

# 15

## Tools for Creating Healthy, Productive Interracial/ Multicultural Communities



# A Community Builder's Tool Kit



A Primer for  
Revitalizing Democracy from  
the Ground Up

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A Project of  
The Institute for Democratic Renewal and  
Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative

## PRODUCED BY

**The Institute for Democratic Renewal (Claremont, California)**, founded in 1998 by Claremont Graduate University to provide a focus for scholarly examination of the core issues facing the institutions and processes of democracy in the United States and abroad. This document is part of the Institute's initial project, *Renewing Democracy Through Interracial/Multicultural Community Building*. John D. Maguire, President Emeritus and Institute Director

**The Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative (San Francisco, California)**, created in 1991 by Levi Strauss & Company through its corporate foundation to address racial prejudice and institutional racism in four communities where the company had manufacturing facilities. Project Change, now housed within the Tides Center, currently works in Albuquerque, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Valdosta, Georgia. Project Change seeks to expand public recognition of racism's social and economic costs and promote much needed common ground through multicultural partnerships in communities where it is active. Shirley Strong, Executive Director

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**Center for Assessment and Policy Development (Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania)**, a non-profit research, planning and policy organization based outside Philadelphia. Founded in 1988, its mission is to improve the quality of life for children, adolescents, families and neighborhoods by helping to build the capacity of organizations, collaborations, government, schools and others who do the day-to-day work on their behalf. Through their evaluation, CAPD helps people use the tools of democracy—leadership, civic engagement, anti-racism work, system reform, public will, outcome tracking—to build stronger communities, particularly for children, adolescents and families. Sally Leiderman, President

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# The 15 Tools



1. **Plan with people, not for them:** Start by listening to local residents. Any detailed plan of action, in order to be legitimate, must arise directly from their most pressing concerns.
2. **Goals will help you see the big picture:** In any successful community-building effort, there should be such clarity of purpose that the essence of the undertaking can be described in no more than two or three sentences.
3. **Strategies will help you get from here to there:** As you gauge your neighborhood's needs and its capacities (that is, its available resources to reach a particular objective), and as you discover what has worked for others engaged in similar efforts, you will begin to develop the tactics and strategies best suited to the goals of your project. As with other challenges in life, you need a well thought out and executed plan to succeed.
4. **Leadership is about selecting the ones to follow:** You can't always choose your first leaders, so agree from the beginning that leadership can change. After that, the best course is to grow your own, train your own, replace your own. As for staff, it's easier to hold employees accountable than volunteers.
5. **Governance is about authority, power, representation and equity:** The "start-up" group has great influence over how decisions will be made and who will make them. The permanent structure they create needs to be based on equitable distribution of power and responsibility.
6. **Come to grips with racism:** The complex issues of racism, which play out as blatant or subtle injustices must be candidly addressed right from the start. The more educated people are about racism, the more effective their strategies to overcome it will be.
7. **Draw strength from multicultural identities:** Know and appreciate your separate traditions. It's possible for different groups to form an effective tapestry of community if each has equal opportunity, respect and status.
8. **Bridge language barriers:** For people to be included in conversation, they must be able to understand and be understood. Be aware of these needs, and make preparations before every important gathering for people to talk and listen in the major languages represented.
9. **Money matters:** Project leaders must take the utmost care to determine what the work will cost, to identify sources of financial support and learn how to tap them, to spend wisely, and to be fully accountable for all funds. A healthy donor-recipient relationship is driven not by guilt or charity but by mutual respect and appreciation.
10. **Action and analysis go together:** Once you have put your plan into motion, analysis must proceed with it, step by step. Without continuing evaluation, self-reflection, adjustment, refinements, and retraining as needed, continuing action will soon lose its energy and direction.
11. **Stay grounded in the community:** Issues change, priorities rise and fall, people come and go—but community-building projects tend to fare best when they keep their eyes on the prize and their primary focus on the people of their neighborhood. If injustice remains, so does the need for goals and strategies, action and analysis.
12. **Work hard to build constructive partnerships:** Without losing sight of your permanent interests, the best way to gain allies is to be allies with others, whether publicly or behind the scenes—and with or without credit for missions accomplished cooperatively.
13. **Cultivate the media:** Television, newspapers, and other media greatly influence people's thinking about public issues, and about the causes of problems and their possible solutions. The harder you work to maintain sound professional relationships with reporters and editors, the more likely your project is to get full and fair media coverage.
14. **Keep the motor running:** You should be constantly measuring where your project is in relation to where you expect it to be, so you'll always know what's working, what's not and what remains to be done.
15. **Be committed to the long haul:** Follow the game plan, keep up the pace, analyze, make changes, hold some resources in reserve—these are a few of the disciplines that will help you keep a long-term commitment to community building.

## How the Handbook Came to Be

One of the lasting benefits of President Bill Clinton's 1998 *Initiative on Race* was the lengthy list of "promising practices" found in communities throughout the nation. Several hundred exemplary projects and programs were identified in which people committed to the ideals of a more equitable society had come together in search of interracial, multicultural responses to the issues and challenges of racism.

Convinced that these programs deserved deeper study for the lessons that might be learned from them, the principals in Claremont Graduate University's Institute for Democratic Renewal took a closer look at thirty-seven on the list, and finally settled on fourteen of these for site visits.

The fourteen eventually became partners in the Claremont Renewing Democracy Initiative, which in essence is an ongoing search for greater understanding of the complex elements that make democracy work at the community level. The intent was not to hold up these fourteen local projects as "the best" or "the most successful" in the country, but rather to cite them as compelling and diverse examples of the work now being done in this field.

As the names of these fourteen projects suggest (they are listed in the back of this booklet) they cover the waterfront. They were selected in part for their variety, with each taking on a different subject or challenge: Jobs, for example, or housing, employment or economic development, health or educational reform, or some other concern. The communities where they work are diverse in size and location; they range from big cities to small towns to rural areas in all regions of the country. Taken together, they also include just about every major racial, ethnic, and cultural group in the American rainbow. Each implicitly or explicitly identified racism as a key contributing factor in the widening gap between rich and poor, and as a barrier to solidarity among all.

Over an eight-month period in 1999, study teams headed by John D. Maguire, President-Emeritus of Claremont Graduate University (and now director of its Institute for Democratic Renewal) visited the fourteen programs for two to four days each. Sally Leiderman, President of the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (consultant to this venture and one of the co-authors of this booklet) and David DeLuz, a Ph.D. candidate at CGU, also did substantial field work. Several of the other sixteen members of the project advisory committee (listed on the inside front cover) also went on one or more of the trips. Project advisory committee member Shirley Strong, Executive Director of Project Change, an anti-racism venture initiated by the Levi-Strauss Foundation, supplied crucial funding while helping in special ways to shape this project, and is a co-producer of this booklet. John Egerton, another project advisor, contributed indispensable editorial assistance to the booklet.

As our field studies progressed, we began to recognize some trends and patterns. First, no matter what their focus—jobs, housing, and so on—each project was in essence working on a response to the legacy of racism (where some groups assert privilege and others are oppressed) and to the worsening of economic disparity (the “haves” moving ever farther from the “have-nots”).

Second, we repeatedly heard participants describe their projects as “community building” efforts—deliberate, intentional, persistent attempts to move beyond racism and class divisions to virtually reinvent their communities as inclusive, respectful, cooperative, and proudly diverse partners in the larger society around them.

And third, it became apparent that these communities were doing the work of democracy. They were organizing individuals to create a collective demand for equitable economic, educational, employment and other opportunities; they were experimenting with governance structures that embody equitable representation and decision making; they were making use of the power that lies in multiple voices to take actions and to encourage others to take actions. They were making “majority rules” work for them. So these three key elements—**acknowledging and undoing racism, building a sense of community, and doing the work of democracy**—became the guideposts of our inquiry and the inspiration for this handbook.

Within the fourteen local projects that formed the centerpiece of our study, we found general agreement on the meaning and importance of these terms. Because they are so central to our purposes here, we want to pause and examine each concept a bit more closely.

## Understanding Race and Racism

**R**ace is an idea, a human invention used to distinguish groups of people from one another. Descriptive classifications are a natural and universal human tool. Every society uses them to observe who is tall or short, young or old, bald or skinny. The essence of racism is when one group of people defines another group as inferior on the basis of physical or other distinctions, and creates laws, institutions and practices that maintain and reinforce the privilege of the dominant group and the oppression of the “others.”

Because skin color historically has been the most commonly misused of these descriptive features, the name “racism” has attached itself to it. That dynamic, broadly understood, also defines other forms of discrimination—against women, for example, or the elderly, or the poor, or any other arbitrarily disparaged group (though other terms, such as sexism, may also apply).

