

Chapter Ten

Multi-Racial Partnerships and Coalitions

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“Partnership has become a buzz word in community development. However, in most cases around the country, “public-private partnerships,” in which representatives from low-income neighborhoods are asked to sit at the table with government, business, and other private sector leaders, have led to little gain for the community and sometimes great harm. Sitting at the table is not the same as exercising community power. Communities that are unorganized, have forged little or no consensus as to what they want to see done, and have not yet identified resources to bring to the table cannot be expected to participate as equal partners with government and private sector leaders bringing traditionally recognized resources and planning capacity - and often elitist assumptions - to the process. The result of this premature partnership is almost always failure. To forge an effective partnership, the community must be organized well enough to be an equal partner at table, not a junior partner. It must participate out of strength, so that it can pursue its own agenda and not be suffocated or co-opted by the agenda of others.”¹

– from *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood*
by Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar

The coalitions and partnerships discussed in this chapter range from multi-racial coalitions composed of residents from a neighborhood working together on a common goal and agreeing to take action together, to multi-racial partnerships composed of diverse organizational leaders who create a shared set of goals and agree to use their personal and institutional power to achieve them.² Foundations also play different roles in these coalitions and partnerships: Some request a quarterly report, others are active partners, and some participate as needed. Community residents are placed in awkward and frustrating positions when forced to navigate foundations’ expectations and roles, in part because of the power imbalances inherent in their relative positions of privilege.

One thing whites and predominately white organizations must understand prior to working in a community is our historical record of betraying people of color, and how that plays a role in each and every partnership and coalition (see sidebar, next page). It is important to not be tepid or resistant to discussing the issues of race and privilege. By ignoring the issues and letting them emerge, or in many cases explode, it is on one level irresponsible and in some cases reckless. In the publication *Voices from the Field II: Reflections on Comprehensive Community*

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¹ Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), p. 276.

² William Potapchuk and Maggie Potapchuk, *Building Effective Community Partnerships*, Toolkit1. Systems Improvement, Training and Technical Assistance Project (Washington D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership, 2002), p. 3.

Change, one of the themes that surfaced from the interviews with community building practitioners, stakeholders and foundation representatives was “Every participant in the change process needs to develop the capacity to talk about the deep and difficult aspects of racial issues.”³

Methods Used to Neutralize and Destroy Coalitions

While the strength of numbers and the power a coalition or partnership can have to tackle structural racism and white privilege is extraordinary, that strength can also be very threatening for white elites and others committed to the status quo. The following are some of the methods used over the years to “neutralize and destroy coalitions,” as compiled by Mark Chesler in the book *Impact of Racism on White Americans*:⁴

- Denying or ignoring issues;
- Inventing irrelevant tasks or committees;
- Making token concessions;
- Distorting issues and information (perhaps through media);
- Symbolically supporting coalition objectives (rhetoric without action);
- Diffusing elite accountability;
- Postponing or delaying meetings/actions;
- Challenging the competency of members of color;
- Accepting others as representing organizational or community needs better than coalition members;
- Co-opting visible coalition leaders;
- Taking police action to suppress activity;
- Reminding Latinos they are Caucasians (and not black);
- Reminding Blacks they are Americans first (and not of Latin descent);
- Reminding poor whites they are white first (and not Black or Latino/a); and
- Having coalition groups compete with each other.

This chapter applies some of the concepts in Section II to the work of building effective multi-racial partnerships and coalitions in community building work. The ideas are based on our experiences with coalitions and partnerships that have

³ The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, *Voices from the Field II: Reflection on Comprehensive Community Change* (Washington D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2002), p. 59.

⁴ Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt, editors, *Impacts of Racism on White Americans* (Newbury Park, CA 1998), p. 234-5.

been initiated, supported, and/or financed by foundations. The following are the issues that consistently were presented as challenges community builders face:

- How to choose people and organizations to participate in a partnership or coalition that will have decision-making authority;
- Who controls the process and how to address the power dynamics;
- How to address intergroup tensions;
- How to create an inclusive transparent coalition process with ongoing learning; and
- How the coalition is involved in choosing technical assistance providers.

The following items frame each of these issues within the context of white privilege and racism. We also share some ideas on how to address the complexities of creating and maintaining strong multi-racial coalitions and partnerships. Some of the issues may seem obvious, yet some persistently present themselves in community processes.

