



MISSION
PARTNERS

Race Equity Action Plan

PROGRESS REPORT + ACTION PLAN
UPDATED SUMMER 2022



MISSION PARTNERS

At Mission Partners, we believe communications is one of the most powerful tools to advance social justice. We acknowledge our privilege as a white, cisgender woman¹-owned company and B Corporation™, and believe our highest responsibility is to use our influence and capital for good. We are guided by the vision of a Beloved Community, and do our part every day, to serve as a positive agent of change in our communities, with our clients, and for our world.

The following Race Equity Action Plan articulates the Mission Partners commitment to realize racial equity within our business, within our work, and within our communities—a priority that aligns with our company’s core values. We believe that if a business commits to being a force for good, it must also be deeply committed to challenging barriers that inhibit equal outcomes.

This action plan is a living document², and we will build upon it as we work toward our stated goals and identify new opportunities for equity. We hope that by sharing our vision and commitment, we inspire others to adopt more equitable and anti-racist practices and policies that create sustainable outcomes for their employees and communities.

1 We belong to, support and celebrate a broad community spanning a spectrum of gender identities, including cis-gender, transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people.
2 See the first version of our Race Equity Action plan [on our website](#).



I. Introduction

Mission Partners is a Benefit LLC headquartered in the state of Maryland. As such, we are held legally responsible for considering people, planet, and profit in every decision we make. We take our Benefit status very seriously, and maintain a heightened sense of responsibility about our actions, to ensure that we build a business that is equally good for our employees, good for our clients, and good for our world.

It's one thing to say that, and another to bring those commitments to bear within an organization.

We are not only a [Certified B Corporation](#), but a founding signatory of [We The Change](#), a movement led by fellow women-owned B Corps™, who believe as we do in building a radically inclusive and richly regenerative economy. We commit to economic, racial, environmental, and social justice and a world where women are equally represented in positions of power and influence. And we are working towards our envisioned economy where business can work for everyone, and for the long term. We are also an Inc. Best Workplace®, and a Mental Health America Bell Seal holding workplace, meaning we prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of all

employees, and that we are committed deeply to creating a safe, inclusive, and healthy work environment. These certifications are more than marketing to us. They're a testament to our values, and commitment to building a workplace that works for all.

Building a business like this requires deep analysis of the systems, structures, and institutions at the core of traditional business and employment models to ensure we foster an environment that supports our commitment to justice and racial equity, and that is in line with our stated values. We are committed to actively identifying and eliminating racism, sexism, classism, ableism, antisemitism, ageism, and heterosexism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes, so that power can be redistributed and shared equitably. It is those -isms that have supported and maintained the long-defined societal norm in North America (white, heterosexual, cisgender male leaders who are Christian, live without disability, and who have access to wealth, power, resources, and networks), and which limit a society's ability to achieve true equity among its people.

Our path of purpose has been an especially interesting journey given the work we do. As strategic communications consultants working at the intersection of policy, philanthropy, and public relations, we've been at the decision-making table with hundreds of organizations as they have taken on issues of equity in their work: internal and external communications, grantmaking, board development, hiring and recruitment, all the while pushing our company along the same complicated, often uncomfortable, but necessary path.

When we started this intentional race equity journey as a company, we looked to large and established foundations and corporations to inform our actions. There was hardly a barometer for business leaders, especially for small businesses like ours.

And so, over the last few years, members of our team including current and former employees and contractors have worked to identify, disrupt, and address policies, systems, and situations where we see as white supremacy, privilege, advantage, influence, and power at play.

It has not been easy. Shifting power to an envisioned end state of fairly distributed power and racial equity—where one's identity is no longer correlated with outcomes or abilities and where everyone has what they need to thrive—requires a willingness to get messy. It requires a vulnerability to try even when the right words aren't easy to find, and a commitment to wholly transform how business operates, knowing that the end result of implementing high impact practices through an equity lens, and actively pursuing equity, is a business model that works for everyone, and for the long term.

As this journey requires regular reflection and accountability and continuous commitment, we wanted to share some of our practices for those going through, or considering, a similar process. We share this framework as a tool for other businesses, and as a public barometer and internal accountability reminder to ourselves that anti-racism is a never-ending journey, and that every step is an important step toward real and enduring change.

