

Chapin Hall
Center for
Children



Core Issues
in Comprehensive
Community-Building
Initiatives: Exploring
Power and Race

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Community-Building Initiatives

Exploring Power
and Race

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Introduction



Power, race, and comprehensive community initiatives

To successfully rebuild disinvested communities, there must be a focus not simply on the economic process, but also on race, class-based social policy, and the value judgments that drive those decisions.

—Otis Johnson, in *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*, 1996

It's time the old adage “where you stand depends on where you sit” was strengthened to include: “where you stand depends on where you sit, and who owns the chair.”

—Earl Durham, in *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*, 1996

Commonly acknowledged in private, yet rarely confronted publicly, power and race remain undeniable influences in community change initiatives. Given the robust social scientific and popular debate about these issues in American life and the conspicuous concentration of comprehensive community-building initiatives (CCIs) in poor communities of color (in particular, predominantly African

American neighborhoods), it is remarkable how scarce formal consideration of race is, in particular, in CCIs, and how weak the attention to race, power, language, culture, gender, and class have been in the practice and implementation of CCIs and other community revitalization strategies.

While discussions among practitioners around these issues in homogeneous settings are more common, conversations in diverse settings about race or power typically move swiftly to less controversial ground. Acknowledgment that these issues “must be addressed” is often as far as some initiatives go. And because they lack a specific framework for considering these issues, most CCIs—when they’ve addressed power and race at all—have tended to focus on practical issues of inclusion and respect, such as equal representation of different cultures in collaboratives, translation in mixed-language community meetings, cultural celebrations that honor community diversity, or hiring community residents as CCI staff. While these practices have provided some benefit to the initiatives that employ them in terms of resident engagement, local understanding, community cohesion, and good will, most practitioners agree that these steps fall far short of what’s needed to change the status quo of social, political, and economic neglect in poor communities.

Those in the field tend to explain the dearth of attention to race as some combination of ubiquitous personal discomfort with the subject, lack of clarity regarding what “race” means, fear of having race obscure everything else in a project or pigeonhole individual actors as narrowly

What does it mean to practitioners that these issues are fundamental? Influential? Pervasive? What is meant by the complaint that “no one talks about it?”

concerned, and belief in some circles that racism is no longer an issue. Attention (or lack thereof) to power is harder to pin down, but generally connects either to reticence on race and the assumption that the two are inextricably connected, or to an unwillingness to name and recognize “class” distinctions in social, professional, and political settings.

Whatever the explanation or set of explanations, it is clear that these obstacles must be overcome. Because while it may be increasingly clear that power is tightly held in some elite circles, that race factors into community decline and persistent poverty, and that there are enduring policies and practices that reinforce color lines, as long as community initiatives fail formally to assess and address these issues, they appear doomed to join many past community enhancement programs whose contributions and successes could not be sustained over time.¹

This volume stands on a foundation of work in the field that has surfaced these issues in a variety of ways, including power as a core tension in initiative governance, the class distinctions that divide both homogeneous and diverse neighborhoods and coalitions, and the importance of race in various aspects of community revitalization practice.² In particular, it was inspired by comments in Chapin Hall’s 1996 *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*, and follows the “discussion on paper” format of that volume. Our intention was to probe more deeply than

has been possible in the other work, to attempt to assess both what it means in community initiatives to appreciate the influence of race and power, and what the specific obstacles may be to making these issues a sharper focus.

We concentrated on practitioners because their own understanding of the issues translates most immediately into what actually happens in initiatives.³ For example, what does it mean to practitioners that these issues are fundamental? Influential? Pervasive? What is meant by the complaint that “no one talks about it?” Do different practitioners see or treat the issues differently because of their role in community initiatives? In particular, we wondered what residents—the “deep stakeholders” as one funder called them—who volunteer their time, invest in change efforts, and live with the consequences, mean when they talk about “putting power or race on the table.” Is “race” typically used as a euphemism for “black?” Where does attention to diversity of class, culture, and language fit in consideration of power and race? What would it mean for CCIs to address these issues directly? With this volume, Chapin Hall explores those questions with people deeply involved with a variety of community initiatives.

About the project

In *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*, essayists rhetorically questioned why “no one talks about race; no one talks about power.” This project responds to that implicit challenge by engaging community initiative practitioners in structured conversations around both these issues. We intended the project as an open exploration, without preconceived ideas of what we would find. The conversations summarized in this volume, therefore, represent the beginning of an ongoing process of sorting and understanding.

To understand how different perspectives on power and race played out in practice, we engaged thirty-five community revitalization practitioners to talk with us at length in two semi-structured confidential interviews conducted before and after they participated in full-day peer focus groups (focus groups included interview respondents who played more or less the same role in initiatives).⁴ From

those conversations, we tried to map out what the issues were and to understand more systematically what might be done to address the wide range of issues identified as “about power” or “about race.”

In addition to these “issue-mapping” essays that begin each chapter, each participant was invited to compose an essay to appear alongside the mapping essay. In this way, we hoped to bring back the unique voices of the participants and allow each of them to argue or highlight a point without the moderating influence of the researchers’ interpretation.

The six participant peer groups included: CCI managers (directors of multi-site initiatives), funders (foundation program officers who oversee such initiatives), site directors (directors of a single site within a multi-site initiative or of a single-site initiative), resident volunteers (residents of a community who participate actively in a change initiative), TA providers (resource professionals hired to assist community initiatives), and researchers (professional analysts who study and/or evaluate community change in a systematic way).

Participants were selected from a variety of contacts in the field, with deliberate attention to creating peer groups that were diverse in terms of gender, race/culture, and geography. In order to continue reaching out to new voices, we did not invite participation from those who had written for the first *Core Issues* volume.

To engage participants, a preliminary conversation described the project and asked if the person would be willing to be interviewed once. Full participation in the project was discussed only *after* the first interview was completed, so that participants could make an informed choice about continuing with us. One person declined to participate after the first interview. One more dropped out after the first interview due to a job change. Out of the thirty-three participants who took part both in interviews and the focus groups, nineteen completed essays for inclusion in the volume.

