# AVDS strategy

**Description: after setting up the group and doing your research about the state of racial equity at your specific institution, what are strategies one can take to actionably address areas of racial inequity at their institution?**

## Low-hanging fruit and easy first steps for addressing racial inequity:

* Identify who at your institution is responsible for racial equity: this could be a Dean, office, department, program head, or some other institution. If it is not someone’s full time job to do racial equity work, advocate for a position solely dedicated to doing that work.
* Ask for data about race at your institution. A good place to start is an annual diversity report that tracks the racial makeup of students, post-docs, faculty and staff, as well as a detailed yearly report about racial equity-related efforts made by your institution and metrics for success.
* Also ask for data about the admissions practices in your program. For example, a formal evaluation of every rejected application from a PEER (People Excluded based on Ethnicity and Race) applicant could reveal discriminatory or exclusionary admission criteria.
* Advocate for creating a Post-Bac program for PEERs .
* Advocate for financial support of PEERs with creation of an award.
* Require active anti-racism training for people in leadership positions and for students as part of their graduate training. This could eventually be expanded to asking that any PI or faculty that actively interacts with trainees receive this training.
* **Read** [**AVDS’ Recommendations for Increasing & Supporting Racial Diversity at OHSU**](https://zenodo.org/record/3948281) **for more ideas!**

## Data collection

* Read the Data Collection section (starting on page 7) in [AVDS’ Recommendations for Increasing & Supporting Racial Diversity at OHSU](https://zenodo.org/record/3948281)

## Working with other student or racial equity groups on campus

* AVDS’ strategies are largely founded on building towards long-term change in a sustainable manner. People who are new to social justice work often burn out quickly by trying to solve all problems immediately, but AVDS believes there needs to be a lot of solid groundwork laid in order to truly address these issues and cause culture shifts. This slow approach may not align with other groups on campus, but that’s okay, you should respect that different groups may take different approaches and do your best to work together in areas where your goals overlap.

## Working with administration

* Institutions are primarily concerned with saving money, which for racial equity can often translate to taking action that merely presents the appearance of progress. There may be individuals within administration who mean well, but it is useful to remember that these individuals are still operating within a structure where their job demands that they put the interest of the institution first, so often their good intentions can only go so far. Working with administration can therefore be difficult, especially as individuals become defensive when presented with criticism of the work they have done. However, AVDS believes that it’s best to first try to work *with* administration and not against them. If you can frame your asks in the context of mutual goals, you are more likely to receive their help. However, staying in the good graces of administration doesn’t mean sacrificing the principles of your group, so it can be a fine line to tread and requires ongoing conversation within the group.
* **Tips for presenting changes and new policies to administration:** It is common for administration to focus on the details of a proposal and semantics in order to distract focus away from the main goal. For instance, they may try to dwell on how certain implementations of your proposal are unrealistic or won’t work, but remember that it is not your job to be doing any of this in the first place and the least they can do is handle implementation and logistics. In order to maintain focus on the central goal of your proposal, it’s good to begin by explaining that it is not meant to be a completely fleshed out plan as ideally the university should be paying professionals for this work. Furthermore, administration should have a better idea of how to realistically implement policies anyway given that they have a more intimate understanding of the structure of the university, while most others likely have only a very basic understanding (in fact, structures can be intentionally esoteric so that only those on the inside have any knowledge of which people to talk to in the chain of command in order to push for real change). The more polite way to communicate this is that the expertise of administration is required to put the plan into action. As the discussion continues, don’t be afraid to repeat yourself if someone tries to shift focus.
* **General tips for meeting with administration:** In our experience, there should always be more than one person attending a meeting with someone from administration. When there is only one person, administration may try to overpower them or use other political tactics that are easier to use when dealing with only a single individual. Another important thing is to make sure to take detailed notes and identify action items for when you next meet. You could even bring someone from your group to the meeting whose duty is to be the note taker. Without proper tracking, the meetings tend to repeat themselves: your group brings up particular issues you would like to see addressed, administration responds by apologizing and offering explanations for the current state of things, and the meeting ends without resolution, resulting in a repeat of the conversation in the next meeting. Taking notes and identifying action items assures that the conversation can move forward and that time won’t be wasted by having to repeat topics of conversation (especially if a lot of time has passed since the last meeting and it’s not fresh in everyone’s mind)

## Adaptability

* The strategies you take are likely to change over time depending on their success or failure at your particular institution. Different communities will be in different places along the [path to becoming an anti-racist institution](https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf) and so your strategies will need to be appropriate to the current state of the culture as it grows. A common mistake that people make is to default to classic approaches to racial equity, many of which are not actually effective. Be open to creativity, critical assessment of your success, and reimagining your approach
* The language in racial equity work is always evolving to more explicitly and appropriately frame the reality and complexity of white supremacy’s deep roots in society, the various manifestations throughout history, and how different groups are uniquely impacted, so expect your language to evolve as well and be conscientious about the true meaning behind words. However, this does not mean that things always need to be perfect. For example, “BIPOC” is a relatively new term that many have adopted, but it has its limitations and not everyone necessarily agrees that it’s a useful term. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use it: the important thing is to acknowledge the limitations and be open to changing your use of the term in the future as the discourse and your group’s understanding evolves.

## Being conscientious about how the internal structure, culture, and strategies of your racial equity group may perpetuate white supremacy culture

* Don’t be a part of the problem. Approach this work with the same values that you wish to imbue in the larger culture of your institution and communities
* Helpful resource: [“Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture”](https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html) from Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun



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