Racism is more than the individual and collective bigotry of people; it is also the way bias is perpetuated when things remain as they were. This is the kind of racism that frequently exists at the level of institutions—governments, corporations, political parties, the media, schools and religious bodies. It is not enough to focus only on overt acts of bias in institutional racism; the roots of such structural racism are often buried beneath years of unexamined laws, policies, traditions, and rituals. Current consequences are more obvious, however. Whenever we see huge, consistent and long-term disparities of health, education, employment, social mobility, income and accumulated assets for groups of people, it seems reasonable to examine whether institutional or structural racism

“ It is for me important for us to stop arguing about race and racism, prejudice and discrimination, and tackle the problems these terms describe. ”

“ Too many community building efforts assume (without reflection) a fellowship of the oppressed—they are short on racial analysis. ”

**“ What does it take to stir things up to the point of launching something? Are we the ‘status quo’ capitol of the world? ”**

**“ The most important thing to us— even more important than race and culture— is being an effective, responsible resident of this community. ”**

plays a part. At the least, we should be asking why these kinds of un-American disparities have been allowed to persist by our current institutions.

The human problem we are faced with is that throughout history, differences have also been used to divide and conquer. Bigotry and distrust have kept us from forging the kinds of alliances and communities that can acknowledge racism, declare it wrong, understand how it came to be and, thus, what it will take to undo it, organize ourselves across our differences, draw strength from our diversity and take the necessary actions to fix what is wrong.

Whenever a diverse group is formed to work together on problems of mutual concern, they should first acknowledge that racism exists in all communities. Since it will need to be addressed eventually, the best way is to do it openly and honestly, up front, from beginning to end. This is because unexamined racism itself prohibits the formation of healthy communities.

And never forget: It helps to recognize that all community members have a vested interest in fighting racism. This is because racism— particularly institutional or structural racism—is expensive in human and economic terms, takes a great deal of energy to maintain, divides people and limits their opportunities to contribute to their fullest. This, fundamentally, is why racism must be addressed by those who want to build communities and revitalize democracy.

## Creating a Sense of Community

**T**he cultural composition of virtually every American city and town is undergoing unprecedented change. People are moving in from all over the world. As populations become more diverse, misunderstanding often spreads and tensions mount—and sometimes explode. Far from producing new insight and understanding, these clashes of culture, compounded by the use of various languages, tend to widen the spaces between different groups of people, and make it harder than ever for them to reach common ground.

Is this process inevitable, or can it be halted, and then reversed? What can be done to move people closer, rather than driving them apart? How can the places in which people find themselves become neighborhoods, and the neighborhoods become communities?

A procedure for doing this is proving to be effective in various places around the country. It begins by identifying and isolating matters that affect a majority of residents in a given area. Then, the residents themselves help create the vision for what constitutes a good place to live. Third, skilled leaders organize folks and work through a carefully representative and equitable process for deciding what it would take to make things better. And finally, the organized residents take specific actions that promise to improve and strengthen the neighborhood. These are the essential steps in building a community.

All politics is local, said the late Congressman Tip O’Neill, the famous local politician from Boston who went on to become Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. And so, he might have said, is community building. It begins locally, and as it unfolds, it gradually reaches into its surroundings—the city, the

state, the region, the nation, and beyond. Nelson Mandela began his “long walk to freedom” as a small-town lawyer trying to get some justice for his clients. Martin Luther King, Jr. was responding at first to people in Montgomery churches who were being subjected to racial discrimination on city buses.

Sound community building requires broad-based involvement of local residents willing to organize themselves, identify and elect their own leaders, build upon neighborhood assets, and form alliances with institutions outside the immediate area. A solid community organization with constituencies that cut across various lines of race and class must build trust within its ranks, and be constantly on guard against biased policies and actions by individuals or institutions that could undermine the group's efforts. Many agencies and departments of government and a wide array of profit-making groups such as real estate and lending institutions are burdened with dismal histories in this respect. In making it abundantly clear that inequitable and unjust treatment will no longer be tolerated, the new community builders not only serve their own neighborhoods—they also provide a vital impetus for change in the larger society.

The biggest barrier restraining most underserved communities is economic—insufficient resources, inadequate jobs, grinding poverty. For some, a sense of hopelessness and alienation is evident. And yet, in our visits to these local projects, we invariably found enormous resiliency, and deep reserves of energy and commitment. In fact, our most inspiring encounters were with people who, in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, have not only found success on a personal level but are giving leadership to others as well. In an age of fading heroes, these unsung women and men—and school children too—are America's untapped fountain of strength.

This is the paradoxical challenge at the heart of any quest for a new sense of community. On one hand, there is the constant need to overcome past and present manifestations of institutionalized racism, class divisions, and the like, and these must be addressed structure by structure, individual by individual. And on the other, there is the recognition that while a neighborhood's most critical problems are made infinitely worse by racism, these problems may transcend racial and cultural bounds, and can only be tackled by people of all racial and cultural backgrounds working together.

If every neighborhood felt a sense of commitment and belonging to all the others, and a pride in being an equal part of the whole, a true community would finally exist. That shining goal is a distant, beckoning star.

## Realizing the Promise of Democracy

Renewing democracy doesn't mean recapturing a once splendid past. Such thinking glosses over the horrendous injustices that are part of this nation's history, including decimation of the native population and the enslavement of millions of African captives. For America's citizens of color, there are no “good old days” to look back upon. In spite of the democratic and egalitarian ideals written into the nation's founding documents, we must be honest enough to acknowledge that, insofar as nonwhites are concerned (and some whites too), these ideals were not grasped and then lost—they were never realized in the first place. Democratic renewal means making the unfulfilled American

“Denial and resignation are the two big culprits. Both lead—consciously or not—to cynicism.”

dream a reality for all who live in this country. It means acting responsibly and cooperatively—as diverse individuals, and as communities—to make decisions, choose leaders, and distribute the power and benefits of society. The global impulse toward democracy is an awesome force. Millions of people who have only a distorted image of democracy risk life and limb to reach its shores every year.

Here in the world's oldest democracy, the workings of our government at all levels fall far short of perfection. They call to mind an old adage: Watching governments make laws is as unappealing as watching butchers make sausage.

But at the community level, where we followed the activities of these local projects, we saw much to inspire hope. People there are learning from experience that fairness and equity are the only principles on which a lasting social contract can be based. Slowly but surely, policies that reflect this even-handed ideal are being drawn up and implemented. Local projects that dare to take on daunting tasks, that struggle but stay together, that build from small successes to larger ones, that somehow turn up wise leaders and constantly develop new ones, are finding allies, collaborators, and funders to stay the course with them—and some of these programs are now beginning to see long-term payoffs. They are attracting new capital to their communities, improving housing and health care and education, getting good people elected, influencing local politics, getting results. They are using the power that comes from organizing and working together.

*This* is how democracy is renewed and revitalized. The more it is practiced, the stronger it gets. Measured against these standards, the present condition of our nation falls short of

the “more perfect union” our founders described in the Preamble to our Constitution. Now, more than two centuries after that document was written, The United States is entering a new millennium still too disunited as a country of haves and have-nots. Racism, poverty, and inequality remain the principal obstacles to civic health, social progress, and reconciliation among races and classes. The nation cannot attain its highest ideals or realize its ambitions as long as its residents are trapped in the dynamics of discrimination, either as oppressors or as the oppressed.

We who have worked together on this project are convinced that the seeds of democratic renewal are present in the very communities that are most in need of restoration and transformation—and those, in a word, are *our* communities, our neighborhoods, all of them. Revitalizing American democracy requires collective action. The place to start is where we are.

Here are some tools that may be helpful.

## Who This Tool Kit is For

We hope this booklet will be helpful to individuals and groups who want to improve their ability to organize a community to solve some of its most pressing problems. We hope this booklet is especially helpful to people engaged in community building work who have not yet really brought issues of racism to the fore, and to people engaged in anti-racism or diversity work who have not yet applied their skills to improving specific community outcomes. Both groups have a lot to teach each other—those are the kinds of lessons we have tried to capture in this handbook.

No publication could possibly provide all the wisdom needed for such undertakings. Sometimes just finding a place to start is what concerned people need most to confront vital issues of mutual interest. That is precisely what *A Community Builder's Tool Kit* is: A starting point for a cooperative undertaking. We offer these 15 tools to go along with other needed kinds of support such as the most pertinent websites, written materials, and organizations that also do this work, especially those that do anti-racism training. (See page 35 for listings.)

## How It Works

By sifting through all of the information we gathered on our field visits to these fourteen interracial, multicultural projects, we have identified fifteen elements that seemed to crop up again and again as points of primary importance. You might think of them as our “lessons learned”—the things our colleagues in the local programs repeatedly mentioned to us. In a sense, these are the minimum essential elements of effective community building. Deal with these matters, cover these bases, our associates collectively informed us, and you are most likely to develop a solid, healthy, sustainable community-building program.

## Why It's Needed Now

Despite a booming national economy fueled by the revolution in information technology, by economic globalization, and by measurable improvements in human health and education, the “great divide” is growing ever deeper and wider, threatening the survival of the planet. The haves are fast outpacing the have-nots; the rich grow richer and the poor poorer; the numerically fewer but otherwise

dominant society of lighter-skinned people is fleeing from association with more numerous and more beleaguered people of color. What is celebrated as a mighty boom time by many is lamented as a catastrophic bust by most.

