RESEARCH IN ACTION

Research Ethics, Transparency, and Accountability Standards

NAMING, FRAMING, AND LIVING OUR ENGAGED ACTIONABLE RESEARCH VALUES TOGETHER

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**"If you want to go fast go alone.
If you want to go far, go together."**
African Proverb

Purpose of this Document

Research in Action (RIA) was created to disrupt traditional, top-down approaches and reclaim the power of research by putting community expertise first at every step – from naming the problem to identifying solutions. To be successful in this work, we must go far beyond the production of justice-focused research products and:

- transform the ways we build and maintain trust

- support mutually beneficial relationships

- reorient power back to the communities most impacted

- create strategies for mitigating the differing impacts that white supremacy culture has on us all, regardless of race, gender, class, and ability

This document communicates RIA's standards for conducting ethical community-engaged actionable research using the Equity in Action model and invites impacted community members and our partners to embrace a new way of being in this work to create the change that we all seek. This document makes transparent the values and approaches that RIA staff and contracted specialists are committed to upholding and modeling when in a strategic coalition with project partners and impacted community members that lead our advisory councils. By making our standards accessible, we invite all stakeholders to not only support the change work that brought us together, but to see this as an opportunity to grow in their leadership.

At RIA, true leadership lives at the intersection of collaboration, decolonization, and disruptive yet transformative strategies that invite the creation of intentional, trauma-informed, accountable spaces. We invite all our collaborators to adopt this intention knowing that we will each make mistakes, but are willing to embrace the lessons that come along with that failure, making our work and its outcomes much stronger. In all aspects of our justice-focused research, RIA centers the well-being of the community members we support.

Together, we are all collectively processing institutional harms, uncovering contentious histories, and grappling with deeply challenging questions. As such, conflict is natural and will occur. With this recognition, RIA is committed to naming and mitigating the harms of white supremacy culture, holding space for generative conflict management and bridging community to external resources and coaching support when significant harm (e.g., racist behavior directed at another) has occurred. Here we emphasize the courage to get uncomfortable, rather than safety because transformational learning and change occurs when we take risks and accept the discomfort so we can understand different perspectives and gain new knowledge.

Shared Language

Our work centers racial justice, proactively and authentically partnering with Black, brown and Indigenous people to acknowledge and eliminate white supremacy, the systematic impact of racism, the harms of anti-Blackness, and the oppressive policies and practices upheld by institutions that prevent marginalized people from exercising their full humanity. Racial justice demands strategic and purposeful action with impacted communities leading the work to create material change in people's everyday lives, and to heal the multifaceted trauma of generations of exploitation and intentional harm.

RIA staff are a diverse collective of researchers who draw knowledge from a variety of disciplines and experiences. We come to this work with the understanding that language is a powerful tool and working for justice requires a shared understanding of key terms. As a team, we spent a great deal of time developing our collective definitions of key terms as a way to define our values, many of which show up throughout this document.

Critical Race Theory, Black feminism, and our lived experiences drive our collective conceptualization of key terms like white supremacy culture, harm, anti-racism, and conflict. This document describes our standards for ethical research, transparency, and accountability. Each of our practices and principles are tools to dismantle white supremacy culture.

CLICK HERE to review our growing and iterative list of key terms.

RESEARCH PRACTICES

Equity In Action Model

The Equity in Action model was created by Dr. Brittany Lewis after more than a decade of co-producing actionable research with hundreds of families and local grassroots leaders who entrusted her with their stories of urban infrastructural, political, and economic violence. This model was co-created through building an ecosystem of collaboration, support, and data innovation with impacted communities. Ultimately, one of its most powerful features is the ways that those most impacted can develop a strategic coalition with those who wield more social, political, and financial capital to create justice-focused research that support tangible practice and policy change.

All projects at RIA are designed using this approach, but are nimble enough to understand that the context of the racial justice issue at hand might require our team to lean into certain aspects of the model more than others and reimagine how traditional research methods and tools are utilized or presented.

> **CLICK HERE** for an infographic that explains the Equity in Action model.

Research in Action rejects the idea that knowledge creation is for the privileged few and uplifts how community members have and are creating knowledge in their everyday lives. We engage only with institutional or organizational partners that are committed to an ongoing learning and change process that rejects traditional transactional relationships with community members and instead embrace reciprocal relationships that are accountable to and benefit the community as they envision it.

Equity in Action explicitly rebalances power by creating new tables where impacted community members intentionally outnumber individuals with institutional or organizational rank so that community members are centered as essential experts and project leaders throughout any process. Our process centers community members in defining the issue, making sense of the data and deciding what should be done about it. Our model is intentionally directed toward actionable outcomes that lead to tangible, real world changes – and cultivate community power and authentic, mutually beneficial relationships with partners throughout the project.

At RIA, we are co-creating emergent methodologies as an act of discovery in collaboration with communities. Our approach combines elements of grounded theory and participatory action research frameworks. Our process is cyclical, iterative, and firmly non-extractive. We co-create methods with impacted communities in part to build awareness and understanding of how cultural beliefs and values differ between people participating in the project design. Understanding how culture informs our individual perspectives or ways of seeing the problem help us collectively create shared values, which leads to a cohesive direction for co-creating methods. Additionally, we collaborate with communities to ensure the tools we develop are culturally accessible.