Ensure there is diverse community representation and significant resident participation within the coalition or partnership.

Time and time again, people come together in communities to work on an issue and routinely one of these scenarios occurs:

- Very diverse organizational leaders gather for the first meeting. As the work progresses toward implementation, people are frustrated that members of different racial identity groups are not getting involved, unaware that having one messenger/leader involved in the coalition is not sufficient to represent or engage individuals from a specific racial identity group.
- At one point during the first meeting, someone looks around the table and observes that the group originally invited to this meeting is not diverse. There is discussion about who is missing, invitations go out for another “first” meeting, and then people are surprised that some representatives from different racial and ethnic groups are still not present. Invitations were sent, but no one did any work to learn more about or reach out to the different groups and leaders.
- A group gathers to work on a community issue, never noticing that a diverse group of residents and stakeholders is not present.

Knowing who lives in the community, understanding the community’s racial history, and learning about the different social and service networks that exist in different racial and ethnic communities must be basic steps taken before working in a community. Though we have been using mostly broad racial terms—such as Asian American and Pacific Islander, Latino/a American, African American, and Native American in this monograph—within each of these classifications there

are of course many groups and racial, ethnic, religious, political, tribal, and cultural identities.

Within and across these identities are histories, various forms of solidarity and assorted conflicts and tensions. It is essential to allow each person to self-identify and not to assume another person's race or ethnicity. Michael Jones-Correa, citing a national survey, shares an example of how first-generation Latin American immigrants self-identify: "For example, 63% of the Puerto Ricans and 94% of the Cubans surveyed identified as white." Correa attributes such "self-identification to Latinos' awareness of the social privileges or disadvantages associated with color."⁵ There are many other issues, from generational differences to political party, etc., that are important to consider in bringing together an authentically diverse multi-racial group.

Things to Consider

Do your homework. It is important for foundations and coalition members to increase their awareness of different groups' histories, solidarities, conflicts and tensions. Find out about a community's racial history.

Discuss possible participants with several sources. Ideally, it would be helpful to find a few community residents with minimum personal agendas, who are more focused on a broader inclusive community agenda, to assist with your research. Who do people consistently mention as bridge-builders among different constituency groups? Who are the individuals and organizations that make things happen? Who are the people with legitimacy, credibility and authority within a particular constituency group?

Go beyond basic identity group labeling. An organization may represent Asian Americans, but there is more to know about it. Find out about its constituency: Is it working class? Middle class? Does it include Koreans but not Vietnamese? Learn about the organizations, who they represent, what their issues are, and how they work to be accountable to their constituency group.

Notice how personal filters may be used to make decisions on participants. Sometimes we identify a person of a particular race to participate because of our own personal comfort level based on class, education level, or way a person works. Sometimes we choose people based on our past experiences in groups: Will this person be confrontational? Will he or she be a team player (based on my definition)? Will this person do his/her share of the work? We sometimes choose people who have similar conceptual understandings and responses to racism and white privilege.

Ensure that community residents most affected by the issue(s) being addressed in the coalition are the majority in the governance structure. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, a well-known community building initiative in Boston, learned this lesson very early in their process. Their first design of their

⁵ Maya D. Wiley, *Structural Racism and Multi-racial Coalition Building*, (Minneapolis: Institute on Race and Poverty, November 2003), p.22.

governance board included 23 members with only four slots for residents. After some initial heated meetings, the governance structure was changed so that: “there would be a 31-member board, with a resident majority, a minimum of 12 community members and 4 additional spots designated for residents . . . Equal minimum representation was provided for the neighborhood’s four major cultures—Black, Cape Verdean, Latino, and White—rather than representation based simply numerically on Dudley’s population.”⁶

Address the power dynamics and keep the process transparent.

In the book *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives: Exploring Power and Race*, Butler and Stone discuss power and race issues with different stakeholders (funders, residents, technical assistance providers and managers) and share how foundation behavior sets the tone within many comprehensive community building initiatives:

“Foundation behavior can help or hinder that process, depending on to what extent the funder takes responsibilities for redirecting attention from itself and its power position over resources to the other resource sectors. Instead, foundations have begun to promote the idea of being philanthropic “partners” in community initiatives, which tends to emphasize their role as resources rather than redirecting attention away from them. To complicate matters, foundations typically fail to give a good definition of what they really mean by that partnership. Those on the receiving end of the funds tend to point to ways in which foundations act as de facto “senior partners” in these new relationships, continuing to tightly control initiative resources, to insist on approving local leadership, and to pass judgment on whether their community partners are measuring up.”⁷

Residents are also taking great risks when they trust individuals and organizations—mostly white—after historically being betrayed by authority figures that make policy decisions, by organizations bearing gifts, and by leaders who can’t handle political pressure.

