

Talking About Race in Economic Narrative Messaging

How do we talk about race in our economic narratives and messaging? The following are a few important, practical guideposts to a complex subject.

What to avoid: ***Do not lead with disparities in outcomes***, which is the most common practice now. Doing so reinforces existing racial prejudices and directs people away from systemic causes and solutions.

- When you want to point out unequal outcomes, do so in the context of solutions and after pointing out systemic causes.
- In explaining bias, lots of examples help, to overcome common skepticism.

Lead with values and common purpose: As with all narratives, we want to start with an aspirational goal that establishes our common purpose.

- ***When we include everyone fully in our economy, we all do better.*** Inclusivity is the core value in our economic worldview. On every economic issue, we want to convey the idea that economic prosperity is driven by inclusion.

Do explain systemic barriers when describing unequal outcomes: Barriers are a strong metaphor because they are put up by people and by social practice – they are not natural.

Do focus on solutions, using the metaphor of breaking down barriers: We have the power to break down the racial barriers society puts up.

Example of raising race as part of an economic issue:

- Do NOT say: “Wages are low, particularly for Blacks and Latinos.”
- Do say if pointing out unequal outcomes: “Wages are even lower – due to discrimination in hiring, underfunded schools and a biased criminal justice system – for Blacks and Latinos.”
- Do say when describing policies: “We need to break down the barriers – hiring discrimination, underfunded schools, biased criminal justice – that hold down wages and opportunity for Blacks and Latinos.”

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