

# ACTION AND ALLYSHIP

AN ON-RAMP TOWARDS EQUITY

[vermont.gov](http://vermont.gov)  
[racialequity.vermont.gov](http://racialequity.vermont.gov)



## ACTION & ALLYSHIP

---

*This guide has been adapted and aggregated from public and private sources, and should be considered preliminary information for people seeking to learn about equity. Many of the concepts here that specifically discuss racial equity can be applied to equity for other historically marginalized groups, including people living with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ community, people living in poverty, religious communities, and others. Perhaps most important, equity measures often tend to benefit several of these groups at once, for several reasons: First, many people carry intersectional identities, so equity measures often touch those intersectional communities. Second, the same social, economic, and legal structures are often used to discriminate against various groups, so reforming those systems often has widespread impacts across these groups. The information contained herein is not exhaustive, and is reflective of policies that have been demonstrated to be successful in numerous jurisdictions and across political lines.*

### CRIMINAL JUSTICE, IMMIGRATION, LAW

Many Americans do not understand the history and complexity of the immigration system, or how heavily the U.S. relies on other countries for skilled labor, unskilled labor, materials, food, and finished and cultural products. Further, many Americans do not know the history and context of the social and political strife in other countries that was exacerbated by U.S. intervention and foreign policy, and the impact that had on modern-day immigration to the U.S. As a result, discussions about immigration tend to revolve on who is doing things “the right way” and who is not, without full understanding of the legal nuances and the complicity of Americans in the process. For example, the inexpensive goods and services Americans consume at ever-increasing rates are made possible because of loopholes or lax enforcement in labor and immigration policy—people in the U.S. benefit economically and culturally from this, but simultaneously judge their immigrant neighbors harshly for being caught in the middle.

Learn about the history of immigration law in the U.S., and how it has been manipulated to perpetuate discrimination against groups like Irish, Italian, Central and South American, Chinese, Japanese, and other ethnic groups and nationalities. Explore where your frequently-used products come from. Look more closely at the employees of your local stores, farms, and service centers, and understand how much you rely on the labor and cultural offerings of immigrants, and how your demand fuels the system that often exploits them. Support programs aimed at supporting immigrant populations, especially undocumented populations, and remember that there are human costs and economic costs to abandoning these communities.

Body-worn cameras and dashcams have been demonstrated to help keep law enforcement accountable for their conduct (and also to protect officers).

Find out whether your local law enforcement agencies outfit all on-duty officers with body-worn cameras and require that the cameras be turned on immediately when officers respond to a police call. If not, write to your city/town representatives and police chiefs/sheriffs.

De-escalation techniques have been proven to reduce the likelihood of police use of force—in fact, de-escalation techniques work in many scenarios like in relationships, in schools, in mediation/negotiation environments, and in customer service settings. To be most effective, they take regular practice.

Find out whether your city or town currently employs evidence-based police de-escalation trainings and techniques. If not, write to your city or town government representative and police chiefs/sheriffs.

Decades of research show deep disparities in incarceration and sentencing. This has shattered millions of families, and has fueled false stereotypes about criminality between racial groups. It has also impacted voting rights due to disenfranchisement laws, which further disconnect ex-offenders from society and successful reentry.

Call or write to your state and federal representatives about reducing mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug crimes, reducing sentences for non-violent drug crimes, passing “safety valve” law to allow judges to depart below a mandatory minimum sentence under certain conditions, and passing alternatives to incarceration.

Resources: [Families Against Mandatory Minimums \(FAMM\)](#); [Study](#) on disparities in incarceration; another [study](#)

Despite copious data showing that Black Americans and White Americans consume cannabis at similar rates, Black Americans are far more likely to be arrested and sentenced for possession than White Americans are.

Contact your state and federal representatives to advocate for changes to policy and practices to narrow the gap, and to prioritize people who have been negatively impacted by drug enforcement as participants in emerging legal markets.

People of color are already overrepresented in prisons generally, but private prisons and detention centers hold even more people of color as a proportion of their populations. Further, prisons often use inmate labor to produce goods and services at rates of cents per hour and charge inmates for basic services like telephone access, undermining the concept of fair labor and straining their already tenuous ties to their support networks.

Divest from private prisons and detention centers. Divest from prisons that use exploitative labor practices. Get your city/town, company, place or worship, etc to divest.

While it is shocking to see abuses between law enforcement and civilians, we have only witnessed a fraction of these incidents and there are many that never come to light. The advent of smartphones and other personal technology makes factfinding much easier in these cases, and often leads to more just outcomes (or perhaps less unjust outcomes).

If you can **safely** do so, film or watch public arrests, as a way to witness to any improper actions by law enforcement. This does not give you license to editorialize, narrate, sensationalize, or dramatize the situation—remember, you may be witnessing one of the worst things to happen in a person’s life. The sole purpose of this action is to provide an additional set of eyes to reduce the chances of abuse or misconduct. This is not your ticket to social media clout.