This world view is visible here in the United States, albeit in less drastic contrast than elsewhere. And it is precisely here and now, when times are good for some, that programs to alleviate gross inequities offer the most hope of success. People distressed by the persistence of discrimination and poverty in the midst of plenty include not only the disadvantaged, but some in better circumstances who recognize their own responsibility—and their own vested interest—in working for the betterment of life for all. Neither those in the economic mainstream nor those on the margins can make such a world alone. A just and equitable society must make justice and equity a right of all, or eventually none will be able to possess it. Whether by necessity or choice, we are all allies, and all of us need help and guidance—need tool kits—to begin to see what is required of us in achieving an America as good as its promise.

This is a modest step in that direction: A start-up kit containing what might be called the minimum set of tools necessary (though not in themselves sufficient) for such an achievement.

# 1. Make Plans with People, Not for Them

**I**f you look closely at successful, ongoing programs that are building stronger communities, you are likely to find that their earliest investments of time and energy were spent in listening to community residents, gathering insights and facts, and getting to work on issues that mattered most to their natural constituencies.

*The people in the community are the people who will make or break any solutions that are developed. It is exceedingly tough to get neighborhood people to “own” a solution that isn’t genuinely based on their interests and input from the very beginning. It turns out that all the rhetoric about neighborhood involvement, or civic engagement, or resident leadership is really very practical advice.*



**As you begin to organize your own work, it helps to remember that:**

- Plenty of people will tell you to begin community building by assessing current assets and needs. These are useful tools for understanding the capacities on which you can build. But, when you really trace the history of successful efforts, they usually started at a prior step — by listening to what the neighborhood had to say, and by door-to-door, or group by group organizing, even before formal assessment and a plan of action were developed.
- The strengths, interests and concerns of neighbors are best gathered by a combination of community organizing, community-led research and traditional assessment, such as inventories of assets, community mapping and analysis of key data.
- Hard facts about housing, schools, jobs and wages, transportation, health and other concerns tend to support and sharpen what people already know from observation and experience. Analysis of these facts should be helpful in answering tough questions and bolstering arguments for change.
- It’s important for data to be broken down by race or ethnicity, by neighborhoods, or by other groupings (gender, class, age) to show a clearer picture of how people are being affected by existing policies and practices.
- One reason for these group-by-group comparisons is that underlying issues or root causes within particular neighborhoods may be hidden in data for the population as a whole. For example, comparisons may show unequal allocation of resources for education or public transportation that affect job opportunities, licensing and lending policies that make it hard for local businesses to develop, or police practices that steer unwelcome street activities (such as drug traffic) to one area or another.

### A couple of examples from our field visits:



**One group went door to door for several months talking with residents** in an urban neighborhood that was deteriorating physically and afflicted by frequent arsons. Jobs were scarce, public transportation was woefully inadequate, and many people were in poor health. The area was “red-lined” so people and businesses couldn’t get loans to upgrade their property. But what was most pressing to the neighbors was the fact that the city had illegally foisted a trash transfer station on the neighborhood. The small group that had listened to the neighbors made that the first target of united community action. The few became many, and the trash dump was removed. More issues were raised, and more victories followed. The neighborhood was galvanized, activated, and eventually transformed.

**Another program began by researching specific examples of racism in their** community. They found out whose loan applications were routinely accepted or rejected, who got leadership posts in key community organizations, and which school children were being placed in “gifted” programs and which in special education. This investigation forced local multiracial task forces to confront their individual ideas about what racism is, and eventually let them pick out their first targets for action.

“ To use ‘rapid change’ as a term for where we are right now would be terribly misleading. Any change is like jumping over a succession of high brick walls. ”

- Detailed analysis such as this allows communities to see what they have in common, good and bad. It also highlights specific improvements that people want, and indicates which issues to take on first to create early and tangible successes. And, communities may use first-stage outcomes to establish their long-term goals.
- Information gathered early to guide the development of a plan can also be used in other ways. It can be publicized widely to showcase a community’s capacities and current efforts at change, to mobilize support for greater changes, or to establish a starting point against which to measure future progress. The media (radio, television, newspapers) play a crucial role in maximizing or minimizing the success of these efforts. One of the tools below is exclusively about media.



## 2. Goals: Seeing the Big Picture

“ I have always puzzled why—in a city where plenty of people ‘get the picture’—there is such an aversion to making waves or rocking the boat. ”

Community-building projects come in all shapes and sizes. Some operate behind the scene, others are highly visible. They may be prodders or brokers of change, think tanks or street-wise aggregations, research-minded or action-oriented groups. There are many legitimate forms—but *it’s crucial that a project’s leaders and participants be clear about the nature, purpose, and character of their undertaking. If you can describe the heart and soul of your project in two or three sentences, that’s a good test of its clarity.*

*Clear goals give form and substance to any undertaking; they give it meaning and purpose. Habitat for Humanity builds affordable housing for the working poor. Common Cause works for reform of the political process. The AARP is an advocate for retired people and others in their fifties or older.*



**If you want to make sure your community-building project is that clearly defined and understood by others, it may help to know these things:**

- Simply stated, there are two kinds of programs: Those that challenge, push, persuade or cajole others to take action, and those that make things happen themselves. It is possible for a local organization to play one or two or several roles at the same time, so long as those involved are clear about the distinctions and have the skill and resources to succeed. As a general rule, however, projects that stay focused on one or two major objectives and don’t spread themselves too thin are the most likely to succeed.
- The more activist a project is—establishing new ventures, providing new services, intervening in the established routine of the community—the more certain it must be of its local support, its relevance, and its ability to meet recognized needs.
- The more a project aims to operate quietly in the background, the more it will be expected to apply pressure at the top of the community’s power structure. If it is to be effective, this quieter way will generate high expectations—and must deliver impressive results. To paraphrase Teddy Roosevelt, those who walk softly toward social change may need big sticks to get results.
- A hybrid of these two types is the project that seeks to be a catalyst or broker between the movers and shakers and the activists. A key tactic of such groups is negotiating changes that they themselves lack the power to deliver. Their strong suit is possession of enough information and knowledge to hold institutions accountable for their promises and their actions. (This not only applies pressure, but provides political cover for those who want to do the right thing but feel their hands are tied.) Accountability is the primary objective of these catalyst groups. Among their most effective tools are public report cards, lobbying with regulatory agencies, media coverage, community forums and awards to highlight positive achievements and informed public criticism.

### 3. Strategies: Getting from Here to There

**A**s you gauge your neighborhood's needs and its capacities (that is, its available resources to reach a particular objective) and as you discover what has worked for others engaged in similar efforts, you will begin to develop the tactics and strategies best suited to the goals of your project. As with other challenges in life, you will need a well thought out and executed plan to succeed. That will require careful attention to how to proceed.

“ If that work is self-determination and social justice, model it in the way you train and develop staff, make decisions, provide support and services. ”



**When you are deciding what strategies to pursue to create the change you are seeking, it could help to know that:**

- Programs that emphasize working from a careful analysis of what it will take to change things usually concentrate on one or two targets or goals, but they use many complementary strategies to reach each one. For example, one project was focused on the single goal of making more money available to businesses and individuals in low-income neighborhoods. They used the opportunity of a proposed bank merger to get millions of dollars set aside in a loan pool for certain neighborhoods (using as leverage the merging institutions' interest in showing evidence of compliance with the federal Community Reinvestment Act). They established an ongoing anti-racism training program for area bankers and created a permanent “fair lending center” in a local university to monitor lenders and assist borrowers. They worked with members of the state legislature to improve state consumer protection laws and enforcement. Each strategy produced its own intended result; together, they increased the likelihood of significant, long-term, system-wide change.
- Though each community is different, some common starting targets are school reform, opening up access to capital, public safety, better identification and handling of hate crimes, inequitable sentencing policies and racial profiling and employment opportunities. Supporting the ability of families to achieve their goals for the development of their children is also a common place to start.
- Successful projects show a deep understanding of the uses of power, and often display their own ability to employ it—in economic matters, politics and public policy and other areas. One neighborhood program we visited used its collective political power to gain control over abandoned properties in its area, used its persuasive power (via the media) to compel the city to honor its commitment to this transfer, and then used legal and moral power (by anti-gentrification provisions they built into a land trust) to make sure that local residents could maintain control over the impact of restoring the properties.

“ Move deliberately—through planning, fact-gathering, issue-framing, creation of action plans—toward organizational structures that hold promise of long life. Capitalize upon the credibility of the initial leaders who have ‘convening power’ (including the ability to gain, when desirable, positive media coverage). Through regular public gatherings, get the community used to a shared analysis of racial and cultural needs and issues, and to a common terminology. ”

## 4. Leadership: Deciding Who to Follow

**B**ecause community building efforts often arise from a community crisis, it is not always possible to choose the first leaders; they emerge and take charge. The goal, of course, is to have fully qualified, inspired and dedicated people guiding the effort—experienced, compensated people, if at all possible. So it's essential to establish rules by which leadership can be changed. That allows you to take your time, listen carefully, ask probing questions, and choose wisely for the next round.