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Vulnerability is not winning or losing. It's having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome.

Brené Brown



II. Grounding Commitments

Members of the Equity + Accountability Team at Mission Partners co-created and mutually agreed upon the following set of grounding commitments to ensure full participation of our team in the practice and pursuit of equity. Some of these were developed or adapted by Mission Partners, while others have been crowdsourced over time from our network of clients, friends, and colleagues.

Be an Active Listener

During any meeting, we commit to be fully engaged and focused on the group conversation, and specifically on each individual's contribution to the conversation. There is only one "microphone" during each meeting and thus, team members commit to giving their full attention to the individual who is speaking.

No One Knows Everything; Together We Know a Lot

Every one of us is coming to the conversation with different levels of experience and expertise. But we all have something to contribute to the conversation. This agreement asks that we all practice being humble and look for what we can learn from each person in the room. Share what we know, and be willing to ask your questions, so that others may learn from us.

First Draft Thoughts

We want everyone to feel comfortable participating, even if you don't feel you have the perfect words to express your thoughts. In the spirit of moving us forward, bring your thoughts and ideas to the group, even if those thoughts are still forming.

Embrace Curiosity

We make better decisions when we approach our problems and challenges with questions ("What if we...?") and curiosity. Allow space for play, curiosity, and creative thinking.

Take Space, Make Space, Share The Air

Challenge yourself to take space if you tend to be quieter, make space if you find yourself talking a lot or otherwise taking up space. Be aware of your airtime to ensure all voices are heard.

Meet People Where They Are

In any conversation, especially ones about systemic power (race, class, gender, etc.), we know that each person is coming to the conversation with different levels of lived experience and embodied expertise. As we move forward on the Equity + Accountability Team, it is important to recognize and accept any gaps in knowledge that a team member may have. As we grow together through our work, we will all evolve in different ways and learn at different paces. We ask each team member to share what you know, be open to questions, and kindly rephrase your thoughts to increase understanding, if necessary.

Use "I" Statements

We will focus on sharing insights and experiences from our own points of view rather than generalizing or sharing on behalf of a group. Each member of our team will start their sentences with "in my experience...", "I feel..." or "The way I understand it..." We will share how we feel and be willing to take ownership of our statements through further explanation if the group has questions or concerns.

Own Your Own Story

We don't generalize or share stories that aren't our own without consent. We recognize that everyone is a unique product of values, systems, cultures, and experiences that inform their worldview. It is important to own our unique stories, speak from our own point of view, and respect the rights of others to share stories on their own terms, too.

Respect Diversity on the Internal Team and Client Teams

Mission Partners' Equity + Accountability Team members, as well as our broader network of staff and consultants commit to being respectful of the views, opinions, and both personal and professional experiences that each member brings to the table. This will help inform the way we approach our work internally and the way we guide communications efforts for our clients. This respect extends beyond the Mission Partners team to the groups of individuals, including clients, with whom we work.

Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

Many of the topics we will cover may be difficult to discuss. It is important we hold one another accountable to achieving equity, no matter how uncomfortable the

conversations may be. If we can't tackle challenging topics within the Equity + Accountability Team, we will not be able to tackle them with clients. We will get comfortable being uncomfortable as we grow throughout the team's practice.

Rumble with Vulnerability

"Vulnerability is not winning or losing. It's having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome." —Brené Brown

We agree to be vulnerable and explore tough conversations together. We commit to not being yes people, but to instead make space for the discussions and conversations that require us to lean into vulnerability, to stay curious and generous, to stick with the messy middle of problem identification and solving, to take a break and circle back when necessary, to be fearless in owning our parts, and to listen with the same passion with which we want to be heard.



As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you might otherwise.

Marian Anderson



III. Objectives

We thoughtfully developed this plan in 2019 as a team, and revisited it in 2022, with the following outcomes in mind:

- To **document and transparently share** our commitment to racial equity.
- To **operationalize our purpose** as a Certified B Corporation, and extend our intended benefit to all stakeholders, not just shareholders.
- To **hold our entire team—ownership, staff, and contractors—accountable** to our policies and procedures and to align around a set of shared goals.

