

Understanding and Applying Targeted Universalism

DATE

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Overview

- Goal Today: Explain the *benefits* and *process* of Targeted Universalism as a program/policy design framework.
- This presentation will:
 - Contrast T/U with universal and targeted programmatic approaches.
 - Walk through the Targeted Universalism design process (“doing T/U”).
 - Present examples of T/U.
- In the process, I will break you into small groups for two discussion prompts to check and deepen your understanding, and I will periodically pause to answer questions.

Caveat: Targeted Universalism is not a Magic Bullet

- The Targeted Universalism framework has enormous potential to unlock ideas, innovative processes, and collective action that can solve many of society's most pressing problems without further dividing people or stoking backlash.
- But that doesn't mean it is a magic bullet. Not every problem is amenable to a targeted universalistic intervention.
- Nor can every organization do T/U. It is difficult and challenging.
- To see the limits of Targeted Universalism clearly -- as well as its potential -- we need to understand how policy is developed.

Policy / Program Development

Generally speaking, societal interventions follow three steps:

1. First, there must be recognition of a social, economic, political, or environmental problem. (e.g. poverty, gun violence, climate change)
2. Second, policymakers or other responsible authorities must decide that the problem requires *and* merits a policy response.
3. Third, policymakers must select an appropriate and effective policy response, and develop sufficient consensus to promulgate and implement it. This only can occur if the policymakers at issue have determined the first two steps affirmatively.

It is only at this step where a Targeted Universalism frameworks becomes operational. Targeted Universalism cannot resolve debates at the first or second steps. But it can be quite powerful at the third step.

Equity 2.0: Targeting within Universalism

- The problems we face seem daunting, the politics of solving them often feel more challenging. How can we build greater consensus on the path forward?
- Targeted Universalism is a way to design policy to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged while overcome the divisiveness that sometimes arises from targeted approaches or exacerbate the disparities of universal approaches.
- It is an approach that opens up policy pathways to equity.
- To understand this policy approach, we need to contrast it with universal and targeted strategies.

I. Universal Policies & Programs

- To understand T/U, we first need to understand the two dominant modes of policy and program development, starting with Universalism.
- Universal policies are those that aspire to serve everyone without regard to group membership, status, or class.
- Universal policies can appear in different forms. They can exist as benefits that are extended to all OR can appear as minimum protections, entitlements, or rights for all.
- The key to understanding whether a policy or program is universal is not how many people benefit or are protected, but the aim, purpose or aspiration of the policy or program.

Universal Policies: Examples

- Universal Policies in which all can benefit: Universal Public Education, Single-Payer or Universal Health Care systems, Universal Suffrage or Voting Systems.
- Universal policies that provide minimum protections, entitlements, or rights for all: minimum wage laws, fair labor standards laws, constitutional rights that apply to all “persons,” many (although not all) anti-discrimination laws.
- Whether people benefit or are protected is not the litmus test. Whether people *could* benefit or are intended to benefit is the key.

Example: The Poll Tax Amendment

- The 24th Amendment to the US Constitution says:
- “The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay poll tax or other tax.”
- Is this a “universal” policy?

How Universal is Universal?

- Consider “UBI” – or Universal Basic Income:
 - A UBI policy would pay benefits – a “freedom dividend, to take one example” – to everyone, including Elon Musk and Bill gates. In practice, most “UBI” are income conditional.
- In truth, pretty much every “universal” policy is limited in some way. Most commonly, by the jurisdictional reach of the legislating authority. But even other “universal” policies, like Universal Suffrage, have age and other restrictions.

Types of Universal Programs (Gradient)

TABLE 1

Types of Universal Programs

Type of Policy	Components	Examples
Truly universal	They apply to everyone within a national jurisdiction. No cost or fee. No age or income baseline or minimum. No activity required.	Universal basic income
Broadly universal	A universal policy with some minimal exceptions, based upon activity.	Universal suffrage
Conditionally universal	A policy that applies conditionally, but not based on inherent characteristics.	Social Security's unemployment insurance and old age benefits; minimum wage: requires working

The Advantages & Disadvantages of Universalism

- Universal policies have broad appeal in a diverse and pluralistic society. They give everyone “skin in the game.” They tend to be more sustainable and harder to stigmatize or roll back.
- They also have many disadvantages.
 - Universal policies tend to be more expensive, even if they are cheaper per capita, because they serve more people. They are more easily labeled as unaffordable, overly ambitious, or unrealistic.
 - Universal policies can also exacerbate disparities, because they treat everyone the same, and can be inadequate to help those most in need.