*Community-building projects will be best served in the long run by observing a simple, three-step leadership plan: Grow your own (by spotting potential in young people), train your own (by providing members lots of hands-on experiences, formal and informal training), replace your own (by giving those in authority face-saving ways to retreat or retire if necessary).*



**As you go about putting these leadership support and development procedures in place, it may be helpful to remember that:**

- Community-building projects with a variety of programs for the young—child-care centers, after school programs, supplemental education and work opportunities, organized social events—often find that the young people who were part of these programs come back as adults to take leadership positions. This is most likely to happen if the adolescents were exposed to the primary work of the project, if they were encouraged to develop and run their own activities and if their contributions to the larger project were appreciated and adopted.
- There are many kinds of leaders—charismatic and bureaucratic, street-wise and suite-wise, insiders and outsiders, those who teach or preach and those who roll up their sleeves and get busy. No one person can be all these things, and none should try. Different types of leadership may be needed at different stages of an organization's life. No one type is necessarily better than another. Cultivating a variety of styles within a project should broaden its leadership options (though it may also increase internal competition and conflict).
- No matter how knowledgeable and experienced project leaders are about the work of community building, they never outgrow the need for more training. Interracial, multicultural communities are dynamic places where change is the only constant. There is always something new to learn—about technology or the latest research, about local conditions or innovative practices elsewhere, about privilege and oppression. Good leaders value new

learning experiences that build their skills, refresh their spirits and rekindle their desire to do this work.

- Leaders are vulnerable to burnout given the intensity of community building work, particularly when personally wrenching issues of racism are being acknowledged and addressed. They are also open to physical threats, personal attacks and professional harm. There should be opportunities for leaders to step away if they must, either temporarily or permanently.
- Some of the more effective projects have established an array of options, from leadership rotation and term limits to advisory positions, “emeritus” designation, and task forces, to provide face-saving ways for leaders to step back. Having such options available before they are needed makes it easier to remove shaky or ineffective leaders and to reward good ones.

**“ Candor is the key to solid relations with the press,” declared the leader of a major project. “Don’t try to hide agendas. Put things right out front and seek to persuade the press that you are pursuing solid, needed, responsible goals. ”**

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**“ Don’t allow staff members or leaders to become either messiahs or martyrs. People lose their effectiveness when they lose their emotional or physical health and strength. ”**

**“ Carefully identify and choose who will work with the community. A multi-racial staff is indispensable. Each member of the team must be capable of relating to all the racial/ethnic groups in the neighborhood; bilingualism helps, and all must speak simple, plain English. The team members must be willing to be open and reveal themselves. They must be as sophisticated as possible in their capacity to share deep race, class and gender analysis. They must be strong, willing to identify with the neighborhood, and free of messianism. ”**

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**“ Avoid single-answer approaches to complex, multicultural situations. Evolving a game plan requires a theory or model or concept of change. Generating the plan gives birth to this theory. Without it, action lacks guidance and benchmarks of progress. ”**

## 5. Governance: Modeling Equity

**G**overnance is about authority, power and representation. Its function is to establish the rules about how the rules will be made. Community building efforts that self-consciously experiment with truly equitable forms of governance do more than meet their own ethical standards; they show that these kinds of forms work.

*The most effective groups we've studied focus on: Who their governing body is intended to represent; which constituencies should have the edge in decision-making; whether or not to include all of the key stakeholders on their internal governing body, especially those who might be targets of change; and the processes by which members of the governing body will be chosen.*



**If your group is trying to decide what the form and function of its governing body**

**should be, you may find these points and examples useful:**

- One group decided to use an electoral process and proportional representation to structure its governing body. Individual community residents join the effort by paying fees of \$1.00 a year (often waived) and vote for individuals who run for particular slots on the governing board. Some slots are reserved for representatives of certain kinds of community institutions (faith institutions, service providers); and others are reserved for representatives of the racial/ethnic groups in the community (African Americans, whites, Latinos and others). Representatives of the community outweigh organizational representatives at the table, consistent with the fact that this is meant to be a community-rooted effort.
- Another group began by establishing task forces in four communities to plan and start anti-racism work. Initial funding came from a foundation that had a long history of working in the community, but was not itself a member of the community. The funder established a requirement that each task force had to be multiracial, include 51% people of color, and be 51% female. Because the original groups were selected by the funder, it took several years for them to acquire legitimacy in the community. On the other hand, because the governing bodies were diverse, and the balance of power was shifted toward women and people of color, they stood out from nearly every other organization in their communities (from the Chamber of Commerce to the NAACP). Their governing structure allowed them to play a unique role as brokers, conveners and activists, and to forge a number of strategic alliances.



### Here are some striking notes from the field about governance:

**After leaders of seven different racial/cultural groups had** engaged in a protracted stormy confrontation with city authorities ultimately prevailing, the cadre decided to create a new unified organization. They named themselves “the council of executive directors” and invited all interested members of the seven groups to “confirm” their roles as leaders. They regularly held “town hall” meetings to make big decisions collectively. They stand for “re-confirmation” annually. They have slowly increased their ranks, becoming a powerful force in that city.

**A promising program in a riot-torn multiracial city** felt a need at the beginning to exclude “majority” (white) participants on the ground that people of color needed first to see if they could work out some issues among themselves. Several years later, an effort to include “whites, Jews, gays and lesbians” all but fractured the still somewhat fragile collaborative.

**Perceiving a need to address overt and covert racism in their city,** a self-selected group of organizers came together. The members did not reflect or represent the neighborhoods in which racism was most rampant. They commissioned a study of city-wide institutional racism, but balked at affirming or releasing its hard-hitting but accurate report. Reform efforts in that city remained stymied for years.

“ If everyone can see that their group and its interests are equally and well-represented at the center (and at the top!), things will work well up and down the line, even at the bottom. ”

- Often, project organizers are torn between selecting governing bodies based on the talents, abilities, and stature of individuals, and choosing them because of their highly visible roles as leaders of important organizations. This can be a hard question to resolve. On one hand, too many established names on a board can hamper a group’s ability to challenge the status quo and take controversial stands. On the other hand, the board’s desire to be perceived as powerful may compel it to include some prominent people (say, a certain banker or politician or educator) who seem almost indispensable

to its work and mission. When such people are included, it is important to help them create bridges into institutions that you want to change, and to watch that they don’t become guardians of those bridges keeping you out.

## 6. Tackle Racism First

“The time spent at the beginning working on race will be well-repaid later. When you avoid this painful, protracted conversation at the outset, proposed partnerships fall apart, leading to head-shaking—and sometimes finger-pointing—over the intractability associated with race and the depth of animosities held by one group in relation to another.”

“God knows there are issues out there—despoiling the environment, harassment in every aspect of sexuality, economic exploitation, insensitivity to those physically and psychologically challenged—but the more I live, look and work the more convinced I am that the root issue—deeper than every other social disease—is racism.”

Many well-intentioned or uninformed white people want to be “color-blind,” finding discussions of race and racism inflammatory, unproductive or even rude. Rather than appearing racist, they avoid real issues of racial disparity or race-based analyses of problems. People of color know that America never was and is not now color-blind. But many don’t believe they can have a reasoned discussion about racism, because it takes too much patience, understanding and trust on all sides to be heard. Some are tired of trying; others, of being marginalized as the “race guy.”

*None of us is entirely free of racial prejudice, class envy, or other social judgments of a similar nature. Maybe we can live with that and still “get along.” But institutional racism still protects the unearned privileges of some and imposes undeserved restrictions on others, and is almost always a factor in why some communities are thriving and others are not. Economic well-being and racism are thoroughly intertwined in America through the mechanism of institutional racism. That is why, in any community-building effort, racism must be addressed frankly and thoroughly, from the beginning of the project to the end. You may consider racism an economic issue, a power issue, a moral and ethical issue, a legal issue, an outdated or even false issue—but in point of fact, it is a practical consideration affecting every member of our society, and it flies in the face of our individual and collective self-interest not to be working to eliminate it.*

*So what should you be doing about the problem?*



### An example from the field:



One program committed to reducing institutional racism used a variety of methods to address the problem. They set up multiracial community task forces and helped them move right into searching discussions about what racism is, how it affects their community, what solutions there might be and how to talk with the larger community about these issues. Over a five-year period, the task forces joined with various members of the community (many of them social activists) for retreats and study sessions at which specialists in anti-racism and diversity training drew them into self-analysis and open discussion. In time, some of the participants became trainers themselves (giving the community its own source of facilitators). This level of investment helped the local program rise from middle-of-the-pack participation to a strong leadership role in the community-building work.



**If you want to foster effective multiracial community building and get to the root causes of many neighborhood issues, it helps to know that:**

- Even though individuals representing various races and cultures may be involved in or served by a given project, and the positive outcomes of the venture may benefit community residents of all backgrounds, none of this guarantees that the program participants will openly address racial issues, or that any of them are above the need for such discussion.
- Everyone comes to multiracial gatherings with his or her own theories about how the world works—whether change can be negotiated or must be forced, whether changes in attitude predict changes in behavior, to what extent institutions can be trusted to do what their leaders say they will do, and so on. Often these theories are based on people's life experiences, including how race and racism have affected them. These different "theories of change" lead people to

recommend different strategies. It helps to know this when strategy discussions involving race get heated.