Foundation administrators may defend this behavior because they believe that the stakes for the foundation are high, especially if the initiative is directly addressing race relations or racial justice issues. Foundation management and staff may have put their own careers on the line, or fear that they have done so, and they become concerned about the foundation’s capacity to handle internal discussions of privilege and racism. For the foundation there are risks in investing in this type of initiative, depending on how the foundation addresses racism internally, and whether the discussion on race and white privilege has reached its board level. Also, the foundation’s program officers will probably feel pressures from within the foundation to make progress and have deliverables for each reporting cycle.

The highest stakes really rest with the community residents involved, since many of the issues are life-and-death; they have to live with the risks they take in their community, and the potential political fallout. Residents are also taking great risks when they trust individuals and organizations—mostly white—after historically being betrayed by authority figures that make policy decisions, by organizations bearing gifts, and by leaders who can’t handle political pressure. They are

⁶ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood*, p. 57.

⁷ Rebecca Stone and Benjamin Butler, *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives: Exploring Power and Race*. (Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2000), p. 130.

uncertain whether their knowledge and opinions will be listened to and respected, and if their leadership will be encouraged and supported or if it will be a repeat of “father knows best.”

Foundation staff and consultants representing the foundation are faced with a power dynamic in almost any meeting they walk into (outside the foundation): they are the “holders of the funds.” This can be a difficult dynamic to manage, which underscores the importance of ensuring that building relationships and trust is part of a long-term process. Too many times, foundations have misused their convening power. They invite community residents to a meeting to discuss the issue or even a defined initiative. Community residents may go to share their viewpoints, but they will often go knowing that there may be consequences to their community if they do not attend. If the foundation has not built relationships in the community or does not make time to do so in the meeting, then it can result in misunderstandings, limited discussions on shared interests, and flawed assumptions that participation equals commitment to the project.

The coalition’s responsibility is to consistently work on individual and organizational levels to reduce and eliminate white privilege and to shift the power dynamic within the community, while holding up and honoring the assets of the community.

Things to Consider

Establish a set of ground rules and the expectation to name issues. There are sure to be power dynamics, competition, and turf issues; the sooner the coalition can name these issues and discuss them, the sooner they can be addressed. Consider having a multi-racial team of facilitators to facilitate the meetings until at least mutual group norms and expectations can be established.

Decide who has control and how decisions will be made. The foundation needs to be clear if it has final sign-off on any decisions. Butler and Stone recommend, “... Clearly establish in any initiative the definition of ‘local control’ (i.e., to what extent is it specifically about residents?), its object (i.e., to guide initiative resource allocation, or to create a new force in community decision-making more generally), and the mechanisms through which that local control will be created, sustained, and then passed down to future generations.”⁸

Work to make sure norms of predominately white institutions do not take precedence over cultural practices and community processes. Many of these initiatives are tightly wrapped around a timeline with a set of deliverables with no recognition of community context, culture, and rituals. The coalition’s responsibility is to consistently work on individual and organizational levels to reduce and eliminate white privilege and to shift the power dynamic within the community, while holding up and honoring the assets of the community. Predominately white organizations/foundations, specifically, must be intentionally working on these issues internally, which will increase their credibility in the community.

Create an accountability system between the foundation and the community residents and between the coalition and the community residents. The foundation has a responsibility to be accountable to the community and create relationships in which their role can be challenged without consequence. Too many times there

⁸ Stone and Butler, *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives: Exploring Power and Race*, p. 120-1.

are polite silences or limited challenges of a foundation's behavior, due to concern about the community losing resources. When the foundation evaluates the progress of the initiative, the foundation's role in the community also needs to be evaluated by the residents, as Barbara Major suggests.