- To **elevate our commitment** to continuing education and best practices. We understand that this work is a journey and has no end.
- To **establish foundational practices** to guide and grow our internal team, which brings benefit to our community of clients, vendors, and partners, as well.

All of these objectives are designed to support our overarching goal for Mission Partners, which is to **advance justice in all places where we work, learn, live, and serve.**



Injustice anywhere is a threat
to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



IV. Our Commitments to Equity

As a Certified B Corporation™, our expertise lies in using the tools of communications to advance justice. With decades of experience in **social impact communications**, we work side-by-side with organizations, as trusted partners and colleagues, along their journeys to build more equitable and just systems and communities. We use a full range of strategic communications: messaging, marketing, issues management, and strategy building, to help advance our clients' visions for the future.

At Mission Partners, we acknowledge that we cannot do this work for and with our clients, if we are not deeply living it within our business. As such, we uphold a

public commitment to challenge injustice of all forms in our daily work and business, and to double down where we can have the greatest impact on systems change. Our commitment to racial justice is embedded in the development, structure, analysis, and process of everything we do. Because of our commitment to a racially just and equitable systems, we are working strategically and collaboratively to advance the following goals for our business, with our clients, and in the world.

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If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together.

Lila Watson

Advancing Equity In Our Business

- **We commit to building and maintaining a racial equity lens into our organization’s strategic planning policy, priority setting process, and issue area strategy and implementation work, doubling down where we can have the greatest impact on systems change.** We have long deployed a high impact model of project management, but in January of 2020, we intentionally added a race equity lens to every project we take on. Our team members bring diverse perspectives and experiences. We lean on one another and outside experts to provide continuous learning and shared training experiences that support our collective commitment to building more just and equitable systems, through our words and actions as communications consultants. Through quarterly and annual reviews, we hold team members accountable to using inclusive and equitable processes in our planning, research, client service, project management, materials, and campaign development.
 - » Our team meets regularly to address and advance issues of equity across our work. This commitment requires continuous learning and is part of our learning journey that will never come to an end.
 - » In 2021, we created three distinct working groups—focused on our business, our clients, and our world—to **hold leadership accountable to the goals of our Race Equity Action plan.**
- **We commit to removing bias from the hiring process while building equitable pathways to wealth-building and career growth opportunities for all employees.** Since 2018, we have conducted quarterly employee surveys to check in on our progress towards creating a more racially just and inclusive company. As one result of those surveys, in 2019, we re-engineered our hiring practices, organizational chart, and leadership team to ensure that every member of the organization is positioned for growth, and every member of the team can advance into a leadership role, if they are interested in doing so. Since making this shift, we have found that 86% of our employees see a clear career path at Mission Partners, as compared to 59% in 2018.
- In 2021, Mission Partners made a **values-driven shift in our retirement plan vendor**, incorporating socially responsible investing options that align with our company and individual values, and increasing the match that Mission Partners delivers to all full time and part time employees. We also removed some of the previous limitations that had been in the plan, such as when employees can join, to further build equity into the offering.
- **We also understand that having a diverse staff is itself an essential goal and that a lack of diversity increasingly has a business cost.** Research shows that employers with more diverse workforces [experience better rates of innovation](#) and, as [Nielsen](#) reported recently, “with 43% of the 75 million Millennials”—a large percentage of our client and employee base—“in the U.S. identifying as African American, Hispanic, or Asian, if a brand doesn’t have a multicultural strategy, it doesn’t have a growth strategy.” We acknowledge that at the publication of this plan, Mission Partners has a white cisgender leadership team of women. We remain aware of our

Advancing Equity In Our Business

biases and advantage and are actively working to build a cohort of diverse managers and leaders across the company who can move into leadership positions of the firm.