- Anti-racism training led by experienced people can be enormously valuable (see Appendix 3 for some examples). The best such programs help people develop an understanding of how institutional or structural racism work, a shared race relations vocabulary (see Appendix 1 for a very useful example), a better grasp of racial history, and, thus, some common framework for tough discussions and strategic work.
- Even with training, solid community building takes time. Even with the best intentions, multiracial groups may have to invest years of hard work in honest discussions and shared experiences in order to build genuine understanding and a high level of trust. One sign that an interracial group has reached a higher plane may be its unthreatened acceptance of racial "caucuses"—private talks among the members of a particular race.

**“ Institutional racism did not fall from the sky, imposing itself upon non-European people. These adjectives and classifications were deliberately, socially constructed and, in the process, the powers-that-be have always played a decisive and essential role. ”**

**“ I wish we had dealt with our racial differences, our varying cultural perspectives, more up front. Because we didn't, we created further difficulties for ourselves—even though we work together—with which we still struggle to this day. ”**

**“ A profound mutual understanding of the situation to be addressed is required if head-on discussions of race are suppressed in the name of harmony at the beginning. These issues will always resurface, directly or indirectly. Don't let them pile up without addressing them. ”**

# 7. Draw Strength from Multicultural Identities

“ The point of being knowledgeable about and proud of your culture is that it gives you the confidence to open up to others of different cultures. Being bilingual, bicultural, makes people stronger, more responsible, more self-reliant. ”

**C**ommunity building efforts that succeed in drawing diverse people together to tackle the challenges they face—in education, housing, health, employment, neighborhood safety, raising healthy children—draw strength from their own cultures, and learn about, respect and value others’. They deepen understanding of their own culture, share it with others, engage in exchanges of cultures, thus avoiding noisy voices shouting past one another in disagreement. While an appreciation and understanding of different cultures augments, it does not substitute for hard-hitting anti-racism work, which always requires strategies beyond multicultural “food, festivals and fashion.”

- Participants in multiracial community building may feel torn between loyalty to the racial group or neighborhood they represent and cooperation with the larger group and its ideas for change. For whites, this loyalty may not be expressed in terms of racial or neighborhood identity, but shows up in the counsel to “work within the system” or “under the radar screen,” essentially identifying with the dominant culture. These pressures may be greatest when the group is first forming, or just after it has gone public with its plans.
- The cost of not dealing early on with racial identity, racial inequities and institutionalized unfairness may be painfully high. Some programs have done good work for a while without taking up these issues, only to see fragile alliances fall apart over racial politics and lack of solidarity over strategy decisions. Talking candidly about these matters at the beginning makes it easier for groups to define and agree upon their goals and much easier for them to hang together when the going is toughest.



**If you want to build an effective multiracial and multicultural coalition that draws strength from people’s sense of self and group identities, it helps to know that:**

- Vibrant multicultural programs capitalize on the cultural backgrounds of their participants to create common ground, build individual and group identity and to develop full, accurate and historically grounded understandings of why people approach matters in distinctive ways.
- An understanding of culture helps us to appreciate specific decision-making and resource-sharing experiences and styles that marked the growth and survival of a particular group as well as its place in global events.

## Two examples:



**One very vigorous and effective community-building program** lives multiculturalism as a completely integrated way of life. In a single building, it offers emergency food and clothing, courses ranging from poetry to political analysis to sewing machine skills, an art gallery, music and theater, a gift shop, child care and after-school programs, a lecture and debate forum, and training in community organizing—all with proper attention to the history, languages, and cultures living around it. In this place, cultural identity is itself a strategy to reinforce a sense of power and value in all who take part.

**One urban school cluster in which 45 different racial, ethnic,** and cultural groups are represented is attempting to boost school achievement and reduce institutional racism by raising cultural awareness and respect within and among the various groups. Cultural understanding has become a strategy to unify students, reduce hate-based violence and instill a sense of individual worth. The approach includes an emphasis on teacher training, the curriculum and a wide range of extracurricular activities. At the same time, a focus on multiculturalism has given people who want to avoid dealing with racism a way to do so.

“**Build your history and culture into everything you do. Tell your story over and over so it creates a sense of strong roots.**”

- Different cultural perspectives may prompt different understandings of key elements such as “community,” “family,” “neighborhood” and make us more ethnically sensitive as we come together with others to make decisions, resolve conflicts and work for change.
- Spirituality is an important aspect of most cultures. Many programs get into issues of faith, spirituality, and religion because these are powerful forces that unite as well as divide people, and move them to act. Genuine cultural understanding lets us appreciate how some people have been strengthened by the harshness of their lives and the steadfastness of their faith.

“**It is possible to recapture respect for or to celebrate our own culture without falling into nationalism. And it is possible, indeed necessary to promote strong, positive working relationships with other minority communities in all areas of work, service, political and social activities.**”

## 8. Bridge Language Barriers

Considering how difficult communication can be even when only one language is being spoken, it's no wonder that understanding fades as more varied voices join the chorus. To say that we are all as close as we'll get to eloquence in our native language is to state the obvious. In fact, most Americans can only converse in English (a deficiency that appears to bother few of us, judging from the small number of school districts that require or even offer instruction in another language in the elementary grades, where it can be taught and learned most easily).

Multicultural community-building projects bump up against language barriers frequently and increasingly. Some have simply plowed ahead, leaving newly arrived immigrants to learn English fast or fall out. *But the more successful programs are creating ways at every important gathering for people to listen and talk in every represented language.* Until recently, simultaneous translation was the most common, if not the only, way to do this; now, various supporting technologies are coming into use. *A sure sign of commitment to better communication is when participants seek to learn another language commonly heard in their neighborhood.* The prevalence of English compels new immigrants to learn or lose. Unfortunately, not many English speakers have a similar incentive to take up some other tongue.



**If you want to make sure that everyone can participate in your project's planning, decision-making and action, these points may be helpful:**

- Signs and instructions in public places—schools, hospitals, parks, police stations, government offices—should be accommodating to any sizable minority whose primary language is not English. This is not only helpful to the particular minorities; it also reflects the community's awareness that it is multilingual, and that residents are due such support as a courtesy.
- Many successful projects conduct meetings in at least two languages, either using a presider who is multilingual or having two presiders.
- The racial and ethnic composition of each community dictates which languages are needed there. In a growing number of neighborhoods, another tongue has replaced English as the primary language. Even where Spanish or Chinese or some other spoken voice is now prevalent, though, it is becoming more essential, not less so, to master English, because it is the

## 9. Follow the Money



first language of television, the internet, schools, and the financial world. That practical judgment must not be interpreted as lack of respect for the cultures that different languages express.

- When it comes to understanding other cultures and moving freely among them, people who grew up outside the United States and are now bilingual or multilingual have an advantage that few Americans can fully appreciate. Unless English becomes the world's exclusive language of choice—an unlikely prospect—the American delusion of self-sufficiency will ultimately work against us and in favor of the multilingual minority. Work on more extended language proficiency!

**P**assionate volunteers, generous in-kind contributors, supportive coalitions, and well-heeled partners have been critically important in the development of community-based reform programs. *But funders—particularly those who have stayed the course—are an essential pillar of this work. From the outset, programs must pay close attention to where the financial resources are, how to secure them, how to spend them wisely and productively, and how to be fully accountable in all fiscal matters.* Among the most common failings of community-building programs nationwide are, first, taking on more work than they have the funds to support, and second, not being careful enough about tracking the money.



**If you need outside funding to support your project, these are some of the things you**

**may need to know:**

- Analysis and planning must originate in—and remain in the control of—local communities, but money to make the plans a reality often comes from the outside. Funders need to recognize that their guidelines and requirements for support are usually drawn up far from these local sites, and tensions may arise when attempts to match the funder's interests with the community's identified needs results in a poor fit.
- These are some of the more common funding sources for local reform projects: Community, corporate, and national foundations or other fiscal sponsors (when the efforts are administered by 501(c)3 organizations); fees as reimbursement for *(continued on the next page)*

delivering health, housing, employment and other social services (through contracts with government or other service providers); revenues from products and services, such as training; membership fees (when the efforts are administered by 501(c)3 organizations); donor contributions; and fund raising events.

- Issues of power and independence often arise when the status quo is challenged—as it almost always is in these endeavors. The issues may be particularly inflammatory in community-building projects (some people giving money, others receiving it), and they need to be managed especially well. Program leaders need to figure out how to maintain independence and self-determination without making it impossibly difficult for people to give them money. Funders need to permit programs to manage these issues with their constituencies, and not take the tensions and differences of perspective personally. Every participant in the giving/receiving partnership can be counted on to strain the relationship at one time or another by “acting out” in some way. Each party should anticipate this behavior and be prepared to weather the storm. (Appendix 2 may help community builders and funders get on the same page.)
- Funders who support community building may find their own personnel, investment, and grant-making policies scrutinized by potential recipients and by the public. A willingness to take risks can lead to failure and criticism. On the other hand, funders may find that small risks convert to large rewards—and applause for “putting your money where your mouth is.”