An accountability process also needs to be created by the coalition members. Some examples are:

- Organizations and residents work and communicate together effectively and transparently.
- Organizations and individuals will uphold the principles of racial equity and address white privilege.
- Organizations will internally adopt these principles and address white privilege.
- If a few organizations within the coalition choose a radical intervention, there is an agreement that even if another organization cannot support the intervention, it will not challenge or dismiss the intervention publicly.
- The coalition will regularly communicate with and listen to the individuals most impacted by the social justice issue(s) being addressed and support their leadership.

Discuss how to leverage different organizations' assets and to catalyze an issue in a community.

When organizations work together, it is important to consider the actions that provide more strength by acting collectively. For some organizations, working together provides the political cover to take risks they normally could not take. Others may not be able to participate but can play another role in supporting the effort. The Center for Assessment and Policy Development's report, *Some Thoughts About Public Will*, is about creating strategies necessary to alter public feeling and action. The report shares several lessons, including this:

“More ‘radical’ or ‘fringe’ groups within a movement can be used to strategically place a problem within the public debate. In effect, having both confrontational and mainstream advocates allows decision-makers (at the policymaking level) to view mainstream options as palatable when weighed against the costs of the ‘radical’ ideal. For example, the AIDS movement uses ACT-UP to bring attention to its causes, but uses other, less vocal groups to negotiate with government and the research community. . . In general, the study of successful American [United States] social movements also indicates that with respect to creating political action, having both confrontational and mainstream groups allows fence-sitting constituents to see the mainstream group's ideas as palatable. . . This helps to make a social movement

successful because without the fringe group, fence-sitters might see the mainstream group as too radical.”⁹

Accountability between organizations is crucial for this practice to work. One trap is that mainstream organizations may create a too-palatable strategy and may miss an opportunity to be a catalyst for change within an institution or the community at large. Another trap is for “radical” groups to be marginalized to the point of being ineffective in different circles within the community. But with a clear understanding of the potential traps, using this strategy is another way to think through ways to leverage different organizations’ assets and to catalyze an issue in a community.¹⁰

Address intergroup tensions through a white privilege lens AND a cultural conflict lens.

Intergroup tension sometimes has to do with white privilege and how white elites may provide economic and political benefits to a particular community of color without dealing with underlying issues or understanding how the decision will instigate conflict between groups. The way privilege is conferred to different groups sets up a competitive process. Gary Delgado describes this concept in *Multi-racial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change*:

“This competitive model is often based on the notion that there is only one ‘pie,’ and a larger piece for one group automatically means a smaller piece for another group. Therefore, despite data like the poll taken by the Los Angeles Times that indicates that Blacks and Latinos are the most likely coalition partners, the political reality is that as the two largest racial minority groups in the U.S., African Americans and Latinos are often in competitive conflict over a number of turf and power issues.”¹¹

Eric Yamamoto goes further in explaining this racial conflict: “[It focuses] on how these groups’ interests and cultural patterns are situated in and determined by a predominately white constructed socioeconomic structure ... present[ing] whiteness as the singular agent of non-white conflict.”¹² In the publication *Structural Racism and Multi-racial Coalition Building*, Maya Wiley describes some of the tensions between groups:

“African Americans see Latinos and Asians as beneficiaries of their civil rights struggles who then undermine their hard-won success. On the other side, legal discrimination against Latinos and Asians is more difficult to prove based on current civil rights laws. Because Latino and Asian groups perceive some African Americans as using their political capital to exclude other

⁹ Sally Leiderman, Wendy C. Wolf, and Peter York, *Some Thoughts About Public Will* (Conshohocken: Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2000), p. 12.

¹⁰ Maggie Potapchuk, *Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations*. (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004), p. 33.

¹¹ Gary Delgado, *Multi-racial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change*, (Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 2003), p. 95.

¹² Wiley, *Structural Racism and Multiracial Coalition Building*, p. 17.

minorities from civil rights remedies and other protections, they blame African Americans for their lack of civil rights protection.”¹³

Things to Consider

Take time to understand the basis of the conflict. The conflict between racial and ethnic groups could be based on access to political power, competition for resources, ideological differences, differences within groups, or the difficulty of accommodating new ethnic subgroups.¹⁴ Groups need to choose their process to discuss and work out the issues together. It also may be a conflict that has to do with the underlying white power structure: how resources are being distributed, whose interests are seen as priorities, and how leaders from different groups are being treated. Be careful not to make assumptions on what is causing the tensions and mistrust. Ask questions and learn what is below the surface to determine or support a suitable response.