Research staff on the project included Rebecca Stone from the Chapin Hall Center for Children, project director and editor of the first *Core Issues* volume, and Benjamin

Butler, principal of Community Development Associates, a firm serving a wide range of community initiatives across the country. Although the project was small in terms of staff, we felt it imperative that the team contribute different perspectives on the data and so paired a man and woman, one African American and one white, as the research team. All interviews were conducted by one or the other member of the research team, the team co-facilitated each of the six focus groups, and chapter essays were developed collaboratively.

The project was further supported internally at Chapin Hall by an advisory group that included the principal researchers from a variety of Chapin Hall’s community-focused projects. Advisors informed the design of the research and provided crucial feedback on each chapter.

The Contributions of Participants

We asked participants in this project to do several difficult things: First, we asked them to speak candidly with us and then with each other about what race and power mean to them as individuals, and what those terms mean to them in the context of community work. Second, we asked participants to take terms and ideas like “community,” “race,” and “power” and to define them for us in their own words, from their own experience. For several participants, this was particularly difficult because it was their expectation that we would provide these definitions. We also asked them to step back from their specific roles in initiatives to look at their own motivations, assumptions, prejudices, and ambitions. For many of them, this was the first time they’d been asked, formally, to relate their professional view of power and race issues to their personal history and views.⁵ Third, we asked each participant who told us that power and race were important to this work (and they all did so) how they as individuals had sought to make these issues known and attended to in their work. Fourth, we asked whether CCIs were a good vehicle for discussion or action on issues of power and race, and why. In so doing, we also asked participants to draw a distinction between discussion and action and to weight the contribution of each to effecting the kinds of

changes they hoped for in the communities with which they worked.

Finally, we asked participants to read and reflect on the summary essay describing the discussions of their group and then to write their own short essay for publication in the volume. The results of all of their efforts follow in the next six chapters.

Why CCIs?

Over the course of the project, the research team debated many issues of terminology and interpretation, but no debate lasted as long or had as many implications as our use of CCIs as an organizing principle for the project. The subjects talked about in this book—not just power and

CCIs embody a set of common principles and objectives pertaining to (among other things) diversity and empowerment.

race, but the nature of research in poor communities, or the ways in which policy professionals interact with residents of poor communities, or the challenges of organizing in diverse settings, or even the ways in which foundations are changing the way they work with grantee communities—are relevant to and reflective of a wide range of experiences with community initiatives, broadly defined.

A subset of community-focused initiatives, CCIs embody a set of common principles and objectives pertaining to (among other things) diversity and empowerment. As such, they provide a useful organizing mechanism for an exploration of power and race.⁶ Because of those principles, the individuals involved with such initiatives have, to a certain extent, taken on the challenge of living by those principles in the course of their work. So we drew participants from the universe of individuals who had been involved with a CCI and used the roles most typically associated with a CCI's structure as the basis for our peer groups.

Part of this volume, therefore, represents reflection and critique on race and power in CCIs specifically, insofar as CCIs have been publicly committed to certain objectives.

But, while we used the structure of CCIs as our framework for discussions of issues and roles, we have not confined our comments regarding power, race, and community initiatives exclusively to the initiatives that fit within the CCI framework. CCIs are seen by many in the community-building field (including, importantly, one member of the research team) as not coherent enough a body of work to warrant independent analysis. Indeed, no participant in this project drew narrowly from a single experience with an initiative called a CCI. Thus, many of the references in the essays and much of the analysis in the last chapter speak more broadly to efforts of “community change” or “community initiative” or “community development,” a field of work in which CCIs are just one slice.

The importance of race to power: Two levels of discussion and concern

Although the chapter essays will speak for themselves, we thought it useful at the beginning to comment briefly on some aspects of the research, in particular about power and race as topics, and how they intersected in the research. As we said above, we did not provide working definitions of these terms to participants because part of the exploration was to assess what different practitioners meant when they invoked the terms. We waited for them to tell us, for example, that race is socially constructed or that power can be both positive and negative. We also asked them to describe how race and power intersect, in particular whether in these sorts of initiatives a clear distinction can be made between dynamics due to power and dynamics due to race.

Even with this kind of latitude, many participants and others interested in the project assumed at the outset that race was our main topic and that it would dominate the focus groups, in particular. Indeed, one participant commented “I really thought with power and race together, we'd lean more heavily toward race.” In fact, however, most of the focus groups spent more specific time on power as the key

issue, and we heard familiar themes repeated across the interviews and focus groups: the tensions related to power, the problem of local despotism, the connection between

. . . race “matters” principally because racism in both interpersonal and structural forms blocks the creation and exercise of power.

economic and political power, the importance of who controls power at any level, and a variety of views about to what extent political power can be shifted to the grassroots.

In all but a few instances, “power” connoted something negative, as in “abuse of power.” A few participants interpreted the word differently, seeing it as a positive (if problematic) force, a personal strength, or an objective to be attained.

What was most interesting, however, were the ways in which the negative associations with power (e.g., oppression) were attributed to racism. Because the communities involved in these initiatives are almost all communities of color, sensitivity around racism is never very far from the surface for many participants in an initiative. Whether and how it actually surfaces as an issue, however, varies widely. What participants in this project suggested was that race “matters” principally because racism in both interpersonal and structural forms blocks the creation and exercise of power. Throughout their stories and comments, participants described the difference between these two forms of racism and how they show up as power.

Interpersonal issues raised by participants concerning race ranged from explicit racist behavior or language to often-cited “attitude” issues, such as when patronizing behavior of professional elites is attributed to racism. People of color expressed both how common and how emotionally debilitating such behavior is, and how that can create an environment of defeat in communities of color. These interpersonal dynamics spill over into other

tensions in community initiatives typically thought of as power or control issues, such as “old vs. young,” and “owners vs. renters” when, for example, owners are mostly white and renters are predominantly people of color. Other issues raised under this general heading include issues of community divisions across cultures and divisiveness among blacks of different national origin.

Participants described structural racism as the ways in which racism recreates and enforces power elites, economic inequity, and persistent poverty. This included references to ongoing mechanisms of racial injustice such as hiring practices, redlining, availability of capital for business development, etc. Participants made their strongest specific critique of CCIs in this area, saying that CCIs do little to address these issues at all. Interestingly, participants speculated that CCIs aren’t ambitious enough on this level partly because of enduring tensions at the personal level, and partly because initiative sponsors are part of the power elite. Personal-level dynamics and discomfort, they suggested, make it virtually impossible to talk through the strategies thought to be missing at the structural level. Similarly, participants related what they saw as the embedded nature of racism in powerful institutions (e.g., foundations, banks, corporations) to the personal discomfort with the race of key individuals, such as board members.