- Though there are many potential sources of funds for community-building work, there is only a small pool of funders with a track record of paying for “anti-racism” work, so labeled. Good and productive programs could be greatly expanded if more public, private and independent-sector institutions would encourage this approach and embrace these terms.
- Acknowledgment of the necessity for funding, and the diplomacy that it often requires, need not dampen ardor, prompt compromises, or obscure vision on the part of either funders or community builders. A few examples of effective and long-standing partnerships that have been explicit from the outset about issues of personal or institutional racism do exist in the public record. All parties in these successful ventures have worked on issues of power and control in funding relationships and are continuing to take leadership in promoting the need to back up people’s best intentions with money.

# 10. Wedding Analysis and Action

**W**hen programs and projects are in the embryo stage—a mere gleam in the eyes of dreamers—there is much talk, but little action. Plans are being laid, goals set, strategies worked out, leaders chosen—but these are “head” jobs,” “think” tasks, not hands-on activities.

Then finally, the real action phase begins, and from that point on the demands of the moment take over. It may seem easy and desirable to defer or even cancel whatever continuing analysis and training may have been intended, lest it rob the venture of momentum and spirit. This is a common and sometimes fatal mistake. *Analysis—including periodic evaluation, self-reflection, adjustment, and retraining—is essential to the success of the project. Action without analysis is rootless, repetitious, and blind; analysis without action is anemic, abstract and empty. There is a cycle and a regular rhythm that must be maintained between these two elements to make things run smoothly, much like a drive belt works on a motor.*

“It’s not as hard as you might think to pause periodically for reflection. The much harder challenge is to stay rowdy, to keep the fire, to keep on keeping on, being ‘loud, tough and pushy.’”

- In the first phase, when planning requires issues and goals to be framed, the picture is very broad and unfocused. Work begins in the hazy light of this early vision. Every week’s effort yields new, deeper, more precise images and understandings. Time must be set aside regularly and frequently for reflecting on what’s happening and for deciding anew how the program’s game plan needs to be changed. In a sense, action requires reflection, if it is to be up-to-date, on point, and effective—and reflection requires action, if it is to be pertinent and catalytic.



**If you want analysis and action to refine and reinforce each other, consider these points:**

- Successful programs that have produced models, themes, and strategies worthy of copying have attained such clarity precisely because they set aside ample time for analysis, reflection, review, and documentation.
- Far from weakening their commitment to action, many programs report, regular analysis energizes participants and reinforces their confident sense of knowing where they’re going and how to get there.
- No matter how concrete or abstract a given project is, how explicit or theoretical, how “grassroots” or “white-collar,” the two-beat rhythm is still the same: Analysis and action, analysis and action.

# 11. Bloom Where You're Planted: Remaining Rooted in Your Community

**H**ealthy, productive interracial/multicultural communities are born out of the efforts of residents willing to work together to reach that goal. The heart and soul of every community-building project is local people, neighbors, making progressive change a reality. Those things being true, consider this puzzle: The more successful a project is, the harder it must struggle to remain local.

*Outside attention is distracting. Leaders move up and out. More time is demanded to show others "how you did it." In this fast-paced society, nothing stays the same for long. Local projects facing these challenges must find successors and manage transitions to new leaders, help former leaders stay connected and adjust to the reality of changing perspectives brought on by upward mobility. Through it all, local people in local projects are left to keep the home fires burning by sticking to their commitments and remaining rooted in the community.*

## Two "homecoming" examples:



**One program puts much energy and effort into an annual** return of youth who grew up in the community and have moved away to master new challenges. All former project participants and local residents are invited to join in, and the occasion is a celebration of success that pumps new energy and spirit into the community.

**A long-lived program in a metropolitan area** has regular seminars and training programs at which former residents are invited back to lead. The interchange between those who have moved on and those who remain can be warm and fuzzy or crusty and abrasive—but never dull.



**As you work to keep former leaders and others in touch with the program and "new people" coming in, these thoughts may help:**

- To counter the reality of constant mobility, local projects within a region could jointly

sponsor a regional forum in which old and new leaders of community-building efforts would come together to share experiences and rekindle the old fires. Such gatherings can be seedbeds for new growth.

- The involvement of outsiders (people who live and work elsewhere) in neighborhood projects can be a sensitive matter. They may bring skills, experience and resources that are needed, but to be of value, they must identify with residents and respond in a positive way to their needs and aspirations. Big ideas and grand plans introduced from the outside rarely bear fruit. Unless local leaders and participants buy in, "great deals" go begging.
- New blood from within the project area is always helpful. To keep up such a flow of local residents, it will be necessary to continue organizing and to work on such activities as outreach and recruitment, orientation, and buddy-system pairing of old hands and newcomers.

## 12. Constructive Partnerships

**T**he most effective community-building programs amplify their voices and extend their reach by collaborating with others—sometimes surprising others—with whom they have certain intersecting interests. They may form brief or long-term partnerships with government agencies, faith groups, businesses, single-issue advocates or activist groups that represent a political candidate or a racial or cultural minority. Any group working toward the same general goals or with some of the same people is a natural prospect for these “affairs of convenience,” even if on most issues they find themselves on opposite sides. *The more successful projects gain allies by being allies—stepping out publicly for others who have stood up with them. But they may also act more judiciously and quietly, understanding that productive partnerships sometimes flourish behind the scenes, not out front.*



**If alliances with others to reach some mutual objective have been difficult for your**

**project, these points may be helpful:**

- Partnerships are sometimes formed between competitors, even former adversaries, so they can deal jointly with issues and conflicts that concern them both. Local projects may make pacts with the media, though they oppose some of their tactics or their coverage; they may work with a political candidate on certain issues but not others; they may oppose “corporate welfare” but help subsidized companies recruit and hire employees in low-income communities.
- Cooperative alliances promote change most effectively when local community groups can act from a position of strength as consumers, voters, and activists or when a group’s reputation for credibility and clout will bring to the table all of the key players needed to bring about change.
- It may be harder for ideologically rooted organizations to work with others having similar missions. Strains come from different analyses of what it takes to achieve a given objective. Projects may also compete for funding and other resources, but the biggest obstacle usually has more to do with analysis and perspective than with money.
- Maintaining self-determination and an outspoken, independent voice may cost some programs an ally now and again, but if the voice is consistent, credible and fair—however blunt—it will in the long run make more friends than enemies.

# 13. Cultivate the Media

“ When spider webs unite, they can hold up or tie up the lines. ”

**A**s community building programs begin to experience some success and enter the public eye, they quickly gain the attention of the media. It is usually worth the effort to cultivate open, friendly, candid relations with reporters and editors, especially at local newspapers and television stations. Sound professional relationships such as these will be a central element in spreading understanding and approval of your project's plans, aims and accomplishments.



**If you want to draw media attention to your project—or media sensitivity when something goes wrong—it helps to know that:**

- Having a project staff person whose primary job it is to keep open the lines of communication with the media is a common sense necessity. A personal touch is best. Sending out press releases may be of some help, but there is no substitute for direct and frequent contact with the reporters and editors who will be covering your activities in the best and worst of times.
- Make your leaders accessible to reporters through press conferences, one-on-one interviews, and “background” (off the record) sessions. Invite media representatives to visit your program, and when they come, give them access to everything that is not an invasion of someone's privacy.
- There is no substitute for honesty and candor. Even when it hurts, you're better off telling the truth than covering up. Professional respect for good reporters trying to do their job will be returned in carefully written, balanced reporting. If the reporters are not very good—inexperienced or incompetent, or worse, biased against your project—you may have to take another tack in response. Challenge inaccuracies. Offer more information. Take complaints up the line to their editors. Be persistent, firm, aggressive if you have to—but scrupulously fair. Don't get personal—but if you're right, don't back down.
- Keep your own people—staff, board, constituents—fully informed of the project's work through meetings, newsletters, e-mail. Good internal communication will cut down on the amount of misinformation that finds its way into conversation and print.
- The more dependent a community is on one news source (such as a single daily paper), the more crucial it is to get full and accurate reporting. When there are multiple outlets, there is at least a chance that mistakes in one medium can be set straight in another.
- Use all the media at your disposal—not just the papers and TV but others, old (radio) and new (the internet). Some magazine writers, freelance writers, and photographers also may be interested. And remember that some of the new technology, from video equipment to internet web sites, can be applied to the telling of your project's story.

### A few specific practices:



**One program has several people in its leadership group** who make frequent appearances elsewhere to speak as representatives of the project and the community. Back home, there is a monthly public meeting for the organization's entire membership. It always begins with brief reports by everyone who has been out speaking on behalf of the program. The press is always invited, and usually attends.