## HOUSING, ECONOMICS, EMPLOYMENT

*Where* we live is one of the biggest determinants of *how* we live. Historical segregation, lending discrimination, inequitable neighborhood investment, and property tax policy have caused the flourishing of some communities and devastation in others. By intentionally investing in areas needing opportunity, we can change this course and make life more livable no matter where you live, work, play, or learn.

Invest, build, and hire in diverse neighborhoods. Support minority-owned businesses and banking institutions. Conduct impact assessments to ensure that development projects will not have disparate impact. Advocate for equitable siting of facilities—enjoyable ones and less enjoyable ones.

Resources: on [Opportunity Zones](#); read about redlining [here](#) and [here](#), and view interactive maps [here](#).

Many companies have recruiting channels that are predominantly white, and networking often yields more opportunity and more supportive managers for white employees than for others.

Find out your company’s policy on recruitment and retention of diverse employees, and evaluate who the leadership tends to be and who tends to be excluded. Advertise and promote jobs in more places than the same ones you typically use—share your job openings with indigenous education funds, HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), universities with diverse student bodies, and publications that reach marginalized communities.

Wage inequity exists across the nation, where people of color are not paid the same amount for the same work. Those who also are members of other marginalized groups (LGBTQIA+, women, people living with disabilities) experience even steeper gaps in income. Statistically, Latina women and Indigenous women need a Master’s degree before they surpass the wages of a Caucasian man with only a high school diploma. Further, An African-American woman with a Masters degree makes \$7 less per hour on average than a Caucasian man with a Bachelor’s degree.

Advocate for pay equity. If you are in a position that determines who gets hired or how much they get paid, make sure you are compensating people equitably for their work. Establish pay standards for similar roles to reduce arbitrary salary decisions, and do not use past pay history as a gauge for how much an applicant should be paid going forward (because using that as a guide will mean that people with a history of being underpaid will never be able to catch up to fair wage levels). Focus less on credentials and school reputation, and more on skills and experience. Recruit in broader circles—share your job openings with indigenous education funds, HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), universities with diverse student bodies, and publications that reach marginalized communities.

One of the most common ways that people experience discrimination is in the workplace, either through overt or subtle discriminatory or harassing behavior. Because people depend on their jobs, many feel afraid to come forward, or they don’t want to appear confrontational. As a result, many offensive behaviors like hurtful jokes, comments, personnel decisions, inequitable promotions/demotions/transfers, and other incidents go unreported and

unresolved, causing people to feel defeated and leave. This contributes to high turnover of women, people of color, people living with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ employees, and others.

Do not tolerate discrimination or harassment when you witness it in the workplace. Speak up about it using human resources channels, or share with a trusted supervisor. Find out what policies and trainings your employer has about discrimination and harassment, but remember: you're not going to train your way out of racism. It takes consistent reflection and decisive action to show that the workplace does not tolerate discrimination.

## ORGANIZING & CIVIC LIFE

Equity work has been happening for many, many years. As important as it is to take direct action, it's also incredibly powerful to support those who are already steeped in the work and mobilized.

Donate to organizations that engage in equity work, and join their listservs to remain connected and up-to-date on the latest developments.

Resources: your local Black Lives Matter Chapter, the [National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls](#), the [NAACP](#), [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), [United Negro College Fund](#), [Black Youth Project 100](#), [Color of Change](#), [The Sentencing Project](#), [Families against Mandatory Minimums](#), [A New Way of Life](#), and [Dream Defenders](#).

Legislative bodies conduct a lot of research when considering a new bill, but that research does not always evaluate all the implications of the proposed policy. Equity impact assessments have been shown to reduce the number of racially disparate policies and increase fairness in policies. Most states already require fiscal and environmental impact statements for certain legislation, so the concept is familiar to them.

Contact your state and federal legislators to require racial impact statements be required for all criminal justice bills.

Resources: [Impact statements](#)

Historical representations of discovery, exploration, conquest, heroism, and nation-building have centered figures who openly engaged in genocide and broke countless treaties. Despite this, numerous place names and holidays still bear the names of these disgraced figures, while obscuring truly worthy figures from being acknowledged and celebrated.

Know what indigenous land you're living on by looking at [this map](#) and research the groups that occupied that land before you did. Find out what local activism those groups are doing and consider donating your money or time to those efforts. Contact your local representative to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day like [these cities](#) did. Review the street and landmark names in your town to understand whose history we are celebrating and whose we are omitting.