The essays

Peer Group Perspectives

Although participants in all the peer groups shared some key perspectives and criticisms on power and race in CCIs, each group’s role provided emphasis on different aspects of power and race. The lead essays in each chapter will lay out these perspectives in detail, and describe both where participants agreed and disagreed. Here, we highlight the key topics raised within each group, and some of the main points they made.

For researchers, the central dilemma was the relation of power and race to the issue of *context*. Their emphasis as researchers was to understand for themselves, and then understand for the purposes of exploration what “context”

means, and how to reflect issues of race and power in that. They had a variety of views regarding the “power” of a researcher to interpret and, therefore, publicly reflect the nature of sociopolitical relations in a community. Researchers also reflected on the business of research and the persistent problems of race, in particular, in that business. For example, they talked about researchers of color who are “brought in” for implementation of research, but who are less often involved at the point of forming the methodology or approach. Decision making about research approach, they suggest, is affected by the lack of diversity in methodological discussions, and that translates into less than optimal incorporation of these issues into research design and contextual understanding. Researchers disagreed with each other about the importance of race matching between researchers and the communities they study, about whether race is a good proxy for “understanding” in communities of color, and about how they would like to see research methods change.

Implicitly underscoring the researchers’ point that local context was essential to capture, site directors focused on issues of local power politics and how those are both framed by, and go way beyond, race. In particular, they talked about internal power struggles at the institutional and community governing levels, assigning much of the tension to the sudden empowerment of those who are not accustomed to handling power. They also reflected on the particular racial history of neighborhoods, and the importance of local stories (a hospital notorious for exploitive research on African Americans, for example) to the character of the community and the nature of local participation. Finally, they looked at the power of their own role and questioned how well they served (or could serve) as negotiator among all these players.

Technical assistance providers, a category that spans a variety of professional advisors to community initiatives, were vocal about what they believed to be the broad sociopolitical agenda of CCIs and whether initiatives could be effective in terms of promoting social justice. This particular group of TA providers were united by a focus on empowerment and justice, and so tended to speak from

that perspective. Thus, they were most critical of CCI sponsors and, by implication, CCI designs, for being weak in the area of social justice (including racial justice and economic equity), and for overstating the intentions and objectives of an initiative in this regard. They tended to attribute misunderstandings between sponsors of initiatives and practitioners/residents to the different ideologies among these stakeholders regarding the nature of the changes they hoped to make. They were, as a group, divided mostly by the degree of their pessimism or optimism about the future for most of these communities, in particular on whether small victories in different locales would ever add up to significant social change.

Funders concentrated on the relatively new challenge they’ve set themselves to become more active “partners” with communities in promoting revitalization. They considered the obvious problems of these partnerships, i.e., the power imbalance between a grantmaking foundation controlling millions of investment dollars and a community of underfinanced institutions and poor residents. But they also turned their attention to the obstacles internal to foundations that work against fundamental changes in grantmaking approach, especially the makeup of their boards of directors and the relationship between staff and board. They noted that this relationship typically discourages frank discussions of race as either an institutional or social issue, and that, in turn, discourages true innovation in grantmaking to poor communities of color. Some key differences among funders stemmed from the apparently different institutional cultures of national and community or family foundations. In general, officers from smaller foundations didn’t feel the same kind of distance either from board members or the communities they served as those from national foundations.

The resident volunteers focused on the desire for control, and contrasted what they mean by control with “involvement,” the latter being what they believe they’re offered in most initiatives. They suggested that involvement of residents is just more of the same kind of initiative they have seen all along. As a group, they were also critical of the local effects of grantmaking in poor communities where an influx of resources can elevate the status of

an individual or an institution above others, but talked about local individuals' responsibility to stay accountable to the grassroots as well. Residents also spent some time talking about the older generation's role, particularly in African American communities, as "gatekeeper" when the younger generation started to get angry. Residents described youth anger—among African Americans in particular—as a powder keg, and expressed fatigue and dissatisfaction with their role helping those in power suppress that youthful anger. They suggested that the frustrations with lack of change were legitimate and that violent expressions of that frustration were inevitable. There were considerable differences among residents revolving around political ideology, objectives for their involvement in community, and hope for the future, but as a group they had relatively few disagreements on key points.

Initiative managers also looked at the challenge of effecting major change in either socioeconomic equity or racial tensions and debated whether it was reasonable to expect foundation-sponsored initiatives to have such a large societal impact. They focused on what actually does happen within an initiative, what "reasonable" expectations might be, and what it means for race and power to be addressed within an initiative context. In general, this group characterized discussion around race and power as necessary but problematic and ultimately ineffective—absent concrete action—in promoting change. They also questioned what "taking action" on power and race might mean, and some described ways in which the initiatives they led had done so.

Individual Perspectives

In participants' individual essays, the perspective narrows from the role played in an initiative to the individual in that role. Some participant essays speak directly to the experience of this project or to the issues raised in the summary essay for their group. Others preferred to use their essay to promote a particular point of view, community agenda, or specific approach exemplified by their work. Topics range from the difficulty of recruiting people of color to CCI research to the limitations of CCIs to effect

change, from the influence of new immigration or how we define race to the need to develop wealth as a key to developing power. The "discussion on paper" that results is both impassioned and nuanced, and we do not attempt to summarize it here. Rather, we encourage readers to read the participant essays in full and consider the range of individual opinion and perspective as indicative of the complexity and personal nature of these issues in practice.

A final note

Finally, a number of explanations are required before launching into this volume. First, this is an exploration of practitioner views, not a review of the academic literature on power, race, and community. Much has been written on these subjects, and we do not attempt here to summarize or describe that literature.⁷ Rather, we started with our own experience as researchers in this field who have struggled with how to incorporate attention to broadly-

This project was meant to surface the many meanings and interpretations and assumptions about power and race embedded in the activities of CCIs.

defined "diversity" issues in the work we do and in our institutions. As we talked with other practitioners in the field of community initiatives, we found that almost everyone was struggling with a similar set of issues, questions, and dilemmas. But in each case, experience and interpretation of the experience is somewhat different, and both role and individual perspective seemed to be influential to practice. That is what we sought to understand.

