

## **Instrument 1: Discussion Guide for Call with Project Collaborators**

### **Employment Processes as Barriers to Employment in the Lower-Wage Labor Market**

**Introductions/purpose of the study:** *Racial bias can be present in any step of the employment process, including how jobs are advertised and applications are screened, tasks and work hours are assigned, the nature of the mentoring offered, how compensation is set, and how retention and promotion decisions happen. To meaningfully improve racial equity in employment, it is important to understand the many ways in which employment processes in hiring, promotion, and wage setting can contribute to racial disparities in employment. This project, conducted by Abt Associates and the University of Chicago and sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will systematically review what is known about how employment processes can present barriers for workers of color, and identify potentially promising strategies to address biases in the low-wage labor market. As a first step, the project is soliciting insights from individuals from a variety of groups who can provide diverse perspectives on employment barriers and potential solutions. We are gathering these insights to identify common themes, challenges and best practices that can inform further research; our questions are not intended to identify specific, individual instances of bias.*

*We invited you for an interview because of your role as a <Title/Description of Work> at <Organization>. We learned about <organization> through <insert description>.*

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**Privacy statement:** *The discussion today should last about one hour. Your participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions that you do not feel able to or comfortable with answering. Before we start, I want to let you know that although we will take notes during the discussion, we will not include respondents' names or the names of specific organizations or businesses in our notes and information is never attributed to the name of the respondent in written summaries. Further, those summaries will be used to inform conversations with ACF and will not be made public—rather they will be combined with other sources of information. Findings will be included in reports and presentations to help inform future ACF research, such as identifying promising practices to mitigate barriers to employment and advancement for people of color that may be the focus of further ACF-supported studies. We will maintain privacy of records unless otherwise compelled by local, state and federal laws. <For calls with more than*

*one respondent> We also ask that everyone present on this call respect one another's privacy and not share information that was learned on this call.*

*Do you have any questions before we get started?*

*If you have any questions after we talk, please feel free to contact me at <contact information>.*

### **Module 1: Background (all collaborators)**

- Confirm name and contact information
- Current position, previous work
- Personal experience with low-wage labor market employment processes (employer, worker, policymaker, program operator (including local workforce programs), union representative, software developer, researcher, more than one)
- What in the interviewee's background has given them perspective on ways in which employment processes can contribute to racial disparities in employment outcomes

### **Module 2: Employers**

- Background on company (size, location, nature of work, range of positions, racial composition of workforce in lower paying jobs)
- Hiring processes
  - Recruitment practices
  - Application process
  - Screening applications
  - Hiring decisions
  - Use of staffing organizations
- Onboarding processes
  - Task assignment
  - Ongoing training/mentoring
- Job characteristics (including variation between permanent and temporary workers)
  - Wage and hours determination
  - Benefits available
  - Scheduling
  - Training/mentoring
  - Career pathway
- Promotion and retention processes
  - Expectations of workers
  - Monitoring
  - Performance assessment
- Changes to onboarding, training, and retention during COVID-19
- Problems and solutions
  - Places where racial disparities in outcomes could occur seen, overall and in intersection with other aspects of identity and experience, and ways employment processes discussed above may contribute to them or mitigate them
  - Promising practices for promoting racial equity in employment, retention, and advancement of workers in low-wage jobs

### **Module 3: Workers of Color in Low-Wage Jobs**

- Jobs held in the past three years [*do not request or record information on employer names.*]
  - o Total number of jobs held
  - o Occupations held
  - o Industries worked in
  - o Reasons for leaving jobs
- Current/most recent job [*do not request or record information on employer name.*]
  - o Tenure
  - o Characteristics of job (nature of work)
  - o Characteristics of employer (size, industry, location)
  - o Full-time or part-time
- How learned of job opportunities
- Experience applying for jobs (mode, ease of application process)
- Interview process
- Job characteristics
  - o Initial wage and raise potential
  - o Benefits available and take-up of benefits
  - o Hours (worker preference vs. hours available; scheduling)
  - o Training/mentoring provided
  - o Opportunities for promotion
- Challenges experienced finding work
  - o How those challenges relate to the individuals' race, alone or in conjunction with other aspects of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality) or experience (criminal justice involvement, educational attainment)
- Experiences while employed that have caused challenges to persisting in the job, receiving pay increases, or receiving promotions
  - o How those challenges relate to the individuals' race, alone or in conjunction with other aspects of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality) or experience (criminal justice involvement, educational attainment).

### **Module 4: Staff from Organizations that Serve or Advocate for Workers in Low-Wage Jobs**

- Characteristics of organization (mission, background, size, location)
- Characteristics of members/participants
- Employer processes that are most consequential for producing racially disparate outcomes and how those consequences may be conditioned on other aspects of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality) or experience (criminal justice involvement, educational attainment)
- Efforts to help members/participants obtain entry-level jobs
  - o Challenges and facilitators to obtaining jobs
- Characteristics of members' jobs (permanent vs. temporary, starting wage, part time vs. full time, availability of benefits)

- o Challenges and facilitators to retaining jobs
  - o Challenges to and opportunities for promotion
- Role for federal, state, and local policymakers in helping workers in low-wage jobs secure employment, retain jobs, and advance in their careers; role for other collaborators
- Specific programs, policies, practices (governmental and non-governmental) that merit further consideration

### **Module 5: State and Local Workforce Development Administrators**

- Agency overview, role regarding equitable hiring and promotion practices for workers in low-wage jobs
- Perception of primary ways in which employment processes produce racially disparate employment outcomes for workers in low-wage jobs, and how those outcomes may vary depending on other aspects of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality) or experience (criminal justice involvement, educational attainment)
- Employer hiring needs pre and post COVID; role in meeting them
- Assistance to job seekers in identifying job openings, applying for jobs, and interviewing
- Examples of programs, policies, or practices that can make hiring, retaining, and promoting workers in low-wage jobs more equitable

### **Module 6: Software Developers**

- Background on company
- *Nature of software used in employment process(es)*
- Marketing software to employers
  - o Perceived employer needs
  - o Benefits of product
- Potential for software to create racial bias in the hiring process(es)
- Potential adaptations to address bias
- Software for worker use (e.g., scheduling changes)
- New software on the horizon; potential use/benefits for employers and/or workers

### **Module 7: Conclusion (all collaborators)**

- Advice to employers/policymakers/workforce development program operators on how to facilitate employment retention and advancement.
- Perceived gaps in the knowledge base; priorities for further inquiry
- Recommendations for additional resources or contacts
- Anything else to add regarding the nature of bias in the low-wage labor market and efforts to disrupt it

Thank you