United Way of Washtenaw County

Governance Series Session 5
Wednesday, February 26, 2019 - 9:00am - 11:30am

Session Objectives:

- Make connections between systemic and institutional oppression and the implications to our sector’s work
- Learn practical tips for embracing DEI work in your organization including examples of what local organizations have already done
- Work alongside other leaders to create your own action plans and discuss related costs

Agreements:

- Start/end on time
- Practice self-care
- Create space for multiple truths
- Keep focused on our common goal
- Be mindful of privilege
- Move up/back
- Supportive Space
- Use “I” statements
- One mic, one rock star; listen deeply
- Be willing to be uncomfortable
- Be kind and brave
- Look for learning
- Expect unfinished business
- Uphold confidentiality

Agenda:

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Arrive &amp; Settle In</th>
<th>Institutional &amp; Structural Change</th>
<th>Planning for Change</th>
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<td>9:00-10:00</td>
<td>Anyone here for the first time?</td>
<td>Discuss Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building Chapter 8 (pg 81-89)</td>
<td>Review EIC Appendix – Institutional/Structural</td>
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<td>10:00-10:30</td>
<td>Did you take the FakeEquity Pledge?</td>
<td>Q &amp; A + Reflection questions</td>
<td>In what ways will you (continue to) advance racial equity in your organization and community in the next 12 -18 months?</td>
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<td>10:30-11:15</td>
<td>Video: Conscious Leadership</td>
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<td>11:15-11:30</td>
<td>Appreciations, Evaluations &amp; Close</td>
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Chapter Eight

Interventions: Goals, Processes and Strategies

Sally Leiderman

“It’s not that we have tried comprehensive system reform and found it lacking, it’s just that we have never really tried it.” — Doug Nelson

Doug Nelson, President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, made this point many years ago to make the case that, until we put in place everything we know needs to be done to make things better, we should not be surprised that things are not getting better—and we should not judge our methods until we have put all of them in place. David Hornbeck, former superintendent of the Philadelphia Public Schools, made the same point in his school improvement 11-point plan, in which he stated that the 11th point was that all of the 10 points above must be implemented if the plan has a chance to succeed. John Powell, executive director of the Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity in the Americas, in a meeting of advisors to a foundation that frequently partners with communities to improve community well-being, noted that one of the fundamental ways community building work gets off track is that its goals are generally aimed at reducing something or fixing something, and not a positive vision of what a community could be like when the work is done. Further, he said that the positive goal of racial equity is not explicit enough. The goal needs to be the elimination of white privilege. And he challenged people in the room to think about what that might look like in its specifics.

We raise these comments to make the point that, in the United States at least, we have never implemented a fully realized community building or place-based foundation/community partnership, because we have never explicitly designed one to eliminate white privilege, rather than one to achieve racial equity or to reduce institutional racism. Since we know that white privilege exists and substantially affects the distribution of benefits among groups of people, one could argue that outcomes for people in the United States as a whole (not just relative to another group) can not change in a substantial or sustained way without attention to the issue. Thus, much of the thinking in this section of the monograph is based on imagining (not knowing) what a fully realized community building or place-based community/foundation partnership might be like if the processes that maintain white privilege were an explicit consideration in the partnership’s design and implementation.

Earlier, we described some of the typical components of community building efforts, from the perspective of funders, evaluators and others who do this work. In my own work, I sometimes talk about this as an ‘initiative-centric’ view of community change, because it describes the work in terms of discrete starting and ending points, linked to goals, timetables and resources usually developed by

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a funder outside of a community. In contrast, Barbara Major talks about community building work as a process that is always happening in a community, in which the people who live and work take advantage of resources being offered while trying to be true to what the community is doing for itself.

The following are questions we posed in thinking about how to reduce or eliminate white privilege in our community building processes and strategies:

- How is white privilege operating in ‘initiative-centric’ community building premises, processes and actions? What exactly does it look like?
- If we want our community building and place-based work to contribute explicitly to dismantling white privilege and its effects, what would have to be different about the premises, processes and actions of the work?
- How could this thinking be applied in practical ways to community building work? What might it take to build new approaches into our community building work?

Below are some examples of the results of this thinking.