Second, the volume accommodates a great deal of ambiguity. We urged participants to talk about what they believed, what they perceived as true in their specific contexts of community and role in initiatives. This project was meant to surface the many meanings and interpretations

and assumptions about power and race embedded in the activities of CCIs. As might be expected, a few participants made statements that, if empirically tested, might turn out to be false, or that are true at one point in an initiative and not at others. For example, many sponsoring foundations were discussed in this volume as monolithic influences. But while some initiatives rely exclusively on a single foundation, in most CCIs funding diversifies after the first year or two. Thus, a comment made about one foundation's influence may be more true at one time than at another, or it may appear more acute to one observer in an initiative than another. We did not attempt to add this sort of qualifying detail to every such statement.

We also did not stop each interview or focus group to press for specific explanations of common words or phrases such as "community leader" or "culture" or "funder." Each of these words, and many others used in these discussions, can have multiple meanings, can be used as proxies for other things (e.g., "community" for "residents"). Their meaning, therefore, may be somewhat ambiguous and the project—while it pushed for explanations on some key terms—did not challenge each word or phrase used. Such challenge would have stifled the conversations that, for all their ambiguity, raised so many rich and valuable insights.⁸

It is important to remember, therefore, that each chapter's lead essay tries to bring the reader into the conversations we had with participants and not to sanction as "true" or condemn as "false" any of the individual comments made. Although we situate the role of the participants in some concrete explanations of how most CCIs work, we did not check the facts of a participant's characterization of local politics, or a report of why two groups had not worked well together. We report them as experiences of individuals, and they should be taken as such.

Likewise, the participant essays that follow in each chapter have not been censored in any way through editing. Participants were urged to write about issues that they felt had not been given sufficient exposure in the lead essay, or to challenge the lead essay if they felt it misconstrued what they had brought to the conversations.

What is true across the participant essays is that these ideas are held by influential people within community initiatives and that they are, therefore, influential in the conduct of those initiatives. Understanding them, we believe, is the first step toward forging a way to build a responsible and realistic agenda for the incorporation of power and race analysis in community change initiatives.

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Endnotes

- 1 O'Connor, A. (Forthcoming). *Historical perspective on race and community revitalization*. Queenstown, MD: Aspen Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives.
- 2 See, for example, Kubisch, A., Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Hirota, J., Joseph, M., Richman, H., & Roberts, M. (1997). *Voices from the field: Learning from the early work of comprehensive community initiatives*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute; Walsh, J. (1998). *The eye of the storm: Ten years on the front lines of new futures*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation; Stone, R. (1996). *Core issues in comprehensive community-building initiatives*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children; Walsh, J. (1996). *Stories of renewal: Community building and the future of urban America*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation.
- 3 We define "practitioner" here to include involved residents who typically volunteer their time, but are nonetheless critical actors in the practice of community initiatives.
- 4 In addition, the protocol for the first interview was tested with two individuals who were not participating in the project. Similarly, we conducted one "mock" focus group with a volunteer group of researchers to test the types of questions we might ask and simulate focus group conditions for the benefit of the research team. Data from all of these helped inform the final analyses.

5 To help bring the personal to bear on the professional, we employed a tool called a “Journey Map.” Credit for this remarkable exercise belongs to California Tomorrow whose co-director, Hedy Chang, was a participant in this project. The Journey Map exercise was voluntary: participants were urged to spend some time before the focus group thinking about the events in their lives that had brought them to their current consciousness about both oppression and privilege. If they chose to, they could write down their thoughts. At the start of each focus group, participants introduced themselves and talked about why they were participating in the project. Although not required to do so, many referred to the journey map in those introductions as a way of linking their life experience to the business before us that day. Our thanks to California Tomorrow and Hedy Chang for introducing us to the Journey Map, and to all participants who shared their experiences so forthrightly.

6 Today’s adherents of community building agree that comprehensive community-building initiatives are

guided by certain principles, among them: a focus on local empowerment, whereby residents and institutions within a neighborhood expect (and are expected) to define the issues and “own” the process of change; the importance of strengthening local networks, or building “social capital”; the need to base local agendas on an assessment of the assets and values of a community so that the effort focuses on increasing the indigenous institutional and social capacity to effect positive local change; and a commitment to honor diversity in the pursuit of these other objectives. These principles situate community building in a community revitalization agenda and help distinguish CCIs from other community initiatives.

7 For an excellent review of how race relates to comprehensive community initiatives, see Lawrence, K. (Forthcoming). *Race and community building*. Washington DC: The Aspen Institute, Aspen Roundtable on Comprehensive Initiatives.

8 For some clarification of certain words or phrases, please consult the glossary.

Power, Race, and Community Research



Introduction

Comprehensive community-building initiatives (CCIs) aim to improve the quality of life in poor, urban communities with a unique blend of community-driven services reform for children and families, community development for long-term, sustainable physical and economic revitalization, and community building to bolster essential connections between and among community residents and mainstream systems and supports. With such ambitious aims, CCIs have been of considerable interest to researchers focusing on urban poverty, community social and economic dynamics, and social services reform strategies. CCIs have also received criticism from the research community for (among other things) embracing a variety of largely untested assumptions about the nature of community isolation, the mechanisms through which that isolation can change, and the role of philanthropy and other institutions in promoting change strategies. Research on and about CCIs, therefore, covers a broad range of questions from “What is a CCI?” to “Where do CCIs fit in community change strategies?” to “Is this CCI working?”

Many CCI sponsors contract with a research team to document the process of implementation or to evaluate an initiative’s progress. And, while not uniform across

initiatives, the research that has been sponsored in this way is increasingly self-conscious about its own effects on an initiative, the role and influence of researchers themselves, and the extent to which CCI research can be separated from the other activities of an initiative such as planning and technical assistance. This project sought to speak with researchers who had some experience with these community initiatives about the issues of power and race and how the conduct and results of their research were informed or affected by these issues.

What researchers said was that CCI neighborhoods, while often racially and ethnically diverse, are nonetheless predominantly minority neighborhoods, typically with a majority African American or Hispanic character. CCIs, in short, implicitly draw attention to the interplay of power and race in the context of community development, and so require consideration of these issues and dynamics in research conducted by those attempting to understand the CCI revitalization approach.