II. Targeted Policies & Programs

- Targeted policies are those are aimed at serving or providing benefits or protections for specific groups or discrete populations, generally to the exclusion of other social groups or people.
- The aim of targeted policies, in most cases, however, is not to exclude. Rather, targeted policies are based upon the presumption that the problem which they aim to address is unique to the target.
- For example, a rural assistance program aimed at helping rural residents may be based upon data showing a particular problem existing principally in rural communities. Thus, it is not that urban or suburban communities are *disfavored* so much as it is understood, in this example, that they are not suffer the problem that the policy is aimed at alleviating.

Targeted Policies: Examples

- The most commonly targeted groups tend to be those based upon low-income status, such as poverty or class, rural communities, veterans, the disabled, the elderly or aged, or children and parents, especially mothers.
- Among those, the most widely recognized forms of targeted policies, however, are based upon class, or income qualifications, such as welfare programs. Programs that are means tested or use income-based qualifications, often aiming at alleviating poverty, may be the largest class of targeted policies. Such policies are at least four centuries old.
 - The 1601, the English Poor Laws gave local governments the authority to levy taxes to build and maintain almshouses, provide indoor relief (such as cash or sustenance) to the elderly, disabled, and deserving poor, and furnish tools and materials to employ the unemployed.

Targeted or Universal? The Bloomberg Philanthropies Gift to Johns Hopkins

- The Bloomberg Philanthropies recently provided a \$1 billion gift to Johns Hopkins Medical School. The gift was intended to cover full tuition for medical students from families earning less than \$300,000, and living expenses and fees for students from families who earn up to \$175,000.
- The Philanthropies estimated that it would benefit about 2/3 of medical students into the future.
- Is that a targeted gift or a universal program?
 - Although serving most students, it is nonetheless targeted based upon income qualifications.

Targeted Policies: More Examples

- Not all targeted policies are based upon the premise of solving a problem experienced by a targeted group or community. Rather, in some cases, targeted policies are based upon the presumption that some groups are deserving of special privileges based upon public virtue or service.
 - The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, may be one of the most successful targeted policies in American history, providing subsidized education, loans, and health care to veterans returning from World War II.
- Examples of targeted programs include policies like Medicaid, SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamps), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the refundable (or low-income) component of the Child Tax Credit (CTC). Other targeted programs include Social Security's Old Age Benefits, Affirmative Action, Medicare (age), and Reparations.

The Advantages & Disadvantages of Targeting

- Targeted policies are generally more efficient and less expensive (consider the so-called public option vs. Medicare For All'/ single-payer) overall, because there are fewer beneficiaries.
- They also tend to be more egalitarian because they directly benefit the group or community that needs help.
- But by targeting a particular group, these approaches are often viewed as unfairly helping one group over another, seeding hostility and resentment or stigma. They are less popular.
- As a result, targeted policies tend to be more limited in duration (often sunseting (like the Freedman's Bureau) or being rolled-back, like some welfare programs), and less sustainable.

Example of Challenged Targeted Policy

- In 2021, the Biden administration's attempted to provide nonwhite rural farmers with additional assistance from a \$4 billion federal fund. The intended beneficiaries were Black farmers.
- White farmers sued, arguing that the policy was discriminatory, and a federal court struck it down.





Any Questions?

Group Discussion # 1

- 1) Brainstorm and share a short list of policies you developed or supported in recent years, and try to identify whether they are universal or targeted.
- 2) If they are universal, what is the universal goal? If they are targeted, who is the targeted group?

You have 7 minutes.

III. Targeted Universalism

- Targeted Universalism is a policy framework that establishes universal goals pursued with targeted implementation processes.
 - Imagine, for example, that the goal is to reduce homelessness by 25% over the next five years. Instead of achieving that goal with a single intervention, such as an investment in funding shelters or affordable/ BMR housing units, a Targeted Universalism approach would entail several separate, but reinforcing or complementary implementation strategies, which might include those two ideas, but also possibly pair them with supportive services, health care, counseling, and the like.

Targeted Universalism Explained

- Although Targeted Universalism seeks most of the advantages of both approaches while avoiding their drawbacks, T/U is *not* really a mashup or hybrid because **it is categorically distinct from both**.
- Although the reach of a Targeted Universal policy is aspirationally universal, it differs from both traditional universal and targeted policies because it requires *multiple* supportive implementation pathways to reach that goal.
- ***Both*** traditional universal and targeted policies usually employ a one-size-fits-all means to achieve their goals. These approaches do not tailor their implementation efforts to the needs of different groups, except by design (as in the case of targeted policies, whose aspirational reach is generally tailored to the needs of the targeted group or community).