Provide opportunities and time for leaders from different communities to develop relationships. Wiley, author of *Structural Racism and Multi-racial Coalition Building*, advises that “... technical support and capacity-building support ... should also include opportunities for leaders of different communities to come together and develop relationships in the context of their work, without attempting to force them into a preconceived issue advocacy effort or coalition. The goal of relationship building in and of itself is an important opportunity that is relatively unavailable to many community organizations and leaders.”¹⁵

Be aware of how your [whites’] participation is impacting the formation and sustainability of a multi-racial coalition. Anne Braden, a long-time civil rights activist and founder of the Southern Organizing Committee, shared: “We are so used to running things. Those of us who are white have to be careful that we aren’t trying to dominate. We need more whites who are willing to take action and to serve in organizations with people of color in the leadership.”¹⁶ This topic is discussed further in the upcoming chapter, “Doing our Work: Unearthing Our Own White Privilege.”

Create an inclusive, equitable process within the coalition to accomplish its goals and influence other processes in the community.

Sometimes because of different project management styles, and/or when the stakes are high, a coalition becomes more focused on creating products than on taking action or paying attention to relationships. To meet unachievable timelines, foundation leaders sometimes push through what they believe is the right thing to do and minimize any effort to create an inclusive democratic process that seeks to redistribute power. The message to residents is: “We will give you the money if you do it *this way*—and on *our* timeline.” Creating an inclusive process is about

¹³ Wiley, *Structural Racism and Multiracial Coalition Building*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Delgado, *Multi-racial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Wiley, *Structural Racism and Multiracial Coalition Building*, p. 84.

¹⁶ Delgado, *Multi-racial Formations: New Instruments for Social Change*, p. 94.

developing a different way of doing business that addresses racism and white privilege. The coalition will need to develop equitable practices, including a democratic governance structure, inclusive and transparent decision-making processes and consistent accountability systems.

Things to Consider

Make sure the agenda is jointly created. Though there may be an executive committee that officially creates the agenda, ensure that there are opportunities for all participants to have input (e.g., leaving time at the end of meetings to do a quick brainstorm, or having a small, diverse [race, gender, class, education, etc.] group meet before the next full meeting to help create the agenda). Also, it is important to encourage people not to lobby for agreements outside the meeting process before things are even brought to the larger group.

Be attentive to cultural differences with discussing conflicts and making decisions. It is obviously important to build trust and relationships so people feel comfortable letting others know if they are not being listened to, or if a decision is being pushed too hard, or how white privilege has manifested itself in the dynamics of the coalition. It is essential for the group to have a discussion up front about the decision-making process, as well as how to address conflicts. Take time to learn about different cultural practices and rituals and incorporate them in the process. If there is translation at a meeting, give space for people to enter into the discussion.

Create time for same race/ethnicity caucus meetings within the context of a coalition/partnership. For whites, this provides an opportunity to check in on our assumptions and behavior, or to ask for support in understanding the issues with a white privilege/anti-racism lens, to encourage action, and/or deal with resistance from colleagues within organizations. Some whites may be concerned about this method, as they may see the goal of the coalition as meeting across racial lines and it may feel awkward to self-segregate. In reality in many meetings self-segregation is the norm—though it is usually unspoken. For people of color, meeting in caucus is an opportunity to create a space to discuss issues and to support leadership. For more on using caucus meetings, see Figure A (page 116).

Make the decision-making process transparent. Consistently check to see whose voices are dominating decision-making processes, and make sure that the people most accustomed to controlling these processes (white people with respect to people of color; men with respect to women; wealthier people with respect to poorer people; advocates and system workers with respect to neighborhood residents)¹⁷ are not dominating the processes. Ensure that everyone follows the rules that the group establishes for decision-making and strategy work (since people used to dominating these processes often work outside the rules if the rules require equitable voice, or give more weight to those most affected by the

¹⁷ It is also important to ensure that youth are provided an opportunity to share their experiences, opinions and perspectives. Older people can dominate conversations and negate youth voices. Sometimes the reason stated is "because they lack real world experiences." Though it is important to understand that in several cultures the message is that youth should listen to their elders and not speak, the group needs to be aware of both ethnic cultural practices and dominant culture practices.

issue). Balance time spent on process with actions that move the work forward, because group members will have different levels of tolerance and need for each.¹⁸ Be vigilant in identifying outside and internal forces that may be pushing an agenda, a timeline or deliverables.

