

Racial Justice Institute

2023 Application Information

**Shriver
Center on
Poverty
Law**



Join us for the 2023 Racial Justice Institute, and be a part of the 10th anniversary class. The Racial Justice Institute is a groundbreaking leadership program for anti-poverty advocates. After seven months of intensive training, RJI Fellows join a national network of alumni advancing race equity in their communities.

**Shriver
Center on
Poverty
Law**

For economic and racial justice

Why the Racial Justice Institute?

Advocacy is at the center of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law's mission to end poverty and racism.

We recognize that effective anti-poverty advocacy must not only address people's basic needs, but also advance equitable opportunity and build movement toward systemic change.

The Racial Justice Institute is grounded in a commitment to race equity as an integral and essential part of anti-poverty advocacy and recognizes that legal aid and public interest lawyers and advocates are key to achieving important systemic changes in their client communities. Through online learning activities over a seven-month period, the Racial Justice Institute teaches advocates how to engage successfully in racial justice work within their daily practices, organizations, and communities.

Following completion of the program, Racial Justice Institute Fellows join a growing network of advocates working on race equity issues across the country. In 2023, the Network will reach a milestone of 400 Fellows.

“The Racial Justice Institute helped us take a step back and think about the racism underlying bigger systems at the root of our clients' individual problems.”

— Merf Ehman, RJI 2015 Fellow, Columbia Legal Services



Our Vision



We envision:

- A nation where the walls that separate us along racial and ethnic lines have fallen and the community has the space to thrive, free from barriers.
- A nation where advocates and community stakeholders work collaboratively and successfully to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all people, and race is not an impediment to self-determination.
- A group of leaders in the legal community, coordinated to end structural racism alongside the larger racial justice movement.
- An equity and justice movement that takes race into account at every step with a vision of a country in which racially oppressive systems cease to exist.



Watch our video at povertylaw.org/rji



“RJI was amazing. It gave us tools to have conversations with people about race and anti-racism work.”
— Whitney Knox Lee, RJI 2020 Fellow,
Georgia Legal Services Program

What You Will Learn

The Racial Justice Institute is built around a set of core competencies and learning objectives organized through a seven-month schedule of activities. Through an action learning model, participants apply race equity concepts, skills, and tools to a race equity team project to hone their strategic advocacy approach.

Structural Racialization

"Structural racialization" refers to a framework for understanding institutional and public policies that lead to inequity. Whether intentionally or not, these policies create and perpetuate fundamental barriers to economic and social equality for BIPOC communities and opportunities to white individuals and communities.

Social Cognition and Implicit Bias

Social cognition theory refers to the ways in which the brain creates perceptions and maps those perceptions against mental schemas, which in turn affect attitudes and beliefs. When applied to the concept of race, social cognition and implicit bias theory challenges the central assumption of the color-evasion paradigm: that individuals can ignore race.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is the analysis of structures, relationships, and interdependencies with the goal of developing effective, feasible solutions to problems. In the context of racial justice advocacy, systems thinking is a powerful tool for examining how historical legacies, individuals, institutions, and structures work interactively to distribute advantages and disadvantages along racial lines.



What You Will Learn

Community Lawyering

Community lawyering is a process through which advocates contribute their legal knowledge and skills to support initiatives—identified by directly impacted people and community groups—that enhance their power. The ability to work across differences and bring together diverse perspectives and interests is the cornerstone of successful racial justice advocacy. In working with communities, advocates must be able to create environments that encourage participation, respect differences, and demonstrate a commitment to group initiatives.

Framing and Communication

Framing refers to the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue in order to cue a specific response. It includes and communicates underlying values, and constructs a lens that shapes the parameters of what listeners hear and feel. Communications includes a broad range of strategies and activities. In the racial justice context, we use communications to further issues, big ideas, specific policies, organizational goals, fundraising, etc.

Multi-Form Advocacy

Racial justice advocates use a full range of legal and non-legal advocacy tools—including legislative and policy advocacy, litigation, community education, public relations, among others—to achieve racial equity goals.

Organizational Alignment and Leadership Development

To successfully advance a racial justice advocacy agenda, advocates must be able to articulate a compelling race equity vision and build alignment with this vision and associated action steps within their organizations and communities.

Program Benefits

Participants in the Racial Justice Institute program develop capacity in each of the core practices. Specifically, they learn how to:

- Use systems analysis tools to identify root causes of and proposed solutions to race-equity issues.
- Construct and carry out a litigation strategy in order to identify, obtain, analyze, and present evidence of racial disparities.
- Identify multiple advocacy approaches and apply these in complementary ways in order to achieve race equity goals.
- Use a range of interventions to counteract implicit bias.
- Craft and communicate an effective race-equity message that successfully reaches diverse audiences.
- Work with their organizations to assess their internal capacities to successfully carry out race equity work.
- Identify and propose race-equity practices to strengthen their organizations' race equity work across all substantive practice areas.
- Design and implement a plan for addressing race equity issues in their communities.



Program Schedule

The 2023 Racial Justice Institute will be held from April through October. It will take place online, with one week onsite in Chicago. Fellows will be expected to devote approximately 10 hours per week to learning activities, with the exception of our time onsite in Chicago.



January 26	RJI Open House webinar
February 28	Application deadline
March 22 - 24	Selected Fellows notified
March 27	Registration fee, bios, and headshots due
April 20	Orientation of 2023 RJI Fellows
May 4, 11, 18 & 25, June 8 & 15	Part 1, Online: Live sessions that introduce RJI Fellows to the core competencies of race equity work.
July 11 & 12	Part 2, Onsite in Chicago: Fellows meet onsite in Chicago to dive deeper into the concepts and introduce additional skills and tools.
July 13 & 14	RJI 10th Anniversary Network Convening in Chicago: A celebration of RJI 2014-23, which includes plenary sessions led by race equity experts, new research, and an opportunity to network with RJI alums, faculty, and coaches.
August 10, September 7 & 21, October 12	Part 3, Online: Ongoing two-hour online sessions and coaching from seasoned racial justice advocates to help each race equity team develop its project.

Applications are due on February 28, 2023
Visit povertylaw.org/rji to apply

Who Should Apply



Applications to the Racial Justice Institute are invited from racial equity teams that include at least one legal aid or other public interest lawyer serving low-income people or communities of color. Teams can be organized as:

- a minimum of 2-3 individuals working in a single organization, including at least 1 managerial and 1 front-line advocacy staff person and/or one representative from a partner or community-based organization; or
- individuals from more than one organization, including representatives from 2 or more organizations within a state or region.



Applications must include a description of an equity team project that addresses a race equity disparity impacting your community.

Team members should apply individually but indicate in the application that they want to be considered as a team. We do not accept applications from individual advocates. There is no application fee.

“RJI was key in providing language, concepts, and a framework to help us advance our advocacy that puts racial justice at the core of everything we do.”

— Denny Chan, RJI 2019 Fellow, Justice in Aging

Selection Process



Fellows will be selected based on a variety of factors, including experience, proposed equity team project, racial and geographic diversity, and capacity. Priority will be given to applicants who meet the following criteria:

- Significant opportunities for individual and team learning and success with race-equity initiatives as demonstrated by strong support from sponsoring organizations and community partners.
- Demonstrated commitment and capacity to fully participate in the seven-month peer-learning and collaborative action process.

The registration fee for selected fellows is \$3,000 per person.



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