1. Saying that the elimination of white privilege is a goal of the effort

One obvious change would be to name white privilege and racism where they have contributed to current community conditions, and to name the elimination of white privilege as an explicit goal for the work. While this might sound obvious and unimportant, the analogous experience of work on institutional racism has shown that it makes a difference in how some foundations, technical assistance providers, system and institutional players and evaluators think about and carry out their community building work. The Levi Strauss Foundation created Project Change in 1990, a community/foundation partnership that had as one of its four stated goals to “dismantle institutional policies and practices that promote racial discrimination.” As far as they knew, theirs was the first community/corporate foundation partnership to name reducing institutional racism as one of its goals. At that time, most corporations and foundations were talking about bias or discrimination, diversity or improving race relations—not racism, and definitely not institutional racism.

The CEO of Levi Strauss and Company and the board of the Levi Strauss Foundation were cautioned by advisors and some staff that naming institutional racism would bring repercussions. For example, it would open corporate employment practices to a higher level of scrutiny. And, in fact, this occurred. However, they expressly decided to “call it racism.” The Mott Foundation also began talking about reducing institutional racism as one of its grant-making goals, and several other foundations are now apparently more comfortable with this

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language because they explicitly name it and make it a goal of some portion of their work. The Akonadi Foundation, The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, the St. Paul Foundation, the Long Island Community Foundation, and others are examples. Their willingness to name the issue reinforces, provides political cover for and influences their grantees and colleagues—inside and outside the funding world.

One consequence of this wider discussion is that it is harder to marginalize the people and groups (often groups of color) who were always aware of and raising this issue for consideration. In addition, each successive wave of clarity makes the previous “scary” topic seem much safer, compared to the one in the current spotlight, particularly as white people and institutions of privilege begin to adopt the language. For example, 15 years ago CAPD, a non-profit evaluation group, was told by some funders that it could not use the word “racism” in a proposal if it wanted to be funded; now it hears the same thing about the phrase “white privilege” but less frequently about “racism.” We believe that talking explicitly about “white privilege” would eventually have a similar effect.

We also recognize that language gets co-opted and “coded” over time. Powerful words often lose their meaning when the topics they are designed to highlight are threatening. For example, “empowerment” conveyed an important idea for several years, with some useful work done in its name (investments in building community organizing skills, different ways of thinking about business and non-profit leadership, etc.). The term is now considered jargon and doesn’t seem to spark a lot of new thinking. We have noticed the same devaluation of the language of diversity, inclusion and race relations. Thus, we hope that people will set goals to “eliminate white privilege” soon, while there is a window for the words to have power—but watch for ways in which the words, and the goal, get subverted if they become too threatening to the status quo.

2. Eliminating cultural racism from the goals of community building efforts

The child welfare system in St. Paul, Minnesota is working on an initiative to reduce racial disparities in the system. They are working to understand the extent to which their policies and practices contribute to these disparities and to change them. The effort includes working with their own staff and with contracted providers, as well as listening to several different racial and ethnic communities (Hmong, for example) in St. Paul to try to learn more about their perspectives and experiences of child welfare. In addition, they are trying to create an evaluation and accountability system that can capture what they are learning by using both non-Western methods of evaluation and administrative and other system data in Western ways. They are looking at disparities by racial groups, and also by ethnicity. For example, white families and African American families are disproportionately affected by the system, as are Hmong, Somali and Native American families.

A Hmong consultant who works with Hmong families in St. Paul was explaining to one of the authors of this monograph one reason why the families with whom he works are often at odds with child rearing expectations and family support and...
child welfare efforts in St. Paul. He said, “You know Maslow’s theory? For the Hmong, you need to flip it on its head. We’re not trying to get to self-actualization; that is antithetical to our values and culture. We are trying to create strong, interdependent families and communities. To us, that is success.”

How would the implications of his comment change the goals of a community building effort of which his neighborhood is a part? It might change the relative value placed on “overcrowded” housing conditions, for one thing. It might change the ideas about what is considered “mental health” among adolescents, and the kinds of “good parenting” practices offered in family support, early education and family preservation programs and settings. It might challenge a system leader’s or funder’s idea about how a family organizes itself to simultaneously meet its economic and child-rearing needs, who is considered a family and what constitutes a household. It might fundamentally challenge community builders to consider whether the implicit goal of their effort is to help a group of Hmong families assimilate into the prevailing cultural standards of St. Paul, and what the consequences of that have been for Hmong families and the child welfare system.