- **We commit to eliminating adverse outcomes and barriers caused by the systems of oppression within our work and communities.** We take our role seriously as an employer and good community ally. We create an environment for all to thrive by offering a robust healthcare plan, flexible work from home policies, and paid parental leave, as well as a cash benefit to offer work from home expenses.
 - » **On Parental Leave:** As detailed in our employee policies and procedures, Mission Partners provides up to 12 weeks of family medical leave to full-time employees. This policy includes four weeks of paid leave. Employees can choose to use their personal paid time off, which starts at three weeks, to supplement the four weeks of paid family leave. The policy mirrors the national Family and Medical Leave Act in that it ensures health care coverage and includes job protection. Finally, the policy has been built to be truly inclusive—the time off can be used for adoption, caring for an ill immediate family member, and personal medical emergencies.
 - » **On Flex Work:** Mission Partners operates fully from a virtual workspace, and while the physical space between us has grown, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were all in a shared office space, our connectivity to one another has been strengthened because of the strong foundation we already had in place.
 - » **On Offsetting WFH Expenses:** In 2020, Mission Partners became a fully remote company. With the acknowledgement that this shifted certain workplace expenses onto employees, Mission Partners transitioned its now-obsolete transportation benefit to a work from home stipend to offset costs for employee home offices.
 - » **On Compensating Contractors:** Approximately one-third of Mission Partners employees have contractor status, which creates highly flexible working arrangements for these individuals. Contractors also have complete control of their schedules, which allows parents with young children to ease back into the workforce, with a fair and sustained source of income.
 - » **On Healthcare:** Mission Partners offers all employees working a minimum of 20 hours per week access to a group health insurance policy. Mission Partners covers 55% of the medical, dental, and vision insurance premiums for a regular full-time employee and up to one dependent. Mission Partners ensures a suite of mental health supports are available and accessible to team members, including flexible schedules to facilitate counseling appointments, an employee assistance program, and supplemental wellness activities to support the team.

Advancing Equity In Our Business

- **We commit to pay all employees and contractors a fair living wage to support the long-term prosperity of our people and our economy.** Mission Partners is committed to paying a livable wage to all employees. A livable wage is defined by [MIT](#) as “the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support [themselves] and their family.” Starting pay for hourly positions at Mission Partners is reflective of MIT’s livable wage for Montgomery County. This information is included in all hiring materials.
- **Mission Partners is committed to equal pay for equal work.** We have implemented systems and policies to ensure transparency and equity across the organization, regardless of responsibilities or levels. Mission Partners does allow pay differentials based on measurable factors, including seniority, merit, and quantity or quality of production. These factors are communicated to staff in myriad ways—including in our employee policies manual—to ensure transparency throughout the organization. Pay differentials based on gender, race, age, sexuality, national origin, or any other protected class are strictly prohibited. Mission Partners also publishes its ratio of pay difference, from lowest to highest paid employee, which is currently at a rate of 1–5 times.

Advancing Equity Within our Client Projects

As professional communicators, we hold ourselves responsible for creating an ongoing dialogue to explore and take action on key issues including cultural, structural, and institutional racism, as well as white supremacy, privilege, advantage, influence, and power. We firmly believe these principles need to be present in every single client project, every step of the way—from interpersonal interactions to each deliverable.

- **We commit to actively challenge policies and systems—internally and externally—that perpetuate oppression, discrimination, and inequities.** For years, we have led with a person-first and asset-based approach to communications. We believe that the words and images we choose and the way we use them characterize our identity, manifest our belief system, and bond us with or disconnect us from those with different identities. As language changes, we adapt and change to ensure we are using the most thoughtful and inclusive language possible. We do not always get it right but we are determined to keep learning. We center inclusiveness in our language and counsel our clients on how to reframe their communications to remove instances of discriminatory, stereotypical, or biased language and visuals. In turn this, creates messages and materials that enable everyone to feel that they are being reflected in the work. We ask that clients hold us accountable to actively create anti-racist work and foster an anti-racist environment. And as part of ongoing discussion, we challenge, with love, our clients to consider ways to be actively anti-racist. We approach these conversations with an open mind and an open heart. While difficult, we are certain of our collective power to use communications as a positive force to dismantle the societal norms, systems, structures, and barriers that have been designed to oppress.
- **We commit to supporting the efforts of organizations that serve those most affected by inequity and strengthening our role as an effective partner to those organizations.** We are intentional about the clients we work alongside, which creates an even greater imperative to achieve, model, and spread equity as a company and partner to these important allies. Working in partnership with colleagues, clients, partners, and community members every step of the way, we use the power of communication to advance justice: we lead campaigns designed to eliminate misinformation in public health. We launch and manage initiatives designed to shift philanthropic dollars to historically underfunded communities. We amplify issues that have resulted in federal policy change in support of local news. And, we help organizations re-orient their brands to be authentically aligned with their missions.