Because CCIs also emphasize community context and leadership, and sometimes formally involve researchers in a more interactive role from the early phases of initiative development, they present some new layers of challenge for most researchers. What distinguish-

es “community” researchers within the broader field of urban or community development research, suggested one participant, is “some researchers are not interested in the interactional dimensions. They like to look at a housing program as strictly a technical matter. How you develop capacity, engage leaders or power . . . is not an agenda they think ought to be that high.” Whereas for CCIs, these are central issues in a change process and therefore are central to documentation and evaluation.

The researchers in this project suggested there is a general concern that mainstream urban researchers have little experience with the community dynamics that they record and analyze (and, therefore, can misunderstand or misrepresent what they’re seeing or hearing), that most training emphasizes skills that leaves researchers ill-equipped to deal with diverse populations or to appreciate nuances in community activity, and that the methodologies traditionally employed to evaluate the success of social or programmatic interventions do not fit with the complex, circuitous nature of community change. These concerns come to the fore when researchers talk about capturing and reflecting issues of power and race in their work, as does the concern that these issues are not well handled in most documentation or evaluation of community initiatives.

Researchers themselves come from a range of research traditions. Some researchers work independently, some in teams. The team approach, and the makeup of that team, was particularly important to many of the researchers in this project. Many researchers are affiliated with research institutions, some of which sit within research universities. CCI researchers generally have graduate training in the social sciences, but differ in their orientation to research depending upon whether their field of study was social work, psychology, sociology, anthropology, public policy, economics, history, urban planning, or political science. Like most of academia, the field of community research has more men than women, more whites than any other race or ethnic background, and more people who grew up in advantaged environments than disadvantaged.

Our peer group of researchers, which included only those with experience in looking at community-building

initiatives, told us that there was greater diversity in their group than in the field of community research as a whole. In the focus group were three women and three men, four African Americans and two whites, three affiliates of a university or a university-based research center, two independent contractors, and one director of an independent research organization. Most had considerable experience in community-based work, and most had worked in a variety of geographical settings. For the researchers group, we also had the benefit of interviews and some group discussion with six researchers who did not ultimately participate in the focus group: one researcher who declined to participate after the first interview, and five who were generous enough to participate in a trial-run of the focus group protocol. Their comments and ideas are included in this essay.

Like others involved with community initiatives, researchers’ interests and reflections on how power and race affect them ranged from the very introspective (e.g., How do we conduct research? What have I done in my work to illuminate the role of race or power in community processes?) to analysis of the research endeavor itself and other actors (e.g., the role of funders, the capacity of communities to work with research or conduct it) to broad reflections on the agenda of community building (e.g., Is anything really changing? Are CCIs about fundamental change? What’s the point of what we and others are doing in this field?).

In particular, both the interviews and the focus group surfaced some enduring tensions for researchers in CCIs. First is the pressure on those who do this sort of research to be more involved with the communities under study while at the same time maintaining a judicious distance from the actual agenda of any given community. This tension has particular salience for some researchers of color who feel a personal as well as professional investment in the transformation of minority communities, who are increasingly in demand as funders and others in initiatives insist on racially diverse research teams, and whose work may nonetheless be closely scrutinized for signs of bias.

Second is the extent to which community research is constrained by funders’ expectations, by the expectations

of the academic world, or by time, training, and skill from fully exploring issues of power and race in community initiatives. And last is the question of whether the research

The researcher's job [has] the power to define the community for others outside the community who may have considerable influence over resources and decisions affecting that neighborhood.

profession itself has the luxury of questioning the intent and utility of current trends in CCIs, and, whether, in short, this research is making a real contribution to the understanding of how to improve conditions for children, families, and communities. Each of these is discussed below.

The researcher as “friendly alien”

The researcher’s job is to observe, analyze, and report, and embedded in that job, participants told us, is the power to define the community for others outside the community who may have considerable influence over resources and decisions affecting that neighborhood. That power, whether discussed as the power of the written word, the power to affect funding, the power of deciding which goal is most important, or the power to determine which data are important to the story, sets researchers apart from those individuals under study and establishes a nervousness and, often, suspicion about evaluation at the community level that is difficult to overcome.

Furthermore, the role of research and, therefore, researchers in poor urban communities has a checkered history in the United States. Particularly in communities of color, high-profile research abuses such as the Tuskegee experiments, as well as the innumerable surveys and experimental interventions of the Great Society and afterward, left a residue of cynicism and distrust toward research in many communities. This legacy, no matter how remote the actions

from any specific community, helps form the atmosphere into which today’s community researchers step.

As one of the participants put it, “researchers are aliens when we go to these communities, and the best we can hope for is to be a friendly alien.” And while the source of that particular comment was white, this characterization of the researcher met with general agreement in the focus group; the comment was not meant to suggest that only white researchers are aliens in communities of color. Moreover, the focus group agreed that the role, not the individual, created the barriers.

Whether or not they think of it in terms of having power, researchers are generally aware of their “otherness” and the issues that residents of initiative communities might have with the idea of research and with individual researchers. As one researcher put it:

There’s a need to understand whether someone’s with you or against you. And there’s a history of disadvantage that causes [CCI communities] to use that filter, to figure out if this is someone who can work with us or someone with another agenda who could be exploitive. And that’s something people try to figure out with the evaluation team. Is this team with us or on the outside? Quite apart from what the evaluators represent in terms of race, or gender, it’s “are they ‘us’ enough for us to work together?”

With this awareness, most researchers go to some length to establish their credibility with community members. For some, establishing credibility means signaling that they are open to having work challenged by community members: “We signal that we’re open to hearing and seeing things differently,” said one participant. For others, credibility or acceptance in the community is essential to getting good data. “We want to make sure we get good information. We want to get a bit of honesty because if you don’t have the kind of trust in sources of information, certain ways of knowing would be closed and you’re likely to feel less confident that you fully understand, and that

you can document [that understanding] for others who will need to have evidence.” Still a third view is that seeking acceptance is just human nature, not something uniquely important to the research enterprise. “I don’t see how the desire to build trust and be accepted is different than human nature. It’s what most of us seek in our interactions with people; why shouldn’t we bring it to this work? It’s just fundamental . . . how you approach people, seek information, seek exchange. If you bring that to this work, you’re going to get good results.”