Discuss some of the process issues upfront. After the coalition does relationship-building work, it will be vital to make some process decisions, set group expectations and discuss structural racism and white privilege and how they may manifest in the group process:

- How are decisions made concerning who gets invited? How do people decide if an organization has the “legitimacy” to be part of the process?
- How will the group address the power differentials among organizations (size, staffing, funding, etc.) that are represented? How will the coalition determine each member’s contribution based on differences in size, staffing, and funding?
- Does the group want to create a set of principles everyone must agree to?
- How will groups that use different approaches (advocacy, training, service delivery, organizing, etc.) work interdependently to address an issue?
- How will the fiscal agent be determined?
- How is competency on issues of racism and white privilege determined within the coalition’s learning process?
- How is distribution of resources to particular community organizations determined? How can the process avoid creating a hierarchy of organizations (“anointed” organizations) based on the foundation’s investment of grants, resources and/or time?
- How will the coalition be accountable to the residents most affected by the issue being addressed?
- How will the group determine their message to the media? How will the spokespeople be chosen?
- How will coalition members be allies for each other (e.g., agreeing to disagree, to not attack, to give feedback, to have different approaches to community change, etc.)?

Ensure that everyone follows the rules that the group establishes for decision-making and strategy work (since people used to dominating these processes often work outside the rules if the rules require equitable voice, or give more weight to those most affected by the issue).

Create an ongoing learning process within the coalition. Project Change, a foundation/community partnership to eliminate racism, was funded by the Levi Strauss Foundation. One step of their five-step process is focusing on the education of the institutional policies and practices that perpetuate racial disparities. Having a common analysis and language to discuss structural racism and white privilege within the coalition is crucial in determining interventions,

¹⁸ From www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org (accessed June, 2005).

strategies and outcomes, and in addressing intergroup and process issues. Training is one way to create this common analysis, but coalitions should be careful not to equate training with systemic change work. Rather, it serves as an important component in sustaining long-term change.

One of the dilemmas when a coalition decides to participate in training workshops is which training program to use. A recent publication provides assistance to community members by sharing a detailed profile of several national training programs. The author, Ilana Shapiro, provides a checklist to identify a healthy race-related training program. She asks, “Does the training program:

- Clearly explain its theory of practice and change?
- Demonstrate consistency between what it says it does and what it actually does?
- Integrate a structural analysis of racism into its social change efforts?
- Address the different needs of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups in both its content and methods?
- Discuss differences among various kinds of racism and explain the relationship between racism and other forms of oppression?
- Recognize and support the variety of spiritual/moral, emotional, political, cultural and social aspects of anti-racism work?
- Help participants translate new awareness and understandings into action?
- Establish clear goals and systematically assess its contribution to changing individuals’ intergroup relationships and community structures?
- Provide follow-up or support to participants beyond the training program?
- Cooperate or coordinate its activities with those of other programs working toward racial equity and inclusion?”¹⁹

Understand that the TA provider is accountable to the foundation and the community residents. ... If there are comments or complaints about culturally incompetent behaviors, the foundation’s first responsibility is to the community—and not the consultant.

Choose technical assistance providers who are culturally competent for the community and understand structural racism and white privilege.

Though this process is beginning to change, funders still typically do not give coalitions access and control over the technical assistance (TA) providers entering a community. Residents of the neighborhood are usually in the best position to assess if a provider can work within a community predominantly of color and if the provider has the following:

- Competency in working with people of different races and ethnicities;

¹⁹ Ilana Shapiro. *Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs* (New York: Aspen Institute, 2002), p. 114.

- Basic knowledge about structural racism and white privilege;
- Self-understanding of white privilege and how it manifests itself in their work;
- A willingness to participate in a reciprocal learning relationship; and
- An interest in building the capacity within the community so that the TA needs decrease over time.

When a foundation does not assess consultants' skills or create a process for the coalition to choose providers, then the foundation is once again asking people of color to be the educators or to make a choice not to work with the individual and lose out on services.