**With considerable fanfare, another program publicly** announces an annual theme for its work, and uses it as a touchstone for regular contacts with the media. If, for example, the theme is immunizations for children, there will be periodic progress reports, interviews with doctors and public health officials and television footage of school children getting their shots.

**Recognizing the desirability of maintaining the good will** and understanding of editors and publishers as well as reporters, some projects set up meetings once or twice a year between key staff and board leaders and certain media people (editorial writers, columnists, assignment editors).

- Programs that deal with social issues are essentially about problems and solutions. The press is like that too. Newspaper and television reporters tend to frame stories in a way that targets responsibility: The cause of a problem, the source of a solution. It is useful to consider how you want your story framed, so that it extends responsibility for the issue in question beyond a particular individual or group to the social or political or historical forces surrounding it. This approach points policymakers and the public toward systemic or structural solutions rather than individual ones.



# 14. How Are We Doing?

“ Without jerking up the roots to look, it is important to keep gauging the health of the organization. ”

“ One important reason for regular monitoring is not just to determine how we’re doing, but to ‘tend the seed bed’ for the next initiative we should launch. ”

**I**ntellectually honest and careful assessment serves as a reality check for community-building programs. All along the way, you should be taking stock of where you are in relation to where you were and where you want to be, so you can show yourselves and others how far you’ve come and what remains to be done. Until you know how well—or poorly—you’re doing, you can only guess whether the effort has been worth the cost.



**In evaluating the overall performance of your project, it could help to know that:**

- There are numerous ways for local community building efforts to assess what they’re doing. Some have extensive tracking and accounting methods in place; some use narrative or numerical documentation; some gather data for outside monitoring and reporting requirements; some commission formal outside evaluations; some publish annual reports detailing their work. These efforts are valuable if they give participants a chance to reflect upon their work or help the program tell a compelling story to others.
- Programs that have gone to the trouble of spelling out a clear theory behind their efforts should find it easier to tell other people what they have accomplished. “From the beginning,” said one leader, “reflect hard on a model, a concept or strategy for change, and as it comes together, piece by piece, you can gauge how well you’re succeeding.” Like a builder following a blueprint, you can see the steps to be accomplished and check them off one by one as they’re completed.
- As with every other aspect of community building, issues of racism can easily be embedded in assessment, and should be brought out for open discussion. Some questions to raise: What constitutes success in this project? By whose definition? How can we tell if we’re on the right path? Which do we put the most weight on—what the key stakeholders in the project say or what they do? Whose voices count the most when we analyze and interpret the data? And in the end, who gains the most—those for whom gains were sought in the first place, or those who needed none?

Community building programs feel pressure to produce results from many sides: From their constituency, which is fighting day-to-

day struggles that were the reason for this effort in the first place; from media and other observers, who may be skeptical of work that is based on values (such as fighting racism) rather than on pragmatic issues (such as reducing crime); from funders, who must report progress to their boards; from staff and leaders, who are driven by a passion to make a difference in people’s lives. These pressures may tempt programs to overpromise what they can do and overstate what they have done. Such temptations need to be resisted. Community building is hard, time-consuming work; it can take years to get measurable results. Stick to the facts, however modest the project’s gains. Accurate assessments will eventually bring appreciation and support.

# 15. Commitment for the Long Haul

**P**rograms that promote change of any kind are never free of internal or external stress. For those that work to build interracial, multicultural communities that are healthy and productive, stress is not a sometime thing—it's a way of life. The projects that survive and succeed in the end are the ones that follow an agreed-upon plan, keep a steady pace, monitor constantly, make midcourse adjustments and smooth transitions from phase to phase, and save up energy in reserve for the big push when it's needed. Such programs also create occasions and structures through which participants find periodic personal renewal.



**In order to sustain your efforts for the long haul, these thoughts may be helpful:**

- Be aware of demanding danger points along the way: When plans “go public” and work that threatens the status quo begins in earnest; when individual participants are past the excitement and passion of starting and have taken all the risks they are able or willing to carry; when continuous, unexamined resistance begins to wear the program down.
- Multiracial and multicultural groups working to change community conditions for local people will face resistance not only from the outside but also from within. Changing the status quo threatens everyone who benefits from it, including those in power and those whose livelihoods depend on economic, educational, social difference among groups.
- Resistance is not always obvious. Warning signs: When the group frequently goes back over decisions it has made or keeps changing its strategies or finds it very hard to go from private talk to public plans or tries to push out members with opposing perspectives. When any of these characteristics is present, the resistance and conflict need to be brought to the surface and resolved.
- Programs that have survived these threatening moments have: Gone public with their list of successes, reached out to youth and elders for their special perspectives, revisited their original analyses and made major changes, replaced the leadership or restructured the entire organization.
- The stories of long-term success reveal people working together not for their own benefit and advancement, but for that of the deserving neighborhood and community members whose unjust and inequitable treatment was what inspired these missions of change. To accomplish those original objectives, there can be no permanent friends or permanent enemies—only permanent interests: Diverse, healthy, productive and completely revitalized democratic communities.

## APPENDIX 1

### PROJECT CHANGE'S: "THE POWER OF WORDS" A COMMUNITY BUILDER'S "DICTIONARY"

**W**ords and their multiple uses reflect the tremendous diversity that characterizes our society. Indeed, a common language on issues relating to racism is nonexistent. The need for a vocabulary of commonly used terms quickly became evident when we began working, particularly with our four local Project Change sites. We discovered that the lack of a common understanding of even the most frequently used words in any discussion on race can easily evoke misunderstanding and confusion, and often lead to controversy and hostility. We believe, therefore, that it is essential to achieve some degree of shared understanding in the use of the most common terms. In this way, the quality of dialogue and discourse on race in America can be enhanced. Language can be used deliberately to engage and support community anti-racism coalitions, or to inflame and divide them. The definitions proposed in this glossary are meant to engage and support coalitions. They are a kind of "dictionary" for community builders.

The glossary is not presented as a definitive, authoritative document, but rather as a meaningful and provocative starting point toward the creation of a common vocabulary for the field. It is presented, accordingly, as a "living document," and we invite extensive public input on these proposed definitions.

Many of these and other related terms have evolved over time. For example, given the changing demographic trends in the United States, the word "minority" no longer accurately reflects the four primary ethnic groups. The terms "emerging majority" and "people of color" have become popular substitutes. Also, the terms used to refer to members of each community of color have changed over time. Whether to use the terms African American or black, Hispanic American or Latino, Native American or American Indian, and Pacific Islander or Asian American depends on a variety of conditions, including geographic location, age, generation, and sometimes political orientation.

These are words we have found to be most commonly used in any discussion on race in the U. S. context. Our definitions were adapted from a variety of sources, including: Philip Herbst's *The Color of Words: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States* and Ernest Cashmore's *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*.

**Cultural Pluralism:** Recognition of the contribution of each group to the common civilization. It encourages the maintenance and development of different life styles, languages and convictions. It is a commitment to deal cooperatively with common concerns. It strives to create the conditions of harmony and respect within a culturally diverse society.

**Culture:** A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

**Denial:** Refusal to acknowledge the societal privileges (see below for a definition of the term "privilege") that are granted or denied based on an individual's ethnicity or other grouping. Those who are in a stage of denial tend to believe, "People are people. We are all alike regardless of the color of our skin." In this way, the existence of a hierarchical system or privileges based on ethnicity or race can be ignored.

**Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, and other categories.

**Diversity:** The wide range of national, ethnic, racial and other backgrounds of U.S. citizens and immigrants as social groupings, co-existing in American culture. The term is often used to include aspects or race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and much more.

**Ethnic Group (or ethnicity):** Any category of people within the larger society who possess distinctive social or cultural traits, a shared history and a sense of commonality, regardless of the group's size, power, race, language or time of immigration.

**Institutional Racism:** Anonymous, subtle and systemic discrimination based on race, in legal instruments, as well as in private organizations and professions (educational, legal, healthcare, political, religious, etc.), private businesses and public decision-making bodies.

Because this form of racism is anonymous and built into standard institutional practice, individuals often resist acknowledging its existence and deny, consciously or unconsciously, their complicity in maintaining it.

Examples of institutionalized racism include policies and practices that: arbitrarily govern a person's credit-worthiness; determine what information, positive or negative, is presented in the media about individuals involved in newsworthy events; or place undue value on selective educational experiences or qualifications in establishing promotion criteria in jobs and schools.

**Internalized Oppression:** The conscious or unconscious belief and/or acceptance, by people of color, of racial stereotypes that pervade the cultural context of the larger society. The internalization of these stereotypes can result in self-limiting behaviors and actions toward others that reinforce the stereotypes.

**"ISMS":** A way of describing any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates (oppresses) a person or group because of their target group, color (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), older age (ageism), religion (e.g., anti-Semitism), sexual orientation (heterosexism), language/immigrant status (xenophobia), etc.

**Multicultural Education:** Refers first to building an awareness of one's own cultural heritage and understanding that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another; secondly, to acquiring those skills in analysis and communication that help one function effectively in multicultural environments.