The multiple phases of our Equity in Action model are intentionally designed to intersect to ensure a core component to our approach: shared meaning-making. Shared meaning-making is an ongoing process to ensure consistent collaboration throughout the project lifecycle. We use our technical skills to:

- create space for all collaborators to develop a shared understanding of key language to describe the context and define the problem together
- ensure all collaborators recognize the specific gaps our research seeks to fill and the specific goals of the project
- at every step in the process, revisit our shared values and reassess our collective knowledge based on what we're learning to ensure our process results in concrete policies and practices most needed by impacted communities

We are discerning and intentional in:

- Creating mixed-method approaches that uproot racist presumptions
- Cultivating iterative processes that acknowledge lived experience as rigorous and central to the production of actionable data
- Creating power for and accountability with impacted communities

Through our process, we aim to dismantle white supremacy culture as it shows up in our research spaces not only producing impactful justice-focused research products, but helping to rebuild harmful relationships and new collaboration.

In traditional community engagement processes...	In Research in Action's **Equity in Action model...**
An institution or entity with power and resources comes into impacted communities with a plan to address a problem they have determined is the most important.	We engage only with institutional or organizational partners that are committed to an ongoing learning and change process that rejects traditional transactional relationships with community members and instead embrace reciprocal relationships that are accountable to and benefit community as *they* envision it.
That institution or entity holds listening or engagement sessions to extract information or ideas from those most impacted to appear interested in the solutions they share.	Equity in Action intentionally rebalances power by creating new tables where impacted community members intentionally outnumber individuals with institutional or organizational rank so that community members are centered as essential experts and project leaders throughout any process.
The institution or entity, in fact, already knows what's in their control and what they intend to do, often telling community about a plan they've already developed.	Equity in Action recognizes that community expertise reveals what the problem is and how to solve it. Rather than simply consulting or seeking feedback from community members on a question or proposal created without them, Equity in Action redirects power so that every step is designed and implemented *with and by* community.
The institution or entity seeks feedback on its narrow proposal and provides no resolution to issues raised by community that they believe fall outside of their work or institutional powers	Equity in Action centers community members in defining the issue, making sense of the data and deciding what should be done about it. Our model is intentionally directed toward actionable outcomes that lead to tangible, real world changes – and cultivate community power and authentic, mutually beneficial relationships with partners after the project has ended.

Equity in Action Process Model

6) Identify Solutions & Next Steps
Based on the data and community input, we identify policies, practices and systems changes that will lead to concrete improvements in community members' lives – and shift relationships and power dynamics between the institutional partner and impacted community beyond the project.

5) Community Review & Action Planning
We make data understandable and clear so community members who haven't been part of the advisory council can make sense of what it means, identify where we have misunderstood or made mistakes, and surface multiple solutions.

4) Collect Data
We train advisory council members in data collection to work with the research team to connect with community members through a shared purpose to solve a common problem.

1) Assess the Landscape
We investigate with partners and community members the history and context that has led to the proposed project, honestly identifying institutional harms, pain points, and impacted partnerships. We define shared values, as well as stakeholder goals and interests.

2) Create Advisory Council
We create an advisory council made up of individuals who are personally impacted by a specific issue. Because they understand the issue better than anyone else, we elevate community members as project leaders in accurately identifying and solving the problems they experience.

3) Co-develop Approach
We support community members to use their expertise to describe the problem, design the process to understand it and develop tools to gather information.

Shared meaning making is iterative and ongoing throughout our process. We use our technical skills as researchers to 1) create space for all collaborators to develop a shared understanding of key language to describe the context and define the problem together, 2) ensure all collaborators recognize the specific gaps our research seeks to fill and the specific goals of the project, and 3) at every step in the process, revisit our shared values and reassess our collective knowledge based on what we're learning to ensure our process results in concrete policies and practices most needed by impacted communities.

RIA

Dismantling White Supremacy Culture

White supremacy is the belief that white peoples are superior to all other peoples of the earth. This belief and the reproduction of this framework has created harmful behaviors that have become normalized in every aspect of our daily lives. These normalized behaviors have then been used to systemically justify anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity. In the United States, white supremacy continues as a political ideology that normalizes, perpetuates and maintains the social, political, historical, and industrial domination by white people.[1]

Racism in the United States is anchored in the practices, policies, legal and cultural regimes set in place by race-based slavery. During the colonial era and after the American Revolution, custom and law designated enslaved Black people as property with no human or civil rights, and all other Black people as non-citizens. This system and its cultural practices gave rise to perceptions, habits and expectations that it is better to be white or adjacent to whiteness and to reject or debase Blackness, Indigeneity, and other people deemed non-white. This divisive framework – ordering society by racial hierarchy – impacts political and economic systems, education, social group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and more. Because these systems were set up to privilege whiteness, there are perverse incentives to normalize and maintain white supremacy, or to ignore its continued impacts.

White ignorance is the reproduction of false beliefs about Black, brown, and Indigenous people and the reality of race. White supremacy culture affords white people the privilege to maintain intentional lack of awareness around not only race, racism, and racial justice, but also their own complicity in dominant systems of power and oppression related to gender, sexuality, ability, etc.

