in Guineau-Bissau in Africa, said that leaders must always tell the truth as a matter of integrity and as a necessary means to keep trust with the marginalized, the oppressed – their constituents. It's hard to motivate people to engage in struggle when you're not naming things the way they are. Calling the problem economic mismanagement, when your members (or would-be members) know that the problem is racism, perpetuates the racist myths about the problem and will inevitably alienate parts of your constituency. Tell it like it is and people will know you are speaking the truth and develop trust in your organization, rather than become skeptical of a message that doesn't speak to their reality.

6. Naming & framing racism can prepare us for post-campaign work.

What happens if your campaign loses when you decided, for short-term gain, to avoid naming and framing racism? Now you've failed to win your demands AND you've also failed to educate anyone about the problem of institutionalized racism that you were fighting. If you frame and name racism, you have created a context in which the post-fight still positions you to work with your constituency. And, hopefully, you have developed a higher level of consciousness about institutionalized racism with the public and your membership. If you are fighting a defensive battle against a racist initiative and lose, then unless you have named and framed around race, racism has now been further institutionalized *and* that reality is invisible! How do you now draw attention to the fact that racism has won a major victory, when the fight was never framed around racism?

Are you are Naming & Framing racism well?

Did you frame it as a racial justice issue?

Did people involved with the campaign see the work as a racial justice issue?

Did anyone outside of the campaign learn anything about racial inequity and racism?