**Oppression:** An unwanted pattern of subjugation, persecution, domination, abuse and exploitation which consciously or unconsciously undermines freedom and liberty. Oppression can be employed physically, politically, institutionally, and/or economically by one racial group over another (or others).

**Prejudice:** A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or group toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.

**Privilege:** An invisible package of unearned assets, advantages and benefits that individuals inherit based on their circumstantial membership in the society's "dominant" group. Generally those who experience such privilege (in the United States, predominantly white privilege) do so without being conscious of it.

Examples of privilege might be: *"I can turn on the television or look to the front page and see people of my ethnic and cultural background widely represented,"* or *"I can take a job without having co-workers suspect that I got it because of my ethnic/cultural background."*

Because hierarchies of privilege exist, even within the same group, people who are part of the group in power (men with respect to women, heterosexuals with respect to homosexuals, adults with respect to children, rich people with respect to poor people) often deny they have privilege even when evidence of differential benefit is obvious.

**Race:** The classification of humans based on arbitrary physical characteristics such as skin color, facial form and/or eye shape.

**Racism:** An ideological system of oppression and subjugation, held consciously or otherwise, based upon unfounded beliefs about racial and ethnic inequality. This system of oppression is based on a view that an arbitrary set of physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial form or eye shape, are associated with or even determine behavior, culture, intellect or social achievement.

## APPENDIX 2

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### A CHECKLIST: MARKS OF A HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE, COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM

(particularly for community  
builders and funders)

**These questions might be helpful  
in assessing the promise of any  
community-building project or in  
monitoring its ongoing effective-  
ness. Does the program exhibit:**

- A clear, detailed purpose or objective?
- Goals against which progress can be measured?
- An ambitious but realistic work plan?
- Buy-in from those it is intended to benefit?
- Genuine grounding in the local community?
- Early and continuous focus on individual and institutional racism?
- Precise identification of community priorities needing action?
- Basic strategies and procedures of operation?
- Well-chosen leaders, and provision for their continuous training?
- Internal mechanisms for development of new leadership?
- Democratic and inclusive representation of all identity groups?
- An effective organizational structure?
- Commitment of all participants to the program's success?
- Processes for staff recruitment and training?
- Intergenerational participation and succession?
- Recognition and appreciation of all participant cultures?
- Capability to work in languages other than English?
- Adequate funding sources and sound fiscal management?
- Rigorous analysis as a preface to action?
- Productive collaboration with outside allies?
- A way of holding allies accountable for actions that are beyond the project's control?
- An open and aggressive communications strategy?
- Well-tended media relations?
- Regular internal assessment and monitoring?
- Scheduled points for reflection and mid-course correction?
- Demonstrated successes in relation to goals?
- Clear indications of long-term commitment?

## APPENDIX 3

### RESOURCES FOR FURTHER ACTION

As a first step, we encourage you to contact our partner organizations listed on the back cover to learn more about their approaches. Other useful resources to help you get started, or to further your work include:



#### WEBSITES

**www.AntiRacismNet.org**

Managed by **Project Change** (one of our project partners): Provides access to a wide variety of community building and anti-racism organizations, materials and resources.

**www.benton.org**

Managed by **Benton Foundation**: Provides links to on-line tools for community organizing and community building.

**www.studyircles.org**

Managed by **Study Circles**: Includes materials and tools that can be downloaded and used to create community dialogue on a number of topics, including racism.

**www.commbuild.org**

Managed by **Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives**: Includes the Community Building Resource Exchange, links to resources and other helpful sites.



#### TRAINING

**The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond** - Offers training and technical assistance used by many communities to educate people about institutional and structural racism; creators of the concept "undoing racism."

CONTACT: Ron Chisom, Director  
1444 N. Johnson Street  
New Orleans, LA 70016  
Phone: 504-944-2354  
Fax: 504-944-6199

**Healing the Heart of Diversity** - Offers a four-times-a-year retreat series aimed at renewing and expanding people's spirit and ability for leading positive social change.

CONTACT: Patricia Harbour  
Fetzer Institute  
9292 West KL Avenue  
Kalamazoo, MI 49009  
Phone: (616) 372-2000

**We Interrupt This Message** - A non-profit group that provides media training, technical assistance, materials and consulting, often to newly forming groups with a progressive agenda. For example, they work with community-based groups on re-framing issues they care about, and on campaigns to correct media stereotypes and distortions.

CONTACT: National Office  
965 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA  
94103  
Phone: (415) 537-9437  
Fax: (415) 537-9439

**The Center for Third World Organizing** (one of our project partners) - offers training in grassroots community organizing that includes specific attention to racial analyses.

CONTACT: Mark Toney, Executive Director  
1218 East 21st Street  
Oakland, CA 94606  
Phone: (510) 533-7583  
Fax: (510) 533-0923  
www.ctwo.org



#### READING

**Building Capacity For System Reform**, published by and available from:

Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD)  
111 Presidential Boulevard,  
Suite 234  
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004  
(www.capd.org)

**A Guide to Anti-Racism Resources**, published by and available from:

Project Change  
P. O. Box 29919  
San Francisco, CA 94129  
(www.AntiRacismNet.org)

**Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives: Exploring Power and Race**, available from:

Chapin Hall Center for Children  
University of Chicago  
1313 E. 60th Street  
Chicago, IL 60637

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The *Tool Kit* is appearing in five non-English languages. The respective translators have done yeoman work and enjoy our thanks. They are **Qing Wu** (Chinese); **Elena Reigadas** (Spanish); **Jane Lai** (Vietnamese and Tagalog); and **James Ryu** (Korean).

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## EXTENDED USES

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The Institute for Democratic Renewal encourages the use of this document. Reproductions in whole or in part are allowable without permission provided appropriate references are given.

## TO ORDER

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Additional copies of *A Community Builder's Tool Kit* can be obtained at a cost of \$1.50 each from:

Democracy/Race/Culture Project  
 Institute for Democratic Renewal  
 School of Politics & Economics  
 Claremont Graduate University  
 170 E. Tenth Street  
 Claremont, CA 91711-6163

Tel: (909) 607-1473  
 Fax: (909) 607-9221  
 Website: [race-democracy.org](http://race-democracy.org)

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1218 East 21st Street  
Oakland, CA 94606  
Phone: (510) 533-7583  
Fax: (510) 533-0923  
[www.ctwo.org](http://www.ctwo.org)

### Dudley Street

#### Neighborhood Initiative

John Barros, Executive Director  
504 Dudley Street  
Roxbury, MA 02119  
Phone: (617) 442-9670  
Fax: (617) 427-8047  
[www.dsni.org](http://www.dsni.org)

### El Centro De La Raza

Roberto Maestas, Director  
2524 16th Avenue, South  
Seattle, WA 98144  
Phone: (206) 329-9442  
Fax: (206) 726-1529  
[www.elcentrodelaraza.com](http://www.elcentrodelaraza.com)

### Metropolitan Human Rights Center

Amalia Alarcón-Gaddie,  
Executive Director  
1120 SW Fifth Avenue, Room 516  
Portland, OR 97204  
Phone: (503) 823-5136  
Fax: (503) 823-0119

### Multicultural Center of NW Arkansas

Diana Shiell, Executive Director  
614 East Emma, 231 Box 22  
Springdale, AR 72765  
and  
P. O. Box 778  
Rogers, AR 72765  
Phone: (501) 927-1111  
Fax: (501) 927-0911  
Email: [shiellohc@aol.com](mailto:shiellohc@aol.com)

### Multicultural Collaborative

Bong Hwan Kim, Executive Director  
1010 South Flower Street, Suite 304  
Los Angeles, CA 90015  
Phone: (213) 748-2105  
Fax: (213) 748-3143

### Project Change

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[www.projectchange.org](http://www.projectchange.org)

### Project Change (Knoxville)

Saudia Williams, Executive Director  
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Knoxville, TN 37914  
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Fax: (423) 546-5986  
Email: [prj.chg@kornet.org](mailto:prj.chg@kornet.org)  
[www.projectchange.org](http://www.projectchange.org)

### Project Change (Valdosta)

Frank Morman, Executive Director  
807 N. Patterson Street  
Valdosta, GA 31601  
Phone: (912) 245-3872  
Fax: (912) 245-3873  
Email: [fmorman@valdosta.edu](mailto:fmorman@valdosta.edu)  
[www.projectchange.org](http://www.projectchange.org)

### Samuel Fels Cluster Office

Jan Gillespie, Fels Cluster Leader  
3000 St. Vincent Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19149  
Phone: (215) 335-5037  
Fax: (215) 335-5963

### San Francisco Organizing Project

Bob Untiedt, Organizer  
995 Market Street, Suite 1220  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
Phone: (415) 995-9898  
Fax: (415) 995-9899  
Email: [bobusfop@aol.com](mailto:bobusfop@aol.com)

### Workforce Alliance

Sam Scruggs, Executive Director  
c/o Mississippi County Arkansas  
Economic Opportunity Comm.  
Post Office Box 1289  
Blytheville, AR 72316-1289  
Phone: (870) 532-2348  
Fax: (870) 532-2625