Examples of white ignorance include:

- The belief that racism and race-based structural violence are exceptional and historical phenomena rather than a consistent and systemic reality for Black, brown, and Indigenous people today.
- The belief that racism pertains only to overt behavior on an interpersonal level rather than a societal level system of oppression.
- The belief that claiming color blindness is akin to the notion of "not racist."

White ignorance is not necessarily confined to white people. Black, brown, and Indigenous people can and have adopted some aspects of white ignorance, which can reproduce similar cycles of harm. Still, we draw this distinction:

- White people use white ignorance as a means to maintain their privilege and power.
- Black, brown, and Indigenous people have been forced to assimilate to white supremacy cultural norms over generations.

Thus we recognize that, for Black, brown, and Indigenous people, white ignorance could be a means for maintaining safety as well as a symptom of adopting dominant cultural ideation and practice. For example, Black, brown, and Indigenous people may feel the need to go along with decisions in professional spaces to exclude race or racism from content and conversations because they have been forced to adapt to the false narrative that centering race or racism is polarizing and would hinder efficiency or productivity. Racial justice is at the center of all of our work, and we expect conflict to occur as we intentionally disrupt white supremacy culture.

White supremacy culture wants us all to read conflict, tension, or harm as a reason to separate or invoke divides as the only way of moving forward, rather than leaning into and naming the tension to grow in our solidarity and relationship. We should look at someone naming how a particular behavior has created harm as an opportunity to grow, as we must all be implicated to the collective change we seek.

Keeping these frameworks in mind, RIA staff aim to disrupt these approaches and address the history of violent erasure by recognizing that people enact these harmful characteristics in all spaces, including research and community engagement. We are all implicated in identifying and mitigating these harmful behaviors in our change work.

RIA

Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

Our staff and partners have studied and discussed Tema Okun's framework for an understanding white supremacy culture. Okun explains that the characteristics described below, which promote white supremacy thinking, are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group. Okun goes further to say that because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us – people of color and white people alike.[2] RIA seeks to not only name the ways these attitudes and behaviors show up in our work but also dismantle them. We invite RIA staff, external partners, and impacted communities to hold accountability in shifting the ways we do our work away from the way white supremacy culture expects.

On the following pages are frequently experienced characteristics in community engagement work that RIA staff have collectively named as cultural norms and standards to disrupt.

Sense of Urgency

The importance of social and racial justice work is not in question – it is absolutely urgent. And this work requires intentionality in taking the time to prioritize impacted communities and drive impactful, transformational change that is thoughtful and strategic.

white supremacy culture
alternative

	Sense of urgency	Collaborative decision making grounded in what is realistic
BEHAVIORS	Strictly adhering to self-determined timelines that emphasize the interests of funders Bypassing community engagement to adhere to unrealistic timelines Expecting support staff working beyond capacity to adhere to unrealistic timelines	Recognize that taking the time to engage impacted community members as co-leaders as a worthwhile step In the process of driving racial justice Co-create realistic timelines/workplans with impacted community members at the table Accept that everything takes longer than expected Consider staff capacity and timelines for other projects when determining deadlines
IMPACTS	Programs/policy "solutions" cause more harm to impacted communities Reinforced power dynamics inherent to dominant culture Burn out/turnover amongst project staff, staff considered to be underperforming if they cannot adhere to timelines	Shared power and partnership in driving progress in achieving racial justice Identified solutions align with the interests of impacted community Program or policy is less likely to replicate harms, more likely to lead to intended outcomes and impact Burnout/turnover amongst project staff less likely

Fear of Open Conflict, Right to Comfort, Either/Or thinking, Defensiveness

Conflict can be uncomfortable but should not be ignored. In conflict, it is common to take something personally and interpret information as a direct critique of the self, leading to defensiveness. However, we invite our collaborators to embrace conflict as a place to grow a deeper understanding of different perspectives with a willingness to perhaps reassess what you thought you knew, embracing conflict results in the best understanding and outcomes.

■ white supremacy culture

■ alternative

	Fear of Open Conflict **Right to Comfort** **Either/Or Thinking** **Defensiveness**	**Conflict and Discomfort as Tools for Learning & Growth** **Both/And Thinking**
BEHAVIORS	Overemphasizing politeness, compromise to uphold the comfort of those with inherent power. Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line Perceiving calls for change as personal attacks Allowing conflict and discomfort to be divisive (i.e., one person is right & the other is wrong) Viewing different perspectives as contradictory rather than complementary	Frame discomfort as opportunities for growth, learning, and aligning values Consider the function of defensiveness (i.e., what someone is trying to protect/what do they fear) and engage in call in strategies Remember that different perspectives can both hold truth Manage conflict in an inclusive manner, where logic and emotion are balanced Reflect after the conflict is resolved to determine what might be handled differently in the future.
IMPACTS	Impacted community members feel forced to go along with decisions that do not serve their interests/values Impacted community members disengage from projects altogether Reinforced separation between those with inherent power and impacted communities	Impacted community members have agency to raise concerns, speak their truths, and showcase their expertise Cohesive, collaborative approaches to decision making and problem solving