3. Using inclusive processes to set community building goals (including recognizing the limitations of inclusive processes)

Many community building efforts include processes to involve people from different perspectives and backgrounds, including racial identities, in their goal-setting activities. These strategies include paying attention to multi-racial collaboration in the proposal and design processes, using community visioning and similar processes to set community outcomes and priorities, and establishing specific goals for different racial groups (for example, in school achievement, health outcomes, income and wealth accumulation, etc.). People who put these kinds of processes in place usually try to focus on the variety of perspectives represented, the authenticity and legitimacy of the people who are representing a broader constituency, and making sure that all of the voices in these processes are heard. There are a number of resources available to help people doing community building pay attention to these kinds of issues.4

These kinds of processes make sense. But to eliminate cultural racism in the goals of community building efforts, we may also have to scrutinize the results of these processes much more deeply than is common. The process doesn’t ensure that white privilege has been eliminated, because of the internalized superiority and inferiority of participants in these processes and the power dynamics at work.

For example, one lesson from the Project Change work is that most of the task forces set boundaries around what they thought the goals and the strategies of their work could be. Though these issues were debated within the groups involved, none of the task forces elected to target the Levi Strauss Company’s employment practices or to engage in very confrontational strategies with other institutions. They chose other targets (media, the school system, lending institutions) and, for the most part, negotiating, collaborating, training or other

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4 Please see, for example, materials produced by California Tomorrow, the Applied Research Center, and materials available at www.evaluationtocisforracialjustice.org.
“within the system” strategies for change. In hindsight, several task force leaders reflected that this was the message they received from the Foundation. As the evaluator of this effort, I noticed that the Foundation did not give them this message in any direct way. Some task force members put these constraints on the work themselves, responding to their own sense of what was appropriate and what was not, given their understanding of how things work.²

I believe we have to become much more skilled, honest and courageous at naming the aspects of the dominant culture that we allow to remain in community building goals, even when we use inclusive processes to set them. Then we need to remove them. This may require, for those of us who are white, 1) taking direction from people of color who often see white privilege or cultural racism before we do; 2) challenging results of inclusive processes—not on the basis of who is included but on the result’s consistency with the group’s analyses of white privilege; and 3) being among the people who are marginalized for consistently insisting we view our work through a racialized lens.

Below are some examples of what we might have to question:

- What value is placed on white notions of material success? What weight does the community building effort put on how community residents invest their money (for example, using immediate income to support extended family members—“sending money home”—rather than to accumulate wealth among immediate members of one’s nuclear family)? Are relationships valued as wealth (as they are in some Native American nations)?

- Are we very clear about the cultural assumptions the initiative makes about what constitutes its key goals? What assumptions does the initiative make about what constitutes a stable family, a well-raised child prepared for success in school and in life, high-quality education, individual or community self-sufficiency, individual or community interdependence, a responsible person, an engaged citizen, effective leadership, and a good steward of the earth? How is good health defined? Literacy? Proof that something works?

- Are we constantly questioning the extent to which the community building effort is working to assimilate community members to white cultural values about these things? Do we know the extent to which various groups within the community support or reject assimilation in specific ways?

- Even in an inclusive process, have we explicitly discussed with residents of the community their histories, various cultural values and individual or group aspirations? Do we know our own racialized or cultural history, values and aspirations, especially if we are white? Do we have processes, vocabulary and analyses that permit us to look at the values underlying our work from different racial and cultural perspectives?

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• As white people, are we willing to work just as hard to support community building efforts that ‘privilege’ the stated aspirations of people whose cultural values are different from our own, as we do for ones that match our own values? That is, are we willing to give up our own cultural racism?

4. Building elimination of white privilege, elimination of cultural racism and effective strategies to reduce institutional racism into our theories of change

When we create a theory of change, we are laying out the assumptions about how we expect change to happen. Theories of change also lay out the strategies that we think are likely to make things better for a community. This means that theories of change are one of the key places to apply our understandings of white privilege, cultural racism and institutional racism, if we want community building efforts to operate differently than they do today. Below are some issues to consider:

• Is the theory of change ‘community-centric’ (rather than ‘initiative-centric’)? That is, are we assuming that the community existed long before this particular community building effort and will go on afterwards? For example, does the theory of change acknowledge the community’s own agenda for change, and processes in place working toward similar ends? Is there a process to allow the community to test out whether or not it should engage with the proposed community building effort? To decide how to allow it to enter, and how it should leave?