Things to Consider

Understand that the TA provider is accountable to the foundation and the community residents. The foundation needs to take this accountability seriously. If there are comments or complaints about culturally incompetent behaviors, the foundation's first responsibility is to the community—and not the consultant.

Go beyond the usual suspects. Too many times, foundation staff choose TA providers by going to people they know the best and trust. This cycle has historically privileged TA providers who are white, or who work for white-owned corporations and non-profit organizations. One strategy to break this cycle is to pay particular attention to who is receiving the most contracts and who is doing what type of work, by race and gender. However, this strategy works best if the foundation backs up this research by committing to changing the ways in which it identifies and vets TA providers.

Consider how residents are being asked to provide assistance. Many times community residents are asked, in effect, to provide technical assistance by sharing stories and information to educate the foundation team. However, these residents are treated as volunteers and not compensated for their expertise. Instead, they should be compensated and appreciated for their contributions.

Figure A: Caucus Meeting Tips

As mentioned, caucus work may seem confusing for some, especially whites, as they may see the point of the coalition as being people of different races and ethnicities working together.²⁰ A majority of people having that worldview can be a challenging barrier to overcome.

It is helpful to discuss that those in the dominant group (whites) received one set of messages from friends, family, media and teachers about being white. The messages ranged from promoting colorblindness to being told, openly or covertly, that we need to live and go to school in a different place than people of color. People of color also received messages from friends, family, media and teachers. Some were told that the blatant stereotypes of one's race or ethnicity are true. Others learned about their self-worth by going to schools that did not have the same level of community investment as white schools.²¹ Crossroads Ministry, an organization that has been using the process of caucusing for the past 16 years, describes these internalized messages that "support and reinforce a kind of 'dance' that helps maintain the race construct."²²

A few things to keep in mind if the coalition decides to use a caucus process:

- It is important for the coalition to have already had a discussion and awareness-building activities on racism, internalized racism and white privilege so people have a common language and analysis.
- It is important to have facilitators. Racism and white privilege leave many wounds, cause confusion and doubt and can sometimes be difficult to communicate about because of the many emotions underneath. Skilled facilitators can support and challenge participants to hold up a mirror to their actions and thought processes, ensure ground rules are maintained, and provide guidance as needed. Facilitators should be experienced by already having done self-work on racism, and should be familiar with caucus processes and exercises. It's best to avoid having someone learn how to facilitate in the moment; it would be wiser to have an experienced facilitator be a mentor and train others in the group.
- One of the dilemmas can be choosing which group to participate in. As stated earlier in this monograph, race is a social construct. How one is viewed by another person based on this construct sometimes can define one's identity. For example, a Latino/a or African American who is light-skinned may be viewed as white. Multi-racial individuals may find it challenging to have to choose a racial group. And there are some white refugees or immigrants who may feel that they don't receive privilege and identify more with people of color. People may respond to this dilemma by blaming the facilitator for "making them" choose between groups. Take time to discuss these racial constructs and how people are perceived by society. Keep the choice in the hands of the individuals and avoid having the group decide which caucus a person 'should' join.
- For whites, being in caucus can be challenging. Some may believe that these conversations must happen in diverse groups; others may connect caucusing with white supremacist organizations; and for others it is just very uncomfortable. Crossroads Ministry provides an explanation of why the caucus process is helpful in creating just communities and organizations:

"Caucusing is fundamental for understanding identity development. ... Caucusing enables us to own our 'we-ness'—empowering us to make 'we (the white collective) statements' in place of 'me (the white individual) statements.' Anti-racist white people need the discipline of coming together, just as we go to the doctor for check-ups, and check-ins. Gaining clarity about racism's hooks—how we act out of these narrow and limited identities—is an important part of claiming our anti-racist identity. So too, our health depends upon using the caucus as a place in which we define, design, plan, develop, dream, and envision what it means to be anti-racists whites ... to be anti-racist whites contributing to building an anti-racist community."²³

²⁰ Thanks to Catherine Wong for suggesting that we include these tips and for providing framing of some of the key points.

²¹ It will be helpful to read the chapters from this monograph, "What is Internalized Racism?" and "Doing the Work: Unearthing our own White Privilege" to understand messages and how they are internalized.

²² From www.crossroadsministry.org/CaucusInfo.sxml (accessed September, 2005).

²³ From www.crossroadsministry.org/CaucusInfo.sxml (access ed September, 2005).