How to “do” Targeted Universalism

- 5 Steps:
 1. Establish a universal goal based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations.
 2. Assess the general population performance relative to the universal goal.
 3. Identify groups & places that are performing differently with respect to the goal and the overall population. Groups should be disaggregated.
 4. Assess and understand the structures and conditions that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal.
 5. Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

Step 1: Establishing the Universal Goal

- Most policies have a statement of goals or purposes. The goal should be framed in relation to the problem you wish to address.
- This seems simple, but is possibly the most difficult step in the process. It is time-intensive and requires tremendous collective effort.
- What is required here is to be as specific and explicit as possible. Ideally, it should follow SMART criteria: specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time bound.

Establishing the Universal Goal

- The articulation of the universal goal is the first step in a targeted universalism platform because it then serves as the basis for subsequent policy development.
 - Without reference to the universal goal, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to assess progress and evaluate success.
- Defining the goal in terms of collective aspirations will require the input of many stakeholders, and can be a time-intensive process if done well.
 - It is partly a visioning process as well as an effort to get members of the institution or community to articulate a shared vision, much like vision and mission statements do for institutions.
 - This step requires bringing everyone affected or touching the policy to be at the table: experts, community members, affected people, and everyone involved in implementation. It requires meaningful community engagement and involvement.

Reminder

- Remember our discussion at the top, that in some instances, there is a lack of political consensus that a social, economic, or environmental problem or need exists, or that a policy response is warranted. A targeted universalism process cannot resolve these policy disagreements.
- It can, however, forge a policy pathway forward where there is broad agreement that a problem exists and, furthermore, that the problem warrants a policy response, even if there is disagreement or uncertainty about what to do.

FAQ: Should the universal goal be realistic or aspirational?

- It is important to make your goal realistic/achievable. If the universal goal is set so high that to reach it would be impossible for most or all groups, then those strategies are, narrowly defined, failures. Worse, it will engender cynicism among participants in the TU effort.
- On the other hand, the universal goal cannot be so anemic or weak that it requires little effort to achieve.
- One way to manage this tension is to set the universal goal in increments over time. So, for example, you might say that you want to get all groups to 50 percent within 5 years and 80 percent within 10 years.

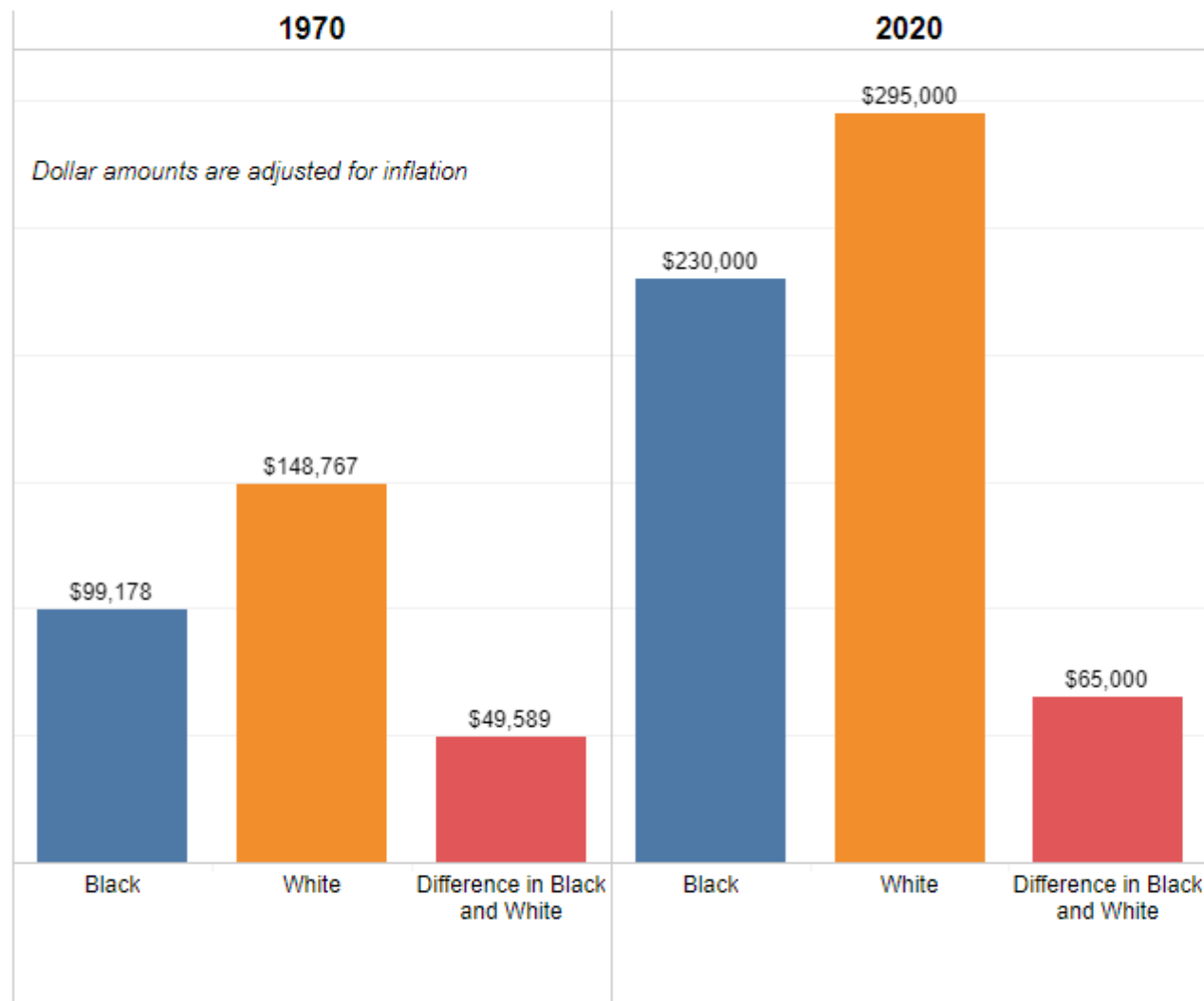
FAQ: Can I focus on a specific group or aim to reduce a disparity for the universal goal?