Paternalism and Power hoarding

Paternalism is the practice of those in authority restricting the autonomy of others. To engage in community work is to share power, however those who hold power struggle to share it and in many cases claim to know others needs or experiences better than those people themselves.

white supremacy culture

alternative

	Paternalism Power hoarding	**Partnership and shared power More than one way of knowing**
BEHAVIORS	Valuing technical knowledge/academic knowledge sources over knowledge from lived experience Allowing people with more inherent power to make executive decisions for and in the interests of impacted communities Resisting or ignoring standards around shared power	Engage in activities/practices designed to establish shared power at the beginning & revisit when power becomes unbalanced Embrace challenges to traditional leadership and power structures Listen to understand and make space for others to share their experiences and thoughts. Design consensus decision making structures. Accept that impacted communities know what is best for them and meaningful change cannot happen without meaningful relationships/shared power
IMPACTS	Reinforced biases around intelligence and capability Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it Harm to people/communities most affected by decisions Problems are defined based on perceived deficits of those most impacted and solutions undermine existing community strengths/assets	Impacted community members have agency to raise concerns, speak their truths, and showcase their expertise Identified solutions align with the interests of impacted community & leverage community strengths/assets Program or policy is less likely to replicate harms, more likely to lead to intended outcomes and impact

ORIA

Quantity over Quality, Worship of the Written Word, Objectivity

Data is our language of change, but there is an obsession with 'objectivity,' 'evidence-based,' and 'statistically significant' data. This obsession manifests in a worship of facts, quantitative information, and information written in formal documents. This undermines another form of data – qualitative data that can not be similarly quantified. Additionally, community engagement work is historically measured in the number of engagements instead of the quality of those engagements. We seek quality experiences with maximum impact.

	Quantity over Quality **Worship of the Written Word** **Objectivity**	**Quality over Quantity** **More than one way to communicate**
BEHAVIORS	Directing all organizational resources toward producing quantifiable goals Valuing end-product over process Valuing quantitative data over qualitative data Relying only on memos/written reports to communicate progress Dismissing or invalidating emotional ways of knowing or communicating in the decision-making process Requiring linear/logical thinking	Sit with discomfort when people express themselves in ways that are not familiar to you Adopt mixed-methods approaches to scoping and answering questions, making recommendations for program/policy solutions Be clear that you have learning to do when you work with communities of different cultures, practice cultural humility when encountering different ways of being, doing, and knowing Accept there are many ways to get to the same goal Embrace intentional engagements with community
IMPACTS	Impacted community members are left out of or harmed in the process of achieving goals Quantitative data are presented without grounded context and misinterpreted, realities of impacted communities are ignored Communities and racial groups get labeled as the problem rather than systems Reinforced biases around intelligence/capability – writing and documentation skills valued over other communication skills	Processes, goals, and solutions are grounded in the realities of impacted communities Identified solutions align with the interests of impacted community and leverage community strengths/assets Program or policy is less likely to replicate harms, more likely to lead to intended outcomes and impact

☐ white supremacy culture

☐ alternative

RIA

Institutional Review Board

RIA explicitly names that white supremacy and structural racism are embedded in the institution of research in the United States. In traditional research spaces, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an impartial panel of people formally designated to review and monitor research involving human participants.[7,8] Several instances of research abuses in the 20th Century led to the creation of the IRB.

One major catalyst for legislative shifts in ethical research review processes in the United States were revelations of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Tuskegee Institute studies on syphilis.[8] The USPHS Tuskegee Study began in 1932 and continued until 1972. The USPHS was extremely deceptive around the purpose of the study – resulting in 400 Black men with syphilis being left unaware of their diagnosis or improperly treated for the disease. Notably, penicillin became a widely accepted and available treatment for syphilis in 1943. The USPHS only halted the study in 1972 because the press revealed their exploitative and abusive practices.[9]

The events of the Tuskegee Study led to passage of the National Research Act of 1974, which created the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. In 1976, this commission published the Belmont Report, which describes the basic ethical principles that must underlie ethical conduct of human participant research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Additionally, this report established applications of these general principles, including informed consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and fair and equitable selection of participants.[10] The ethical principles in the Belmont Report, however, do not provide researchers with tools to disrupt white supremacy culture.

RIA's protocols for research aim to minimize risk of harm and center the wellbeing of those we engage with, which includes procedures for informed consent, trauma-informed data collection, and privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, our IRB centers the authority of the project-specific Community Advisory Councils (see Ethical Review and Monitoring Processes, page 18).

Harm, Risk, and Benefits in Research

RIA recognizes that our approach to research differs from traditional research approaches. Our work requires expanding the traditional definition of harm in research. We implement a holistic, community-informed risk and benefit assessment process. Through our process, we commit to not only identifying harm, but taking reparative steps to address harms to people involved in our work. We believe in intentionality around continuously adjusting our processes to prevent harm toward impacted community members, as well as our staff and external partners. RIA's strategies for preventing and repairing harm center on co-producing prevention and resolutions with the community to avoid replicating harmful power dynamics and dismantle dominant cultural approaches to address harm.