The researcher in place: negotiating race, competence, and trust

Though researchers in this project describe the need for trust differently, and one suggested that it played no role in her thinking or conduct, everyone agreed that establishing good relationships with individuals in the community was important to the research. And while most of them felt that time and repeated positive interaction were the keys to a good research relationship, they readily acknowledged that the short timeframe of most evaluation work required a faster connection with individuals and that some level of trust had to be established early on, before anyone could presume to “know” or “be known in” a community.

This group discussed three mediating factors in the quality of the relationship between community residents and other community stakeholders, and the researcher, and each factor raised interesting points of agreement and disagreement around power and race: 1) race of the researcher vis-a-vis the community; 2) competence in community research (i.e., knowledge of the community dynamic and culture, and sensitivity to language and relationships, ability to share the role and the power of analysis with the community, as well as technical competence and research experience); and 3) understanding or making clear the relationship of the researcher to the funder, where that relationship is an indicator of how “dangerous” the evaluation might be to people in the community. We’ll discuss each of these, in turn.

Race Matching

Researchers differ over to what extent the race of a researcher matters to the quality of community research. In the “trial run” focus group conducted with Chapin Hall

Race matching is thought by some to signal to the community that the researcher is sensitive to issues of race and respectful of the racial makeup of the community.

researchers—all but one of whom were African American—there was a strong consensus that in African American communities, using black researchers should be a priority. Other researchers interviewed felt that such a strong emphasis on race detracts from a discussion that would profit from looking broadly at skills, qualities, or methodologies to improve the quality of community research. As will become clear in the discussion below, many of the researchers who ultimately participated in this project fell somewhere along the continuum between these two positions.

Involving researchers in community research who share race, culture, or language with community residents is often referred to as “matching.” Making sure that there is a “match” between members of a research team and the members of the community under study in a CCI evaluation can be employed for many reasons: First, race matching is thought by some to signal to the community that the researcher is sensitive to issues of race and respectful of the racial makeup of the community. One white researcher commented,

[There’s an] additional kind of layering of mistrust that . . . [has] a racial dimension to it, a difference dimension. So we’re very careful in the early phases of projects to make ourselves look like the communities we work in. It doesn’t change the power of the relationship [between researcher and community], but I think it could help.

Or as an African American researcher commented,

I'm an African American, middle-class person and residents can see that. They know those things about me. I don't try to be "down-home" or anything, but people really appreciate that there's somebody other than . . . well, it's striking in this type of project when you have everybody at the table and all the corporate heads are white males and the residents are like one Hispanic and three blacks. When the people who are being contracted with are diverse, too, it's very appealing to these communities.

As the last comment suggests, the race of the researcher can also be a signal of the funder's perspective and sensitivity to community concerns, and researchers said that funders are increasingly aware of that issue. Said one,

The initiative funders were very explicit about racial appropriateness, about the symbolism of race and ethnicity. They hired consultants two years before the evaluation who were community workers and it became a very important part of their learning as [community funders] how to deal with those communities. And so when they put together the RFP for the evaluation, they required a multicultural team.

Second, some believe that white researchers are disadvantaged when it comes to understanding communities of color and that, therefore, black researchers should be employed in black communities, Hispanic researchers should be employed in Hispanic communities, etc. whenever possible. Although all the researchers in this project emphasized that race matching cannot guarantee better understanding, many believe matching eases the researcher's ability to establish a trusting relationship with community members, or simply increases the likelihood that events and comments will be correctly understood.

One white researcher said,

I've heard many times the comment, "you don't understand the community," which means "you don't understand ethnicity; you're not a person who is of that culture and therefore you don't understand it." It translates into, "you're not African American, or Latino, or Asian and so you can't connect with what you need to do in your research." But it's not put in terms of race. It's put in terms of not understanding the community.

Even when the typical scenario is reversed, the advantages of matching only by race remain unclear. An African American researcher commented:

I've always felt that matching is important, but I don't know how I understand that. In a study of a black, Hispanic, and white community, I always wondered when I did my interviews how the white families felt. I thought, "How will I be perceived? How will they share information? Will they give me the truth?" And it was interesting, because I felt people talked honestly about issues that I thought might not have been easy to deal with.

This same researcher also noted that her ability to speak Spanish transcended difficulties she might have had interviewing Hispanic community members, supporting others' suggestion that race matching may have limited utility in diverse communities.

When I went into a Hispanic community, I had to say, "I speak Spanish" to people so that I would not jeopardize any kind of confidentiality. But it was just amazing how that turned the table every time. It just changed the nature of the relationships. People would bring others out from the back rooms, they'd introduce me to family members, and it was just a different kind of interaction.

When we questioned how matching can be employed in highly diverse communities, most researchers described as desirable a team evaluation approach where the team's diversity reflects the community's diversity. There was, in fact, uniform support for using diverse teams of researchers in this sort of research, even among those who expressed some ambivalence over race matching *per se*. Teams not only allow for flexibility in matching for interviews, they said, they also provide beneficial signals of intent and opportunities to model discussion about racial issues. One researcher who routinely works in teams said,

Even when we create teams that are mixed, we find that we have to work hard to establish a couple of things early in the process. One is that we as a team have to model a way of talking about [racial] dynamics directly. And we try as a team to make things discussable in front of the community. It's a way to start opening things up—and it's obvious that team members who look and identify differently with the communities hear things, pick up on things in visits that I would never hear. And we talk about them, which raises issues about how the team relates and the comfort levels among people in our organization.

Many urban communities today present particularly challenging levels of diversity which researchers must strive to understand and be responsive to. Even if an evaluation can support a large team of researchers (and this is *not* uniformly the case), it may not be possible to be specifically responsive to these levels of diversity. Said one researcher:

California is different when it comes to conceptualizing race, ethnicity, language, and culture. The language barrier alone is huge. Look at Asians—[for most Asian immigrants] there's both first and second generation. For Latinos, you need to know are they Mexican, Guatemalan, Central American, Colombian. Usually it's mostly Mexican Ameri-

can, but in one community there's a significant Guatemalan and Honduran element, and they will be heard. Sensitivity gets pretty complex.