## THINKING, SPEAKING, AND LIVING EQUITY

Many people assume that the work of teaching white people about racism and privilege falls on the shoulders of people of color. It is not the job of an oppressed person to help their oppressors see the injustice of the system created by the oppressor. It is the responsibility of those who enjoy unearned privilege to help their peers understand and undo the unjust systems that privilege them.

Talk to the members of your community who aren't clearly upset by structural inequity. Share your own journey of how you came to understand there was a problem, and offer assistance to help them educate themselves on the issues.

Often, white communities get caught up in the question of “Are we racist?” or “Am I racist?” This is ineffective because many people pacify themselves by arriving at the conclusion that they are not racist or that an act was not racist, and moving on without meaningful change or further introspection.

Instead of reflecting on these sorts of questions, ask yourself instead “How much racism is in play in this situation/location/community?” This allows you to acknowledge that racism isn't cut-and-dry, and that it exists to varying degrees in many of our lives, and that it isn't enough simply to be “not racist”—we must actively combat racism when we see it.

One of the challenges of social and political movements is the unfair association of fringe groups with mainstream, peaceful movements. This phenomenon exists across the political spectrum.

Correct people when they incorrectly label groups like Black Lives Matter as violent/terrorist groups. Explain to them that there are fringe groups that are being misrepresented as part of peaceful movements.

Our main way of receiving information about race relations in the U.S. and abroad is through journalism, which is often an important lens into communities and legal systems. However, journalists are people too, and they also can fall prey to biased reporting and biased thinking.

As you consume media reporting, evaluate it critically. Ask yourself whether multiple perspectives are being represented, whether the reporting uses loaded or coded language (“thug,” “rough neighborhood,”), what kinds of images are used to represent people (generic images of a non-relevant Chinatown, tokenized cultural images), how other sources are reporting the same story, whether there is video of an incident that was captured from another angle, etc.

Resources: This [article](#); another [here](#); another [article](#)

Dialogue is important to understand what others are experiencing, yet we often surround ourselves with people who look, think, speak, consume, and live like we do. In times of trauma or mourning for communities of color, are you asking your acquaintances of color to perform emotional labor for you, like giving you presentations about race, explaining and reliving their trauma to you for your consumption, doing the work of educating you about inequity? Are you asking people of color to perform these sorts of tasks with the expectation that you don't need to pay them for their work/time? As you organize equity efforts, are you centering yourself, or deferring to people of color?

Listen without ego and defensiveness when hearing discussions about race, and privilege. Don't be silent about that racist joke—silence is support, and remember, it's better to ask how much racism was in play rather than asking whether it was racist or not. Understand what reparations really means before deciding whether you support it. Seek out a diverse group of friends for yourself (but avoid tokenizing them—remember, friends are not collectibles. They provide support and meaningful connection, and deserve the same in return). In times of trauma or mourning for communities of color, engage your acquaintances

of color, but do so in a way that provides support to them instead of asking them to support you in your journey to understanding inequity.

More and more stories of people of color encountering racism are being documented and shared through social media — whether it’s at a hotel, with the police, in a coffee shop, at a school, etc. Often, a white person calls police for some minor reason or disagreement, and the results are often deadly.

Most importantly, do not weaponize the government against people who are often harmed by government actors. If you have a disagreement, handle it with maturity. Set the right example for people around you. When you see such a post, call the organization, company, or institution involved to tell them how upset you are. Encourage others to do so as well.

Resources: [Baratunde Thursdon on deconstructing headlines](#)

## EDUCATION & ENGAGING WITH YOUTH

Representation is important, yet many educational materials and academic role models are centered around whiteness and westernness. This sends a clear message to children that some professions and fields of study are not for everyone, and it socializes them to believe in arbitrary and false assumptions about intelligence and ability.

If you or someone you know is an educator, buy them books that feature people of color as protagonists and heroes, no matter the racial make-up of the class. Consider purchasing educational toys that feature diverse characters. Watch and share this [video](#) of Neil deGrasse Tyson speaking about his experience as a black student telling people he wanted to be a scientist and astrophysicist.

Resources: [List of diverse reading](#); another [list](#)

Representation is important—children grow up seeing the composition of the authority figures around them and internalizing that composition as a standard. If all they see is male-identified people in leadership, or white people in academia and people of color in support staff roles, they are being delivered an inequitable and harmful view of their professional possibilities. Further, they exist in an educational environment that is limited in its perspectives and cultural exposure.

Take note of the racial composition of faculty at your local schools, and advocate for diversifying the educator workforce. Again, don’t tokenize them—this is not an exercise in feeling better about yourself, it is a proven practice that improves education for all children and creates a richer workplace for school staff.

Resources: [Vermont-DEW](#); [podcast episode](#)

Many American children lack substantial knowledge of the systemic reasons behind racial inequity in this country. This is dangerous, because children grow up believing that “that’s just the way things are” instead of recognizing that most inequity is by design. Many parents and educators neglect this education because they think children will feel bad, or be unpatriotic, but the harm in hiding the truth is that children will not see the urgency and context for betterment.