In traditional research, harm is defined as a violation of the rights, safety, or welfare of a participant. This definition of harm includes physical, psychological, social, financial/economic harm, and harm to fundamental rights of human research participants.[11] The traditional principle of minimizing harm pertains specifically to the research institution and the researcher protecting participants from harm. Additionally, the processes for addressing harm hinge on researchers reporting protocol deviations and other causes of potential harm toward participants to an IRB. The individuals on the IRB typically determine the degree of harm to participants and the consequences of harm, meaning it is rare for the harmed person to be involved in influencing the resolution (see Paternalism and Power hoarding, page 9). At RIA we want to expand this understanding of harm and be cognizant of the presence of harm in and outside of the research process.

> **RIA's strategies for preventing and repairing harm center on co-producing prevention and resolutions with the community to avoid replicating harmful power dynamics.**

In our work, we center harm prevention for impacted community members, and strive to prevent harm for all persons engaged in a project, including our staff and institutional/organizational partners. The task of minimizing the likelihood that harm will occur as a result of research activities requires expanding the traditional definition of harm. We recognize harm in the context of societal values that uphold white supremacy within dominant culture.[12] White supremacy culture has set up systems designed to divide us from ourselves, each other, and to make us act from a place of believing we are fragmented instead of whole. These systems influence whether we feel accountable to one another.[12]

Our work involves naming historical and present institutional harms and engaging with communities to co-produce solutions to repair past harm and prevent future harm. We approach this work with continuous efforts to understand our positionality and social location based on where dominant culture assigns us power. We do this work to understand ourselves as individuals and RIA as an organization to mitigate the risk of replicating harm.[12]

In a typical IRB application, the researcher must identify the potential risks to participants and write a detailed plan for minimizing the risk of harm. Additionally, direct or indirect benefits to participants, communities, and/or society must justify taking the risk of harm. RIA reconfigured this approach by implementing a practice that identifies, addresses and safeguards against harm.

Some of the harm RIA recognizes and aims to mitigate relate to the collaborative nature of our work toward racial justice. We recognize that our work is heavy. We hold space for people with lived experiences to share about the impact of harm and trauma on their lives. This practice has the potential risk of re-activating trauma for the person sharing and triggering other people in the space.

> **We recognize that the spaces we hold have inherent power dynamics and dismantling these power dynamics does not occur instantaneously when we invite impacted community members to the table.**

We recognize that the process of establishing shared power can expose community members to harms like microaggressions, victim blaming, and devaluing community expertise. These harms have the potential to ultimately replicate the historical and present exclusion of impacted community members in driving knowledge discovery and actionable solutions.

Our Equity in Action model was created to conduct mutually beneficial research alongside community members. The Equity in Action model is designed to create space for people with lived experience to be heard. We strive to center community created knowledge and facilitate a process where communities decide what is beneficial to them. We engage communities as leaders in designing a research process that provides the benefits they envision.

> **While potential benefits may justify risking unexpected harm, we cannot weaponize these benefits to justify the harm we cause, even when our intentions are good. We can and should proactively aim to prevent causing, replicating, and re-activating harm. We must also recognize that harm is inevitable and reparable.**

The reality is that we cannot think of everything that might cause harm to someone else. Holding ourselves accountable to our impact versus our intention means approaching the way we address and repair harm with compassionate accountability rather than defensiveness.[12]

Conflict Management

We are collectively processing institutional harms, contentious histories, identifying gaps, and grappling with hard questions. Oftentimes we fear conflict or the naming of harm, because our culture equates publicly naming these feelings as a violation of someone's human rights or direct physical violence being evoked on another that names the person who allegedly delivered the harm as a bad person who should be punished or shamed. RIA does not approach acknowledging conflict or harm to reproduce this thinking, because we do not want to shame anyone.

We also all have different identities and life experiences. Tyrai Bronson of LEEP Consulting defines conflict as: "Perceived incompatibility and emotional upset between independent parties." Conflict is natural and will occur. Conflict is not a bad thing, nor does it universally lead to harm. Working through disagreement and discomfort can identify opportunities and generate ideas (see Call in vs Call out culture, page 8).

RIA has partnered with LEEP Consulting to support our staff in their interpersonal development and self awareness work in a way that empowers RIA staff to recognize and celebrate difference, set boundaries, manage conflict, and grow as reflective and curious leaders. This partnership is key in supporting our staff's ability to model the type of leadership and self awareness needed in the work.

When we facilitate collaboration with community members, we recognize that each person comes to the table with a different set of experiences that inform their perspectives. When conflict or disagreement occurs in a group conversation with impacted community members, we take steps to help ensure each person in the disagreement or conflict feels heard. We take a culturally-aware and trauma-informed approach to maintain accountable, intentional spaces even when conflict occurs.

This process could include:

- Pausing and naming the tension
- Acknowledging commonalities amongst different perspectives
- Identifying divergent understandings
- Reflecting on what opportunities for learning and growth exist (I.e. possible ways to process through the tension)
- Creating a plan to move forward (e.g., engage a neutral third party offline if needed)

Anti-racist, Trauma-Informed Approach

At RIA, our ethical principles include and extend beyond the principles defined in The Belmont Report (page 11). We collaborate with impacted community members at each step of our research approach and recognize that people at the table have likely experienced various levels of trauma. We center the expertise of community members who face persistent racial injustice. The structures of our society enable Black, brown, and Indigenous individuals to face potentially traumatic interactions on a daily basis.

