



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CROWN FAMILY SCHOOL OF  
SOCIAL WORK, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Advancing a More Just and Humane Society

# Engaging Employers to Disrupt Racial Bias in the Workplace

## *Strategies for Workforce Practitioners*

June 25, 2024



*Commissioned by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE),  
Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Dept of Health and  
Human Services (HHS). The views expressed here are those of the presenter  
and do not necessarily reflect those of OPRE, ACF, or HHS.*



# Webinar Objectives

## Learn about:

- Sources and forms of bias within employment processes
- Promising anti-bias strategies and evidence-building horizons
- Innovative strategies workforce programs are using to engage employers to address racial bias within employment processes
- Ideas for adopting/adapting similar strategies





# Agenda

Agenda Item	Presenters	Time
Welcome and Introductions	Abt	5
Framing the Issue: findings from the <i>Employment Processes as Barriers to Employment in the Lower-Wage Labor Market</i> project	Abt	15
Moderated Panel	Panelists (HireReach; SERJobs)	40
Q&A	All	10
Closing Remarks	Abt	5





## Audience Poll

***What type of organization do you represent?***





# Speakers



**Marlene Brostrom**  
Project Manager  
West Michigan Works!  
(HireReach)



**Michael Perez**  
Assistant Director of Programs  
SERJobs



**Angelique Crutchfield**  
Senior Analyst  
Abt Global



**David Kaz**  
Principal Associate  
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# OPRE's *Employment Processes as Barriers* Project

- **Project name:** Employment Processes as Barriers to Employment in the Lower-Wage Labor Market
- **Aims:**
  - Understand what is known about:
    - **Racial bias** in employment processes
    - **Promising strategies** to combat bias
  - Identify key questions for future research to address
- **Knowledge development activities:**
  - Literature review
  - Practice scan with collaborator consultations / interviews
  - Site visits





# What are sources of barriers?

- **Barriers: supply-side and demand-side**
  - Supply-side: barriers related to characteristics of workers / job-seekers
  - Demand-side: barriers related to characteristics of jobs / employment processes
- **Workforce programs tend to focus on supply-side barriers**
  - Building workers' knowledge, skills, and credentials
  - Addressing related challenges like transportation or childcare
- **Workers of color face particular demand-side barriers**
  - Racial bias creates barriers that may undermine the effectiveness of workforce professionals' demand-side efforts
  - What evidence could be built to help combat biased processes?
  - What might workforce programs do to address demand-side barriers?





# Key conceptualizations – Types of bias

- **Direct bias** occurs when the job applicant's or worker's race is either intentionally (explicit bias) or unintentionally (implicit bias) the basis for differential treatment
  - Explicit bias is bias that an actor is aware of
  - Implicit bias is bias that an actor is unaware of
- **Indirect bias** occurs when an individual's actions or business processes or policies:
  - Are on-their-face neutral
  - But have disproportionate adverse effects because of how they interact with aspects of **structural racism** outside of the labor market (e.g., housing segregation)







# What do we know?

- Racial bias can be present in any step of the employment process including:
  - In hiring: Advertising jobs, hiring decisions
  - Post-hire: Learning opportunities, compensation setting, retention and promotion decisions
- The extent of disparities in hiring and advancement
- Rich body of causal estimates of racial bias in hiring decisions
- Many potentially promising anti-bias strategies are being pursued





# Some promising anti-bias strategies

- Skills-based hiring
- Equitable use of technology
- Data transparency
- Elevating worker voice & power
- Consulting on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) by workforce organizations





# Evidence-building horizons

- Extent and consequences of **bias post-hire** (on-the-job):
  - Workers' experiences: barriers to retention and advancement and the role of racial bias
  - Quantitative measures of biased decision-making that parallel existing measures of hiring bias
- Details of **strategies to combat bias** (pre-hire and post-hire)
  - How they are implemented; lessons learned
    - What is required for successful implementation?
    - What is within **workforce practitioners' sphere of influence?**
  - Causal impact of those strategies on workers' outcomes





# Evidence-building horizons: Components

- **Employer engagement and implementation**
  - Persuading employers to engage
  - Getting buy-in from across the organization
  - Building staff capacity
  - Creating safe environments to elicit candid worker input
- **Other strategy design details**
  - Identifying and measuring relevant skills to support skills-based hiring
  - Understanding workers' and job-seekers' experience with the strategy and barriers encountered (e.g., with technology-based solutions)
  - How to develop meaningful measures of workplace equity to support transparency-based solutions





# Horizons for workforce practitioners

- **Engaging Employers**

- Consulting to improve workplace culture and processes to improve retention and advancement outcomes for workers of color
- Helping them implement skills-based hiring (e.g., HireReach)

- **Services to Workers**

- Help recognizing and navigating bias on the job, through information and connecting to supportive networks
- Prepare them for technology-facilitated recruitment and screening





# Panelist Discussion





# Questions?





## Conclusion

- Research literature shows that racial bias in employment processes is pervasive and persistent
- Workforce practitioners are engaging in exciting work to help employers combat bias
- Workforce practitioners and researchers can each support the ongoing expansion and improvement of effective strategies to combat bias







## Audience Poll

*What additional content would most help you to learn more about this topic and/or apply what you heard today to your own work?*





# Resources and Links

- [EPB Project Page](#)
- [EPB Literature Review](#)
- Sign up for OPRE's [Newsletter](#)
- Sign up for Abt's [Workforce & Economic Mobility News](#)
- Abt's [Workforce & Economic Mobility Insights](#)
- Abt's [Workforce & Economic Mobility Learning Series](#)
- Forthcoming: Special topics briefs (2) and Series of action-focused briefs for practitioners (4)

HireReach: [www.HireReach.org](http://www.HireReach.org) SERJobs: [www.serjobs.org](http://www.serjobs.org)



EPB Project  
Page:



EPB Literature  
Review:





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