- Answer: No.
- In short, the universal goal should be independent of, and not reference specific groups. The Targeted Universalism process is NOT a license to engage in targeting in policy, programs or platforms in goal-setting. All targeted efforts should be designed in reference to the universal goal.
- Nor should the universal goal be framed with specific reference to reducing or closing disparities.

The Problems with a Disparities Focus

1. It triggers a Zero-Sum Mindset
 2. Draws Attention to Groups Rather than Structures/Conditions
 3. Implicitly Makes a Group the Norm
 4. Closing a Disparities Doesn't = Fairness or Justice
 5. Reducing Disparities Through Retrogression
 6. Disparities Can Persist Even if Absolute Conditions Improve
- T/U allows some degree of disparity, as long as all groups are at or above the universal goal.

Median Home Value



Legend

- Black
- White
- Difference in Black and White



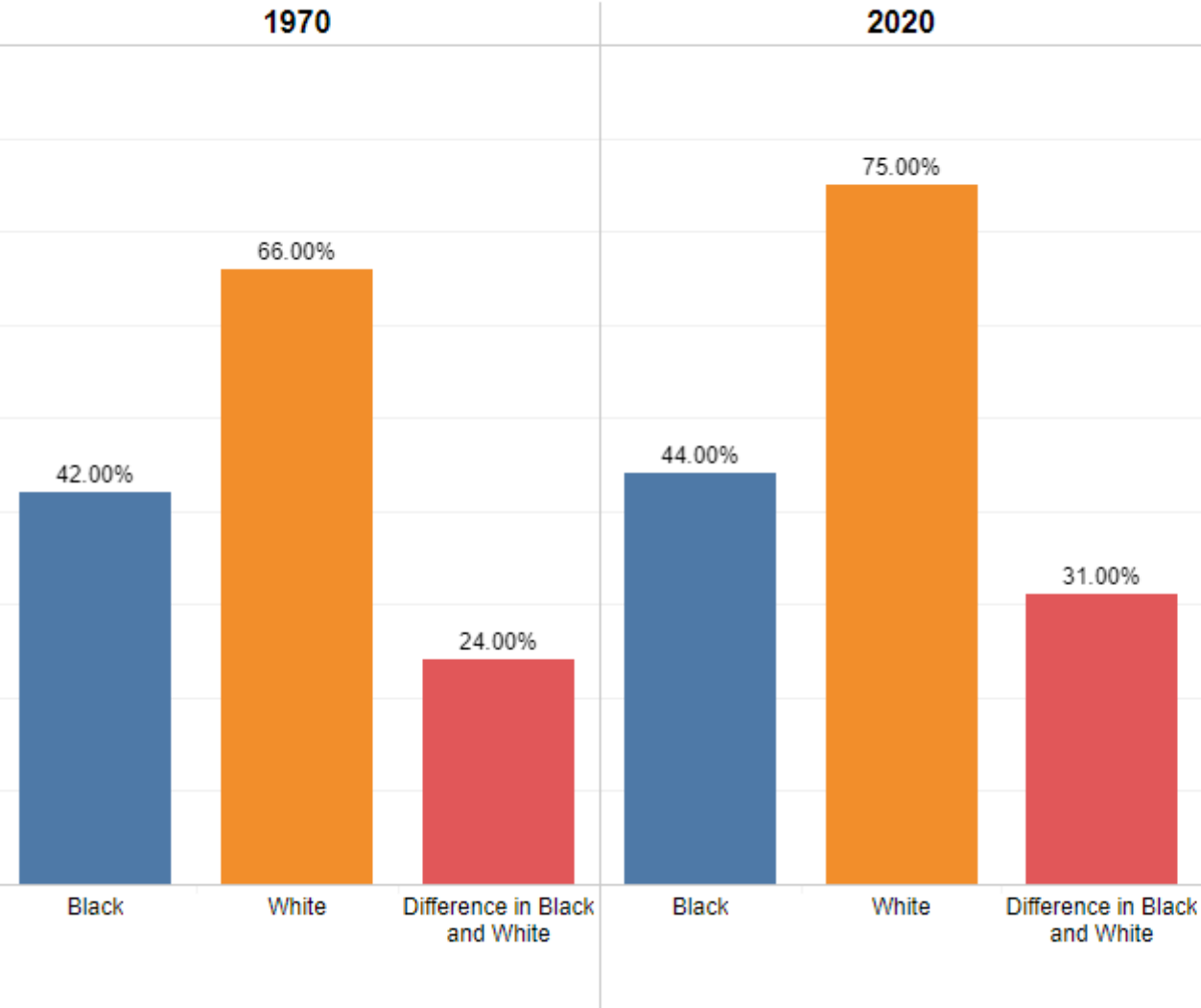
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Data from U.S. Census Bureau