We also recognize that trauma does not only occur on the individual and interpersonal levels. Both collective and historical trauma occur at the hands of the structures, institutions, and systems of dominant society that we aim to disrupt.

TRAUMA:

A response occurring when an individual experiences a physically/emotionally harmful or life threatening event, series of events, or set of circumstances that have lasting adverse effects on daily functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples of everyday causes of trauma include: microaggressions; discrimination; and abuse.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA:

Shared traumatic event(s) that occur(s) at a societal level and involve large groups of people with a widespread impact across generations and communities. Examples include natural disasters, pandemics, recessions and other economic crises.[3] Collective trauma may occur in response to a universally traumatic event, but the effects differ based on social location and positionality within dominant culture.

HISTORICAL TRAUMA:

Intergenerational trauma related to a history of systematic oppression within a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group. In other words, the shared, cumulative emotional and psychological wounds that occur when a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group experiences repeated collective traumas across generations. Historical trauma encompasses trauma from past and present oppression. Examples include structural racism, genocide, colonization, imperialism, slavery, and mass incarceration.[3,4]

We aim to mitigate the risk of replicating the conditions that caused trauma in the first place. We take steps to develop cultural humility and an anti-racist, trauma-informed approach to our work.

Our Equity in Action model and the workplace culture we strive to cultivate address the principles of an anti-racist, trauma-informed organization. For example, we are committed to bearing witness, centering voices, and honoring lived experiences, when we proactively center, amplify, and learn from the voices of those most impacted by racism and trauma.[5] Specifically, bearing witness is the act of receiving and believing – meaning we actively listen to and validate people when they share their experiences with racism and/or trauma without. Additionally, we honor the value of community-held expertise and balance the importance of qualitative data with quantitative data.

In our work, we engage in partnerships that involve both impacted community members and external partners. We are committed to supporting impacted community members in driving structural and systemic transformation through practices designed to foster truth, accountability, and collective repair. We have created this accountability protocol to understand how to address systems partners actively causing harm toward Black, brown, and Indigenous community members we engage. Our end goal is always to drive community-identified actionable solutions. All of these principles, goals, and actions reflect the principles of an anti-racist, trauma-informed organization.[5]

Other key tenets of a trauma-informed approach to research show up in our data collection methods. For example, we engage in strategies to balance power dynamics in an effort to uplift community expertise. We take the time to do our own self-reflection of our communication and conflict styles, social location and positionality, and the intersections of power and privilege within each of us. Through icebreakers and other engaging activities, we invite our collaborators to do the same.

We co-create methods with Community Advisory Councils to ensure we consider historical trauma within the community participants and ask culturally-informed questions in our qualitative interviewing strategies.

We engage in iterative data collection and analysis that fosters community partnerships and shared meaning-making throughout our process. We share our learnings with communities through data walks to maintain transparency and prevent creating a monolithic image of an impacted community.

Our trauma-informed approach is evident in our remaining ethical standards - and our intentions and protocols for holding space apply these anti-racist, trauma informed values.

Intentions and Protocols for Holding Space

RIA has internally wrestled with the concepts of "safe space" and "brave space" and found that neither framework fits our collective values. Safe space presumes that we as a team can guarantee safety for all, which is not true. No one particular space is safe for everyone. Brave space places the burden of bravery on impacted communities.

While we hope to hold space for people to show up authentically and share their truths, even when it is uncomfortable, we simultaneously strive to prevent coercing vulnerability. RIA aims to create intentional environments and protocols for holding space.

We apply principles of trauma-informed care to facilitate courageous, vulnerable, and honest exploration collectively while honoring our individual identities and naming the way dominant culture assigns privilege or marginalization based on these identities.

> RIA is not interested in an "I got you moment" or to create spaces that aim to "shame or blame" any particular person. RIA aims to both model and support external partners and impacted community members at being better at building reciprocal relationships that can repair historic harms and build strong coalitions where we get to know one another in an authentic way.

EVERYONE

TO HOLD INTENTIONAL SPACE: We invite everyone to...

1. Remember that people at the table with you may carry trauma. As you talk and interact with others, try to contribute to a space that feels safe, empowering, and healing.

2. Respect the privacy and confidentiality of those at the table with you.

3. Actively listen when others are speaking.

4. Be mindful of your total talk time (see specifics for people with positional power vs. impacted community below)

5. Understand that we are all at different stages in our interpersonal development work. As such, you must have some outside self-awareness practices to understand how your positionality and social location influence your power in the space and develop supportive allyship to those traditionally afforded less power in decision making.

6. Lean into discomfort and investigate any personal emotions that arise when you hear or see something that might not align with your previous experience or understanding.

7. Look at disagreement as productive and then ask questions to gain deeper understanding (i.e., be curious, not definitive)

8. Frame conflict as productive and an opportunity for learning and growth (see conflict management section, page 12)

9. Own intentions and impacts. When embarking on the impactful racial justice that brought us all to this new table we then must be invested in acknowledging the impact that something has had on a particular person even if it was not our intent.