Race matching may also bring added pressure on the researcher to be supportive of community views, as a few of our participants noted. Said one African American researcher, "there's always this kind of, 'you should know,' or 'you would understand,' or 'you can speak on our behalf.'" And while that kind of trusting assumption is exactly what many see as the advantage of race matching, it may also heighten the awkwardness for a researcher when, for example, community members don't like the characterization of their efforts in an evaluation report. An African American whose report caused some consternation among community members told us,

You know, I think the people in the community are glad that I'm there, because when they sit in the board room for this initiative it is so overwhelmingly male and overwhelmingly white. But I'm not always clear that's not truly why they're disappointed [with the report].

Although most researchers felt that matching had some value, there were several different perspectives on what that value might be. Moreover, a researcher's race did not predict whether s/he would favor race matching, or why.

*One can have great theoretical skills,
scientific rigor, and really understand
absolutely nothing about the community
dynamics . . .*

Indeed, the consensus in the focus group—admittedly a more cautious consensus than the interviews suggested might exist—was that it was naive to think that sharing

race or language could compensate for inexperience in the field, class differences that limit understanding among people of similar racial background, or cultural insensitivity that people of all races may be guilty of. What seemed to have meaning for all the researchers was the view that talking about matching by race or language simply didn't capture a more important set of issues in this kind of research—around understanding context, respecting the historical position of poor communities of color, and reflecting without prejudice the challenges and potential of an initiative.

Race, Competence, and Neighborhood Understanding

In both interviews and the focus group, the topic of matching surfaced some deep beliefs about what it means to do competent work in this field, and how community research needs to go about the business of collecting and reporting data on the history and current struggles of poor communities of color. Commented one researcher, "One can have great theoretical skills, scientific rigor, and really understand absolutely nothing about the community dynamics . . . and if you don't understand that, you can't really even do the technical part well." Participants in these conversations seemed to agree that real competence involves both the more technical skills that the research community respects and a harder-to-define affinity for understanding and working intimately within the local context.

Because of the increased attention to racial issues in recent years (particularly the connection of race to urban poverty), researchers acknowledge there is increased pressure within institutions and from funders to find researchers and other community consultants of color. Some considered this superficial: while for decisions around staffing research teams, race may frequently be used as the best proxy for neighborhood sensitivity, some researchers commented that it is naive to assume that being of the same race as the majority of community residents brings with it the neighborhood perspective or understanding that good community research demands. One researcher talked about how using race as a selection criteria can skirt these issues of background:

That's one of the things about race that I think is unfortunate—that often you select [researchers] so that you can have representation on a team without really understanding what that representation represents.

Another African American researcher pointed out that "not all of the minority [researchers] come from an area like the area we're studying. [And they're] no more comfortable, or in touch, or streetwise than [researchers] who are white."

For some of the researchers, credibility in the community and competence in the job both revolve more around the issue of respect: respecting community ambivalence about research by being responsive to issues they raise, respecting a community's cultural makeup by demonstrating knowledge of the culture. When one researcher suggested that respect was, like trust, something that one needed to win from the community, another responded pointedly that "well, it's both about getting respect and *giving* respect." She illustrated the point with a story about a community boycott of an evaluation:

People were not letting me interview them. They were really taking a position; they had gained a level of power within themselves to influence the process, and they didn't want to give it away. I could have really embraced this as my problem as the interviewer, but it wasn't about me. They were giving a message. And, inside, I really wanted to applaud them.

Still, the reality is that many researchers, both white and people of color, believe that racial minorities are more likely than whites to have a natural affinity within communities of color, even if comfort and understanding cannot be so easily achieved. The tension, as so many noted, is the disparity in perspective over which roles within the community building arena come under conspicuous pressure to diversify and which do not. Indeed, some of the

researchers noted that this is exemplified by the funding community which, while its own ranks are still overwhelmingly white, is increasingly insistent that community researchers diversify their teams. Said one researcher,

I remember when I first experienced extreme and direct pressure from a funder around staffing a project. And I remember sitting in that room and looking at the people who were issuing this instruction. It was amazing.

Of particular challenge to CCI researchers is the emphasis on power sharing with community members that pervades all aspects of initiatives, including the evaluation. As one researcher noted, competent community researchers have the “ability to work within a neighborhood perspective, even thinking about ways of sharing power in terms of research.” Being competent in the eyes of the community may also mean being true to this idea of local control. Commented one researcher:

It’s so poignant and so heavy, the issues of power and control, and the issues of ethnicity, culture, and language. People put a lot of effort into defusing it, including researchers. We try to defuse it with the symbolism of having a multicultural team. We try to defuse it with the language and implementation of participatory involvement. We say up front that community members will be involved in collecting and interpreting information, and having an iterative reporting dialogue. And we come in real early and say those things so that people are thinking, “OK, it’s not a conflict evaluation, it’s participatory. We have power in decision making. We decide where it goes.”

While participatory “theories of change” evaluation¹ is currently in vogue in CCIs because it does put more power into the hands of the community to determine goals and measures of progress toward them, even those who are

using this methodology caution that it is not a panacea for making evaluation community-friendly. Though the approach brings the work of the researchers more explicitly into the service of the initiative, said some researchers, it cannot eliminate the guiding authority of the researcher who is still the expert in the evaluation, and it does not guarantee that the community will embrace a research report. For example, said one participant,

If the researcher is prepared to spend time with people, understand their norms and how they operate, I think that’s very powerful. That’s the piece of the theories of change evaluation that’s powerful. But between the complexity of what [the community] says and the articulation of the theory, I think the experts have a tremendous amount of power. Around measurement, too, we exercise control. We agree to disagree with the residents, but then once we’re working with the data . . . For example, in one analysis, we were the ones who imposed the idea of social class. We wondered whether one of the conditions of community building might be that of having diversity in terms of social class, so we imposed the measure. [The community] didn’t like it; they thought it seemed pejorative.

Another person using theories of change evaluation also noted this tension:

We want [the community] to be totally involved, to be equal partners. But we also don’t want people to fail as a result of their bad decisions. We don’t want a community to say, “we want to use this method or measure” when in fact an expert would say that the measure doesn’t work or the method isn’t appropriate to what they want to do. Those are abstractions that experts like us feel we have to contribute. There’s something paternalistic about that, but there’s also something that says, “well we do believe in expertise.”