• How serious are we about our effort to make a difference? Is the timeframe for the effort, the level of resources, and the range of direct and indirect strategies sufficient to make a real difference in people’s lives? Have we incorporated an analyses of the tenacity of systems that maintain white privilege and resistance to eliminating or reducing the power of these systems?

• What strategies are considered viable and acceptable? Are there implicit or explicit constraints placed on the kinds of strategies that a funder will support based on not embarrassing white people or not upsetting systems of white privilege? Does the initiative rely solely on collaborative or other within-system strategies to create change, or does it also consider efforts to increase pressure on institutions from outside?

• One of the leaders of the Albuquerque Project Change effort to reduce institutional racism credits a lot of their success to a mix of collaborative, coalition and community organizing strategies. She notes that, “We didn’t start to see change until we stopped asking for it and started demanding it.” One consequence of their work in partnership with many other groups was New Mexico’s passage of one of the toughest anti-predatory lending laws in the country, and the ability to defend the legislation when it was under attack in a subsequent legislative session.
5. Incorporating political education or community organizing strategies into community building work

Barbara Major and Donna Bivens talk about the confusion of internalized racism and internalized superiority as one of the strategies by which white privilege remains unchallenged. Paulo Freire, in his classic Pedagogy of the Oppressed, \(^6\) talks about political education as a means of helping people end this confusion. El Centro de la Raza operates a community organization to support the self-determination of residents of a multi-racial neighborhood in Seattle. While it is not a comprehensive community initiative, it embodies the comprehensiveness of community building goals and strategies within the organization. When you visit El Centro de la Raza, it is impossible to tell the people offering services and support from the people receiving services and support. In part, that is because the same people may be both providers and beneficiaries of service. Dignity and respect for the capacities and leadership of people is built into the fabric of the operation. There is a multi-lingual childcare center in which the children learn about community activism and non-violence. There is an attractive and high-quality restaurant in which food is served free. There are a variety of supports for couples experiencing domestic abuse, and poetry classes and an art gallery. And importantly, there are regular political education classes focused on helping people see the relationship among their individual struggles, white privilege and racism, and other forms of oppression.

Individuals and staff are always encouraged to work on their issues at two levels: their immediate individual need, and political remedies to redress the underlying issues that create the immediate need. For example, a person who is currently homeless is likely to be supported to move into one of the apartments that El Centro has developed in the neighborhood over the years. He or she will also be encouraged to become active in community efforts to increase the availability of affordable neighborhood housing. El Centro shows us that paying this constant attention to both levels of work—by the same people—gives them an opportunity to feel their own power, end some of their confusion about how things actually work, and be part of a collective action that has made a difference over the years.

6. Being transparent and addressing racism and white privilege directly.

Many community builders have indicated that they have had to either “pay now or pay later” in terms of the struggles they go through once they begin to work explicitly on their own individual and collective understandings of white privilege and structural, institutional and cultural racism. These groups remind us that there is always struggle, discomfort and conflict in this work, but the issues will always surface at some point—even if groups choose to avoid discussing them. Further, absent the struggle, community building work inevitably stalls. Here are two ideas for community builders to address these struggles:

- It is possible to name privilege and racism explicitly in your work, but it may not always be strategic to name them in terms of particular strategies. Andrea Anderson of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change gave examples at a meeting she and I recently attended. She called this the “inside and outside game.” In thinking about how to support improved early education and care outcomes for children in a state, she asked about the distribution of poor outcomes for young children by race grouping. This had not previously been a guiding analysis for the state or the community building effort, though it was becoming more central to their thinking over time. As is true in most states, people knew about the changing demographics of the state but were having difficulty talking about them in ways that moved the work forward. Anderson then noted that most of the children of color in that state are in family daycare settings, but most of the state’s policy and funding for early care and education focuses on center-based care. People in the state felt that universal policies, not racially specific ones, were most effective at gaining political support. Anderson offered that the community building effort in that state could work to refocus the state’s policy priorities toward family care, without ever making it about race.