[View on Tableau Public](#)

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Homeownership Rates



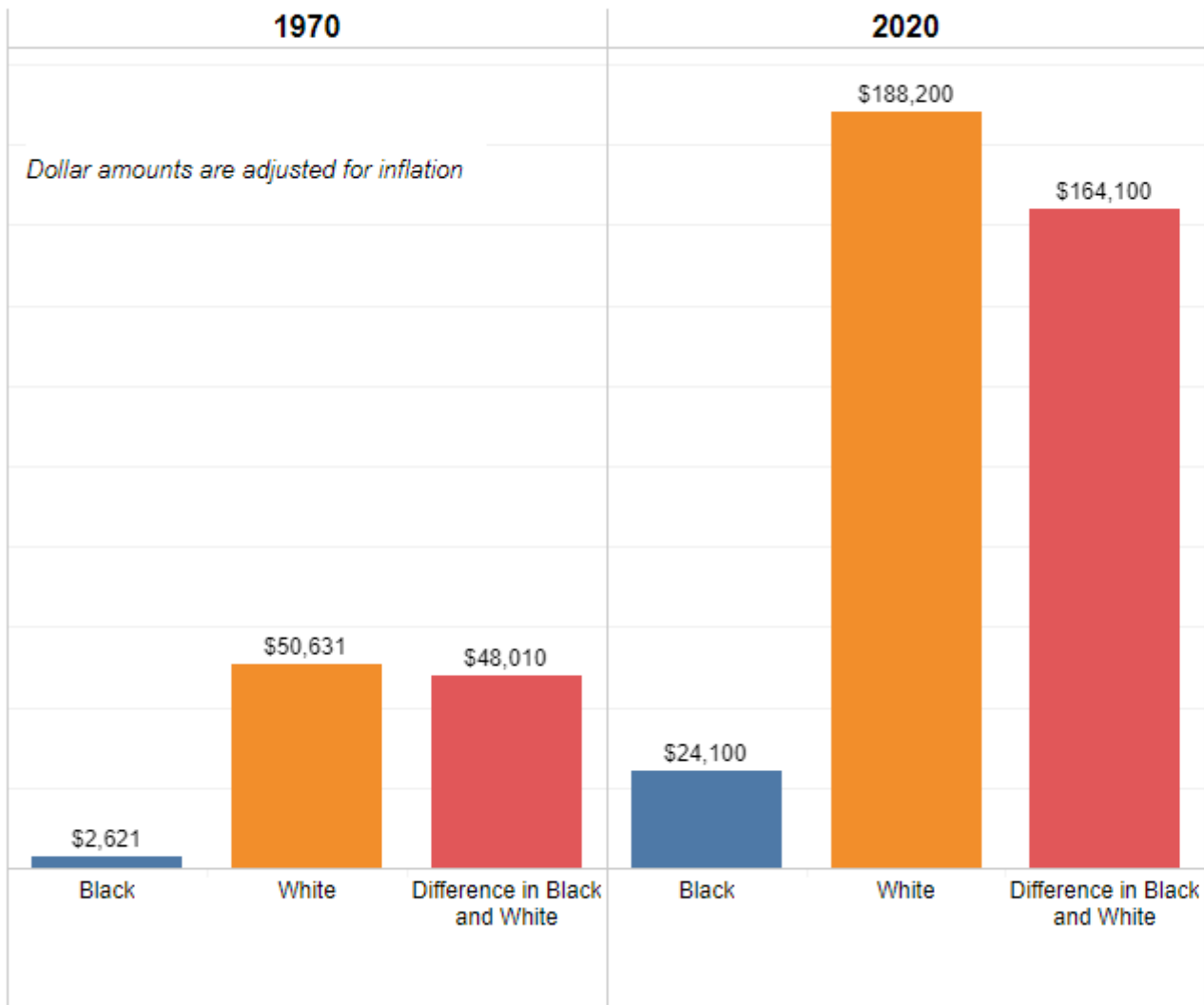
Legend

- Black
- White
- Difference in Black and White



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Median Racial Wealth Gap



Legend

- Black
- White
- Difference in Black and White



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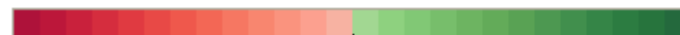
Summary Chart:

Indicator	Grade	Absolute Disparity	Relative Disparity	Absolute Progress	Relative Progress	Total	≡
High School Graduation Rates	A	91.98%	96.98%	165.28%	64.27%	94.15	
Voting Rates	B+	59.68%	64.21%	12.67%	109.79%	79.57	
Poverty Rates	B	52.43%	24.51%	36.99%	92.36%	75.78	
Bachelor's Degree Earned	B	36.62%	77.89%	517.78%	56.88%	74.77	
Health Insurance Coverage Rates	B	62.88%	65.93%	8.92%	56.51%	74.28	
Childhood Poverty Rates	B	41.25%	15.59%	30.40%	113.85%	73.41	
Median Home Value	C+	31.08%	43.48%	131.91%	25.48%	67.24	
Life Expectancy	C-	21.05%	29.71%	12.32%	28.71%	61.47	
Infant Mortality Rates	C-	58.78%	26.76%	67.48%	10.72%	61.10	
Median Household Income	F	68.00%	0.88%	66.54%	0.80%	49.61	
Median Racial Wealth Gap	F	241.80%	62.83%	819.50%	66.84%	49.50	
Incarceration Rates	F	11.19%	0.05%	11.14%	2.05%	46.95	
Homeownership Rates	F	29.17%	23.30%	4.76%	186.36%	31.54	
Maternal Mortality Rates	F	116.77%	1.61%	120.32%	5.87%	24.47	
Unemployment Rates	F	88.65%	30.52%	44.54%	64.19%	21.51	



Worsened

Improved



Examples of Universal Goals

- 1) All residents within a city should have access to, and reside within a half mile, of a park or city green space.
 - (Austin Parks & Rec Plan)
- 2) All 4-year old children should have access to safe, quality pre-K educational programming.
 - (NYC PreK for All)
- 3) All students in a school district should have access to vision care, including free eyeglasses, so that difficulty seeing (for non-blind students) is not an impediment to learning.
 - (“Vision for Baltimore”)



Any Questions?

Group Discussion #2

1) Identify universal goals you hope to achieve.

- Articulate those goals in SMART terms.
- List possible articulations of the Universal Goal(s).

2) Separately, specify what disparities or inequities you hope that achieving the universal goal will help solve.

- Keep this separate from the universal goal articulation.

You have 7 minutes.

Step 2: Assess the General Population Performance relative to the universal goal.

- This is relatively straightforward: identify the difference between the universal goal and overall performance.

Example 1: Goal is 100% high school graduate rate. Suppose a school district's graduation rate is 92%.

Example 2: Goal is 100% health insurance coverage. California's insurance coverage rate is 92.7% We have 2.9 million uninsured people.

Step 3: Identify Groups & Places that are performing *differently* with respect to the Goal *and* the General Population. Groups should be disaggregated.

- This is the step in which you look for group-based disparities.

Example: percentage of each group without health insurance in California is masked by the 7.3% uninsured figure:

- 12.3% of non-white Hispanics
- 5.8% of whites
- 5.8% African-Americans
- 5.5% Asian & Pacific Islander

Source: UCLA

Disaggregating the data creates a very different impression. We can begin to see the group that needs the most attention. If we disaggregate further, we would get an even stronger sense.

FAQ: How do you decide to disaggregate? Which groups do we examine?

- There is no prescribed formula. The answer is highly contextual.
- In each situation, different groups may perform differently.
- You may start by doing a disparities *analysis* to see if you can isolate groupings that are performing further from the goal.
- Look at 1) social identity groups, 2) geographies, 3) socio-economic circumstances, and 4) other conditions/circumstances.

Step 4: Assess and understand the structures and conditions that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal.

- This is the *WHY* some groups are further from the universal goal. Diagnose the cause.
- To understand the why, engage all stakeholders.
 - E.g. To understand why a social group performs worse in a class, ask students, teachers, parents, counselors, and experts/researchers. Maybe it has to do with nutrition, sleep, undiagnosed vision or hearing problems, English language difficulties, or other issue

Step 5: Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

- Brainstorm, select, and implement specific strategies tailored to the barriers or resource needs you identified in step 4 for each group analyzed.
- Be aware that *different* implementation strategies may be required for different groups and/or institutions or systems you are targeting."
 - E.g. Students with learning disabilities may need a different set of supports than students who are food insecure.
- As a rule of thumb, a decent T/U process would include at least three different implementation strategies.