Be honest with children about history, both at home and in the classroom. Find out how Indigenous contact, the Trail of Tears, slavery, the Civil War, immigration, Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment camps, post-Civil War convict leasing, and the Jim Crow era are being taught in your local school. Call for history to be taught accurately and truthfully. Call for the inclusion of authors, historians, and historical figures of color. If you don't know the full story about these topics, educate yourself too.

Resources: [Teaching for Change](#); [The National Association for Multicultural Education](#).

Representation is important—white children can look at nearly any book, movie, t.v. show, music video, or advertisement and see themselves represented in a wide range of professions, emotions, personalities, adventures, and nuanced situations. Children of color are exposed to these same stimuli, and they internalize the messaging that their stories are not worth telling, and that when they are featured, it is often as a token character (spiritual healers, martial artists, scientists, “warlords,” gang members, domestic workers, people living in poverty).

Audit the media your children are exposed to. Do their books and movies omit people of color? Do they rely on harmful stereotypes? Who are the heroes, who are the villains, and who are the victims?

Resources: “Scan children’s book and media for racism & sexism,” from the “Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools For Empowering Young Children” by Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force

Many white Americans still claim that it’s “not their fault” they exhibit racial bias because they don’t interact with people of color. While it is true that many rural places in America lack the diversity for many white Americans to have rich and varied relationships with people of color, there are often opportunities to engage with diverse communities, including other students and families at your child’s school, or those who live in different geographic areas who may have shared interests such as a sport or hobby.

Help your child establish a diverse group of friends. Be supportive in helping your child maintain those friendships, which includes facilitating in-person play dates and new experiences. It is important to avoid tokenizing your child’s friends—remember, friends are not collectibles. They provide support and meaningful connection, and deserve the same in return).

Resources:

Many schools express a general desire to make their student bodies and teaching staffs more diverse, but do not take concrete steps to do so. This impacts recruitment and retention efforts, because prospective students and educators often seek learning environments or work environments where they feel welcomed, accepted, safe, supported, and where they see advancement paths for themselves.

Find out what DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) policies your local schools and universities have in place, especially the public universities supported by your tax dollars.

## SUGGESTED MEDIA

The following items are recommended as a way to learn more about equity, but consuming these media is not a replacement for concrete actions that you can take to advance equity and support marginalized people. Note that some of these items may contain sensitive content—please use discretion.

TOPIC	TITLE	FORMAT
Critical Race Theory & White Allyship	“White Fragility” by Robin Diangelo	Book
	“How to be an Anti-Racist” by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi	Book
	“Americanah” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	Book
	“So You Want to Talk About Race” by Ijeoma Oluo	Book
	“The Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh	Thought / Discussion Activity
	“The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson”	Film
Indigenous History & Culture	“The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600–1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People” by Colin Calloway	Book
	“The Voice of the Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation” by Frederick Matthew Wiseman	Book
	“An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States” by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz	Book
Culture / International	Rough Translation	Podcast
Housing & Segregation	“Evicted” by Matthew Desmond	Book
	“The Color of Law”	Book
	<a href="#">“A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America”</a>	Podcase episode
Criminal Justice	“The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander	Book
	“Caught” by Marie Gottschalk	Book
	“The House I Live In”	Film
Civil Rights Movement	“March” series by John Lewis	Comic / Graphic Novel
	Selma	Film
Historical Figures	“Hidden Figures”	Film
	“Loving”	Film
	“The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers’ Struggle”	Film
	<a href="#">“The Legacy Of Civil Rights Leader Fred Korematsu”</a>	Podcast episode
Slavery & its Economic Legacy	13th	Film
	Roots	Film
	12 Years a Slave	Film
	<a href="#">“The Case for Reparations”</a> by Ta-Nehisi Coates	Article
U.S. History	<a href="#">“The 1619 Project”</a> by Nikole Hannah-Jones	Web series
	“A People’s History of the United States” by Howard Zinn	Book

Personal Stories	“The Fire Next Time” by James Baldwin	Book
	“Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates	Book
	#RealizedIWasBlack	Hashtag
	“American Born Chinese” by Gene Luen Yang	Comic / Graphic Novel
	“ <a href="#">The White Flight of Derek Black</a> ”	Article
	“ <a href="#">How to deconstruct racism, one headline at a time</a> ”	TEDTalk
Vermont-specific	“ <a href="#">The History Of Slavery In Vermont, Across New England</a> ”	Article
	“A Stranger in the Kingdom”	Film
	“ <a href="#">Green Mountains racial history isn’t black and white</a> ”	Article
Education / Youth	The Hate U Give	Book; Film
	“Teaching to Transgress” by bell hooks	Book