For Our World

At the start of the COVID-19 crisis, and in service of justice, Mission Partners made a commitment to deliver \$50,000 in resources towards Black- and women-led organizations, acknowledging the broken and harmful systems that contributed to Black and women-led organizations being among the most negatively impacted during the ongoing pandemic. The vision of a just, equitable world is what drives us and our work. That's why we're growing our commitment by investing a minimum of \$2.5M in Black- and women-led organizations by 2025.

- We commit to prioritizing Black and Woman-Owned Vendors. We are proud of the alliances and partnerships we've built that support our equity vision. More than 65% of Mission Partners vendors are women-owned businesses including five organizations identifying as Black-led, African-American-led, or Person of Color-led. In 2021 alone, **we moved \$617,000 in capital to Black- and women-led organizations** through sponsorships, investments, and intentional vendor transitions, along with an additional **\$130,000 in pro bono services** toward our multimillion-dollar commitment to invest resources in Black- and women-led firms.
 - » According [to 2021 data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#), the **demographic makeup of PR specialists in the U.S. is 83.7% white**, 8.9% African American, 12.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 4.5% Asian American. Also, according to the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York's 2021 Report](#) on Firms Owned by People of Color, owners at Black-owned firms (across sectors) were the most likely to use personal funds to mitigate their financial issues, while 92% said they had experienced financial hardship in the prior 12 months, compared to 79% of those at white-owned firms. In accordance with our commitment to growing Mission Partners as a teaching hospital and in accordance with our racial equity action plan, Mission Partners has launched a Social Entrepreneur in Residence program to invest in the growth and success of Black-owned communications or marketing business. The Mission Partners Social Entrepreneur in Residence is a **9-month term, and includes a generous stipend, business referrals, access, and growth opportunities.**
- **We commit to creating an ongoing dialogue to explore and take action on key issues** including cultural, structural, and institutional racism, as well as white supremacy, privilege, influence, and power, especially within the content of our [issue areas](#). Our Mission Forward® podcast and learning initiative offers both a platform for us to convene leaders on key topics while engaging in conversations with those most impacted by inequities. Since 2014, we've hosted community gatherings, workshops, and trainings to build more equitable communities from within and to learn and grow as a team.

For Our World

- **For lasting change, the way we spend our money will always align with our values.** We don't invest even a single dollar in Facebook ads, and instead prioritize investments in Black-owned media. We require our vendors to take annual surveys to ensure alignment with our values. There's a reason we are proud of our role in the B Corp™ community, and we take seriously our role to contribute to a radically inclusive and richly regenerative environment. Through direct investments, grants, sponsorships, vendor investments, and purchases, we will honor our commitment to supporting Black- and women-led organizations.

We acknowledge that putting this framework on paper is an important step, but our actions against this plan and in service of justice matter more. It is how we hold ourselves accountable to this racial equity action plan that will signal our effectiveness in advancing our vision for more equitable and inclusive workplaces, communities, and society.



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WOMEN
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Mission Partners is a woman-owned strategic communications firm and Certified B Corporation™. Our specialty lies in guiding purpose-driven organizations in realizing their greatest social impact.

As a B Corp™, our company voluntarily invests in meeting significantly higher standards of sustainability, governance, and giving back to the community in our daily operations. At Mission Partners, we believe business is a force for good and we are committed to providing an environment of mutual respect, which celebrates the diversity of thought, background, and experience. We believe the more inclusive we are, the better our work will be.

Since launching the firm, we've counseled hundreds of nonprofits, foundations, and socially responsible businesses across the U.S. and around the world, as well as the partners who fund and support their work.

Learn more and partner with us:



mission.partners



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