Building the Table & Evaluation

- As you can see, robust community and stakeholder input is required at most stages.
- You need input on framing the universal goal, assessing the reasons for disparities, and in designing implementation strategies.
- This means including 1) those most affected by the problem, 2) those involved in administering the solution, and 3) experts who have studied the problem.
- In addition, you need a strong evaluation process to measure progress, and a communications strategy to frame your plan.



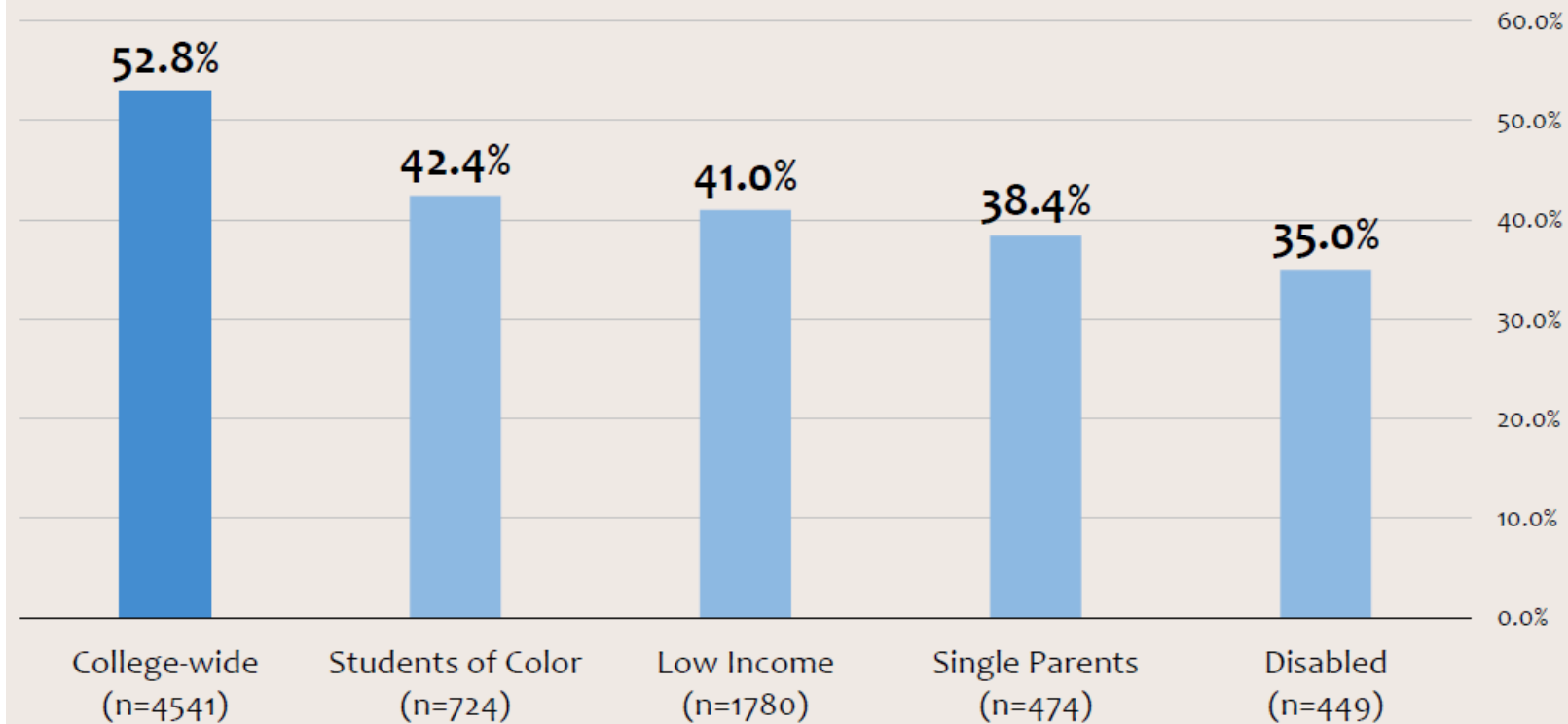
Any Questions?

Example for a Community College

- **Focus:** Graduation Rates within 3 years.
- **Step 1:** Let's say we want to set the goal of 60% graduation rates within 3 years.
- **Step 2:** What is the general performance?
- Answer: about 53%
- **Step 3:** Disaggregate into specific subgroups.