- All of the work of community building does not have to be done by multi-racial groups or in multi-racial settings. Mono-racial work and caucuses are valuable, and can be a sign of the maturity of a community building effort. Barbara Major offers that some communities of color are in so much pain that they need to do some of their healing work apart from other groups. Otherwise, the healing work gets shortchanged in favor of protecting or taking care of people from other groups (usually the white people). We know of some pro-integration advocates who believe that society cannot achieve full integration of opportunities and values using segregated strategies or working in mono-racial caucuses. But with that exception, many community building efforts that are explicitly talking about racism in their work encourage the use of caucuses of white people, African Americans, Latinos/as and other groups as part of their work. (For more information about doing caucus work, see chapter 10: Multi-racial Partnerships and Coalitions.)

7. Staying the course
Whenever communities and funders work together, there will be power and group dynamics at play. Funders have money (and often many other kinds of resources), and community organizations and residents have access to the people, places and actions that can produce outcomes. That is, funders need communities to do community building, Foundation Boards, management and staff often say that they have no reason to exist without “grantees” (people who have ideas, opportunities and reasons to use foundation resources). While this is not entirely true—foundations could give away their money at any time in almost any way for almost any purpose—it is true that foundations rely on others to do the work the foundation feels is important. Thus, the basic power dynamics in community/foundation partnerships are not as one-sided as they sometimes appear.
At the same time, one of the most difficult power dynamics in community/foundation partnerships is that, as the work is currently constructed, the consequences of things going badly are always much more serious for the people in communities than for donors, foundation Boards, management and staff. All of the players in a community building effort who are economically, intellectually and emotionally invested in the work suffer if things don’t go well. In the most difficult instances, people in the community or foundation employed by the effort may lose their jobs. But all of the people in communities that participate in these efforts have to live every day with the results—in terms of the conditions of their communities, the kinds of supports and services available to them, the relationships that are built or ruptured, and the opportunity cost of being part of the effort instead of doing something else with the same time and effort. This is not true for people at the foundation in the same way.

Community partners in community building and place-based initiatives can never walk away from what is going on in their communities (unless they can move away), and foundations can (though they may choose not to). In a similar way, most people of color can never walk away from racism, while many white people can. The ability to ‘walk away’ is one of the ways in which foundations are themselves privileged institutions.1

My own impression is that funding partners sometimes leave a community building effort when the opportunity they have unleashed becomes most difficult for them to control or its future success seems least likely. Sometimes the rationale is couched as unacceptable levels of risk or unacceptable returns on investment. Sometimes foundations will say that community partners are ready to go solo, though the problems are not solved and a community’s ability to move forward is compromised by the foundation’s departure. To me, that is one of the most central examples of white privilege in community building work: the worldview that allows a sense that some levels of risk are not acceptable, though the consequences to others of your opting out are greater for them than for you.

Appendix A: Call to Action

The work of building a Race Equity Culture demands an intentional approach. People of color and whites alike must interrogate assumptions about how the work of nonprofits, grant makers, and other social sector organizations is and can be done — and by whom. There are specific practices to be followed, at all four levels on which racism operates:

PERSONAL
- Decolonize your mind. Accept that white supremacy and institutional racism are real and practiced by all races.
- Interrogate the dominant narrative. Understand implicit bias and your identity and role in enabling and propagating structural racism.
- Complete your own internal work. Don’t put the burden exclusively on people of color or people who you perceive to be more “woke” to explain the system to you. Hold yourself accountable for the work at all four levels on which racism operates.

INSTITUTIONAL
- Commit to understanding and speaking publicly on principles of race equity, and how they apply in the institutional context.
- Disaggregate staff engagement, performance, compensation, and promotion/retention data by race at all staff levels. Hold yourself and leadership accountable for this work.
- Engage staff and communities of color to inform governance, decision making, and execution across organizational processes.

INTERPERSONAL
- Respect the lived experience of people of color operating within white dominant culture, including your own if you’re a person of color.
- Commit to building, being vulnerable to, and learning through, relationships with people of a different race, especially people of color whose voices are often marginalized.
- Acknowledge the impact of race-based power differentials within organizations.

STRUCTURAL
- Be accountable, at the individual and organizational level, for dismantling personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural instruments of white supremacy.
- Publicly advocate for race equity and challenge white dominant cultural norms, including naming microaggressions in interpersonal and institutional contexts.
- Cede power to people of color within and across teams, organizations, and systems.