- When someone calls you "in" typically to get clarity, know that their goal is not to place blame or shame, this gives you a chance to clarify or learn something beneficial for the future. Examples of calling-in include:
    - *What was your intention when you said that?*
    - *Help me understand where you are coming from, why do you think that is the case?*
    - *How might the impact of your words/actions differ from your intent?* [6]
- After receiving clarification, express personal impact or remaining disagreement with "I statements,"
    - *I don't see it that way. My belief is X.*
    - *I need to express how your comment just landed on me.*
    - *I need to push back against that, I believe it contradicts our agreed-upon values.* [3]

10. Hold each other accountable to microaggressions (i.e., indirect /subtle /unintentional discrimination) and other problematic or offensive words/behavior.

11. If you are called-in, practice self-reflection and accountability in your response with the following actions:

- Listen to and center people impacted by the statement.
- Remember that being called in is an opportunity for learning and growth
- Follow-up with a sincere apology taking responsibility for your actions and placing responsibility of your emotions / discomfort on yourself
- If necessary, thoughtfully clarify intent, but always take responsibility for your impact
- Reflect on how to avoid making a similar mistake in future collaboration and ask for support in doing so if needed

RIA

COMMUNITY

TO HOLD INTENTIONAL SPACE: We invite impacted community members, who bring their own lived expertise to the table, to...

1. Take on leadership in establishing group agreements/norms (see co-creation of ground rules below).

2. Choose how and when you share your expertise and participate in discussions.

3. Use "I statements," when speaking about your lived experience and bear witness to other people's stories.

4. Accept that multiple truths exist even within a given identity group.

POSITIONAL POWER

TO HOLD INTENTIONAL SPACE: We invite external partners, who have more positional power at the table, to...

1. Redistribute power and speaking space – prioritize impacted community member perspectives, ideas, and proposed solutions - limit speaking time and take on the role of listener.

2. Respect the solutions that community members state align best with the context and only add your expertise or insights if it aims to add value.

3. Be transparent up-front about deliverables you have already committed to and identify where there is flexibility and where there are firm limits.

4. Follow-through with the priorities and solutions community members identify. If they are not feasible, then be transparent about why and collaboratively identify alternatives that community members support.

5. Recognize that people with lived experience have diverse experiences to make this work stronger.

6. Treat impacted community members as experts of their realities; "receive and believe"

7. Be aware of the distinction between raising up raising up uncomfortable truths that lead to discomfort for those traditionally afforded more power and offensive or problematic words or actions.

8. Practice willingness to change processes and structures when they are not working for impacted community members.

9. Remember that you hold responsibility in disrupting white supremacy culture – practice self-accountability and calling in others with more positional power at the table instead of relying on impacted community members.

RIA

RESEARCH IN ACTION

TO HOLD INTENTIONAL SPACE: RIA builds structures to support this culture of awareness and accountability.

We co-create ground rules for collaboration with community members and external partners at the beginning of our process as a means of establishing a space where we are accountable to each other. In order to ensure that the spaces we support are not upholding white supremacy culture or causing harm we commit to doing the following:

1. Co-create ground rules for collaboration with community members and external partners at the beginning of our process as a means of establishing an intentional space where we are accountable to each other.

2. Embrace a culture of consent that allows a stakeholder to say that they are not prepared to share at this moment or believe other voices should be privileged in this dialogue.

3. Center the voices of impacted community members/people with lived experience and take on the role of ally or engaged supporter (step up/step back).

4. Co-create and implement trauma-informed facilitation strategies such as:

- Present all participation as invitational to embrace a culture where people can opt-in without outside pressure and opt-out when they need to
- Discuss different ways trauma responses may show up in the space
- Acknowledge when conversations get heavy and build in time for processing or breathing breaks
- Create strategies to follow-up with each other

Our staff worked with Tyrai Bronson of LEEP Consulting to workshop common responses to conflict and/or harmful behavior.

Defensive Response	Accountable Response
I'm sorry you feel [emotion/offended].	I can see that what I said brought that [trauma] up for you. I'm sorry for saying something that made you feel this way. How can I approach this topic differently in the future? Thank you for telling me that my words/actions were [hurtful, problematic, etc]. I see that I caused harm and I am sorry. I will reflect, and learn more about [X] so I can prevent making statements like this in the future.
Why didn't you do X?	Can you tell me more about X? I want to understand your perspective.
I hear you, BUT...	I'm sorry that I escalated our conflict by trying to defend myself / the harm I caused you. Moving forward, I'll do better to be direct and thoughtful in addressing the impacts of my words.
I don't think I did that. I think you did X.	I see and I hear you. I take responsibility for [action/words/etc] and I am sorry for X.
You're too sensitive.	
You're making this bigger than it is.	Thank you for coming to me with this. I understand that you feel [X]. I will [action statement].
I unintentionally did Y and I'm sorry, but you also did X to me.	I hear what you're saying, and I appreciate more open conversations like this to address situations like these in the future.