3-year Graduation Rates:

2016-17 Cohort – Associate Degree & Technical Diploma Students



Targeted Universalism Strategies

- Step 4: Analyze why such disparities exist.
- Possible reasons:
 - Inability to afford tuition.
 - Unpaid bills.
 - Care responsibilities.
 - Unsure how to re-enroll.
 - Lack of supports.
 - Others?

Targeted Universalism Strategies

- Step 5: Brainstorm possible strategies *for each* group.
- E.g. for student-parents:
 - provide daycare services during class.
 - Provide housing that is family/children friendly.
- For students with disabilities:
 - Assess access issues on campus, from parking to classroom and building entrances.
- For low-income students:
 - Assess financial aid office's ability to serve students and counsel individually.



Any Questions?

Summary: Targeted Universalism

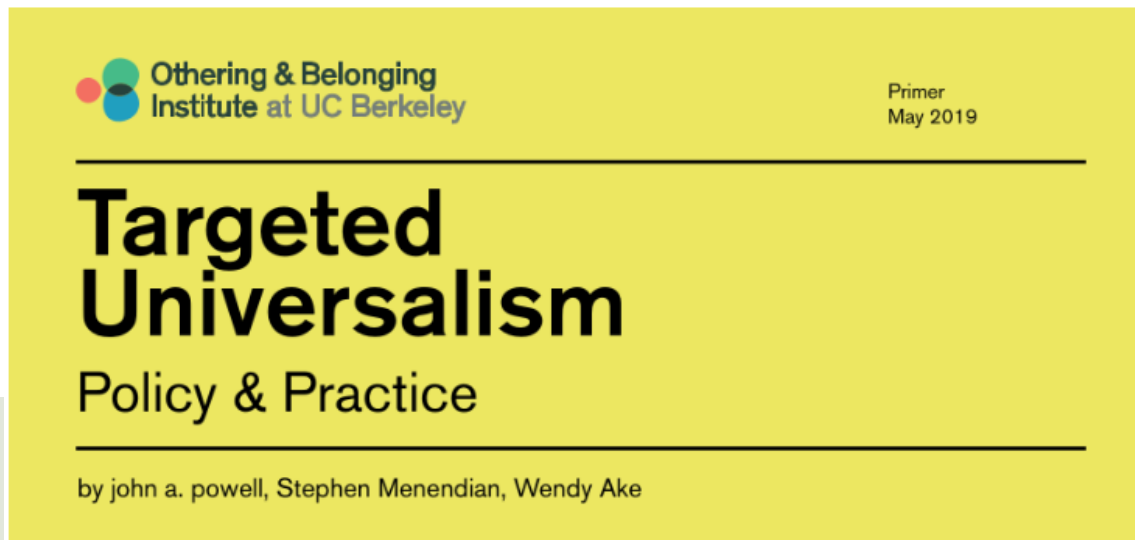
- Targeted Universalism requires a *diversity of implementation strategies* rather than a one-size-fits-all solution. This requires a different kind of policymaking than the typical legislative victory. It requires monitoring and evaluation to ensure success.
- Although the targeted universalism framework supports a wide range of policy interventions, the process for deriving implementation strategies unlocks the potential for transformative change.
- By emphasizing the universal goal as a way of justifying a diversity of implementation strategies, transformative change possibilities can be envisioned, pursued, and aligned.

Summary: What you Need to Do T/U

- DATA: you can't do T/U unless you can measure performance for the general population and subgroups.
- Access to Stakeholders. You can't do T/U without ground truthing and buy-in.
- Capacity: You need to design and implement multiple interventions simultaneously.
- Patience: you need time to evaluate progress and make adjustments.

Learn More About Targeted Universalism

- Check out our resources page with our Primer and FAQ
- <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/faq-targeted-universalism>



Targeted Universalism

Policy & Practice Primer



Animated Video

Case Study: King County

Podcast interview with john a. powell

FAQ

FAQ: Targeted Universalism



- In simple terms, what is Targeted Universalism?
- Can I aim to reduce a disparity for the universal goal?
- Can I focus on a specific group for setting or calibrating the universal goal?
- How do we set the universal goal?
- Should the universal goal be realistic or aspirational?
- Do you have examples of the application of Targeted Universalism in practice?
- What's the difference between Targeted approaches and Targeted Universalism?
- Is Targeted Universalism a framework that justifies or legitimizes targeted policy design or a remedial scheme?
- If a policy like minimum wage helps people of color more than white people, does that make it an example of Targeted Universalism?
- How does this relate to equity? Doesn't Targeted Universalism water down or de-emphasize racial equity?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgGcftWpwUQ>

Primer

- We are out of time, but if you want to read more about targeted universalism, please go to:

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>

You will find our primer and more resources, including our FAQ.