RIA

Voluntary Participation, Informed Consent, and Compensation

We present all research activities – from project planning/design to data collection – as invitations to become involved. We maintain the voluntary nature of research participation throughout the data collection process. We make sure people know that they do not have to answer every question and can stop participation at any time.

Additionally, we obtain informed consent to participate in data collection activities. The informed consent process involves providing participants with transparent contextual information about the project. Additionally, we provide transparency around participant rights, potential risks and benefits of participation, privacy and confidentiality safeguards, expectations for participation, and compensation.

Participants have the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. We strive to create spaces where participants feel comfortable making their decisions without pressure. We value the community expertise people are willing to share and all impacted community members involved in our projects receive compensation. We protect the information people share with us with a set of practices to ensure privacy and confidentiality of impacted community members.

Privacy and Confidentiality

RIA keeps lists of Advisory Council and community participant names and contact information in an electronic folder that only RIA staff can access. When people participate in a focus group or interview they are assigned an ID number. These numbers replace names in the documents we use to analyze the information we learn from these discussions.

We only record and transcribe interviews and focus groups when and after all participants consent to doing so. We store recordings and de-identified transcripts in an electronic folder that only RIA can access. We do not share recordings or transcripts with people outside RIA, except when we contract with someone to help with analysis. When Advisory Council members or external partners co-facilitate research activities, they sign a confidentiality agreement.

When we share data collected with the Advisory Council, which includes the external partners for the purpose of practicing shared meaning-making, we de-identify all data to protect the interviewee. Additionally, our public-facing data summaries and results reports do not contain any potentially identifiable information about participants. We carefully consider whether to report demographic information based on the likelihood that someone would be able to identify participants.

ETHICAL REVIEW & MONITORING PROCESSES

Role of the Community Advisory Council

The Community Advisory Councils hold primary authority in reviewing and overseeing the ethical aspects of their projects. Following the formation of the Community Advisory Council, RIA observes the following steps to create project-specific IRB processes:

1. Provide external partners and advisory councils training on mixed methods research and the basic ethical principles described in this community accountability protocol

2. Discuss potential harms, risks, and benefits of research with external partners and Community Advisory Councils

3. Give space and power for the Advisory Council to identify gaps add provisions they believe are missing

4. Define project-specific ethical standards that both disrupt exploitation of impacted community members in research and influence how project stakeholders interact with each other

5. Co-develop strategies for preventing/minimizing the risk of harm to impacted community members, as well as the ethical review and monitoring processes

6. Co-develop processes and strategies for reporting and addressing unexpected harms/deviations from ethical standards that occur during the research project

Project-specific ethical standards are tailored to pain points, as well as historical and present harms to the specific impacted community. The Community Advisory Council and RIA will center these ethical standards in the co-design of data collection tools, informed consent practices, and other research activities. These standards also provide a protocol for implementing research activities with impacted community members. We create consent forms and data collection tools with intentionality around building trust with community research participants.

Ethical review and monitoring occurs throughout the research process. RIA implements accountability practices that adhere to co-developed ethical principles into all collaborative structures with the Community Advisory Council. A basic ethical review and monitoring process could have the following steps:

- Review informed consent forms and processes, proposed privacy/confidentiality protections, and data collection tools with the advisory councils.
- Review can occur at a meeting OR RIA can send these materials to advisory council members along with a feedback survey for members to evaluate whether forms/tools/processes fit within previously defined ethical standards.
- Send quarterly progress surveys to get feedback on the integrity of the project
- Implement corrective actions to address deviations from ethical standards/address unexpected harms.

Guidelines for Addressing Unexpected Harms

In service to the Equity in Action model and commitment to community-led approach to research, Community Advisory Councils will ultimately guide and inform the way we address harm within each project. It's important to note that all parties involved hold responsibility in identifying when the integrity of a project deviates from ethical standards for accountability. There are multiple avenues for staying informed about ethical concerns and streamlining these concerns into actionable change. The course of action taken is dependent on who is involved in the harmful situation and the impact of the harm.

RIA is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of individuals who report they were harmed as a result of their involvement with a research project. We will guide the Community Advisory Council in developing a grievance procedure that allows impacted community members to report harm. We will take steps to understand what caused the harm and how the harmed individual would like to proceed. We will then collaboratively establish a path forward and adopt measures to both repair the harm done and prevent replicating harm in the future.

When the RIA Team observe a project deviating from the ethical standards for accountability, RIA holds responsibility for collaborating with the Advisory Council and external partners to revisit the ethical standards, identify how and why the deviation occurred, identify any harms that occurred as a result of the deviation, and adjust the project approach accordingly. This process of address centers accountability and allows for authentic discourse with community partners that informs future actionable guidelines and safeguards from harm.

CONCLUSION

This document outlines RIA's anti-racist and trauma-centered approach to ethics, transparency, and accountability. RIA's Equity in Action Model frames the principles and processes by which ethical research and review are implemented. RIA aims to dismantle characteristics of white supremacy culture through the intentional implementation and maintenance of community advisory councils, and transformational conflict and harm recognition and resolution. This document will be subject to iterations of improvement with the addition of feedback from community partners and internal discourse. RIA will utilize this protocol to guide the development of transparent and accountable partnerships and ensure the development of authentic justice focused actionable research.

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