The Researcher-Funder Relationship

Some CCIs do not have formal evaluations at all. Others bring in evaluators quite early, as described earlier. Still others bring in evaluators after an initiative is well underway. And given the ambivalence toward research, nearly everything about the hiring and conduct of evaluation is subject to intense scrutiny and second-guessing. Researchers are most often hired by a funder, but sometimes are brought in by a community collaborative. Others have to pass muster with local lead agencies in some way. As reported above, Requests for Proposals (RFPs) sometimes specify that research teams must be diverse, other times they are left entirely ambiguous as to design and process.

Even after a painstaking selection process, it is rare for a funder to contract for an evaluation and let it proceed without checks and balances. Some funders expect to be able to review and edit reports before they are made public. Others require that initiative staff or local collaboratives have the same advise and consent powers. During the evaluation, researchers may be asked to provide advice (technical assistance) to local entities and they may be asked to provide feedback on the initiative to the funder independent of community review.

In short, researchers can be pulled in many directions: community stakeholders need to feel that their interests are understood and will be protected by the researcher in order to engage fully in an evaluation. Funders, on the other hand, may treat researchers as emissaries or intermediaries, asking both for formal evaluation but also for informal feedback that may or may not compromise community relationships. One researcher asked others in the focus group for advice on how to respond to, without angering, a funder that takes unfair advantage of the researcher's knowledge of a community. In that instance, we were told:

The evaluators and TA providers became the agents by which the foundation chose to exercise its need for accountability and monitoring. Methodological issues aside, it just seemed to be a very dangerous sort of precedent. It seems to me evaluators need to take a stance opposite that

and say [to the funder], “we can’t effectively fill this role, and if you have accountability issues then find other ways of satisfying them than using

Community ambivalence, even hostility toward evaluation derives in part from the impact on relationships, reputation, funding, and sometimes policy that evaluation reports can have.

your TA and evaluators to do that.” [But] how do you *diplomatically* maintain your need for independence, to maintain your relationships of trust with the community?

Establishing and maintaining a good relationship with a funder, therefore, is almost as important—and almost as difficult—as establishing relationships within the community, said researchers. As suggested earlier, community ambivalence, even hostility toward evaluation derives in part from the impact on relationships, reputation, funding, and sometimes policy that evaluation reports can have. The influence that the researcher has on the funder of a CCI can be of particular concern. As was true of all the other groups in this project, researchers spent a lot of time talking about the influence, attitudes, and power of funders. Said one,

How can an evaluator who basically carries information from the community to the funder downplay the role of monitor? The fact that the evaluator represents the funder is overwhelming: so much is riding on funding. It’s no surprise that community representatives have trouble with that communication. It’s an abiding tension.

And whereas the comment above from one interview suggests that the research is primarily allied with the fund-

ing source in a CCI, other researchers consider the relationship more ambiguous and in fact spend considerable time negotiating both sets of relationships—with the funder for independence of approach and reporting and with the community for a productive and mutually beneficial rapport.

Several researchers suggested that a key element in establishing a good relationship within the community is being very clear about the distance between the researcher and the funder. Commented one:

I think it's important in some fashion to convey the notion of independence. We struggle mostly not with establishing that we're one with the community, but that we're not one with the funder.

If distance is an advantage, however, instances in which evaluations influence decisions about resource allocation or even the structure of a staff are particularly problematic. In two cases we heard of, an evaluation report was the basis of some job terminations within an initiative. When an evaluation document has that kind of impact, it merely underscores the risk associated with cooperating with researchers. One researcher said,

If the report is used to make decisions about whether people stay or leave, I mean that's a real power kind of . . . I mean, if you're known as making those kinds of decisions, its association could be crippling. In just our first phase of a report, three people were terminated. I don't like that as I enter the second phase of this. I don't like that kind of association between the report and their departure.

Other researchers complained that funders' multiple expectations of researchers—especially the mixing of the researcher role with that of technical assistance provider—made both the evaluation work and the relationship with funders more difficult. Still, most said that their reports rarely addressed that issue or other issues of funder influence. Most agreed that many foundations are still too intent on their own role and turf in CCIs, and further suggested

that putting these issues into reports would amount to “speaking truth to power,” something the group agreed researchers tended not to take on. “There really ought to be a way to hold [funders] accountable for some of this,” one researcher commented in the focus group, although the consensus was that funder accountability was one of the hardest problems to solve.

Race and norms in CCI research

Because of all these issues—needing to establish trust, the desirability of both technical training and a diverse array of “people skills,” credibility with the research and funding communities, issues of background and matching, managing the power of the research position so that it does not work against the interests of the community—the researchers we spoke with spent a lot of time talking about

[One researcher] claimed that community research is dominated by those who value the technical expertise over the experiential expertise, and that this is a form of power within the field that keeps it from growing in positive ways.

who does this work, who determines who does this work, how to find qualified researchers, and what kind of training might be involved. Said one:

See, that's part of our professional dilemma. We have the technical stuff and the theoretical stuff clear, so you can look on a résumé and figure out whether somebody has that. And on the basis of that you can get a job. What we don't have is a way of identifying or valuing those intuitive, experiential, other kinds of skills that would be valuable. When we find people like that, they

often are not in the position to get or may not want the research jobs. They may be more valuable in the professional service delivery arena or in the managerial arena.

Another claimed that community research is dominated by those who value the technical expertise over the experiential expertise, and that this is a form of power within the field that keeps it from growing in positive ways. She said,

My question is, who makes the decision that one kind of knowledge is more valued than the other kind? There are different ways of knowing and understanding. But who makes the decision that it is much more valuable to have the scientific, the theoretical, versus its application or its practice? I'm not trying to say that one should be more valued than another; you really need it all. But it is a fact that one is more valued than the other.

Again, many of the researchers agreed that having the ability to put together a diverse team for community research is a huge advantage in this regard. Said one,

I think you don't find one person able to take all these different hats that community evaluators are asked to wear, everything from arm-length technical assistance to getting in there and providing a voice for the community.

These researchers disagreed on whether recruiting more people of color into the field would itself respond to the issues they raised, or whether it was realistic to expect to find enough experience and interest in those coming up through college and graduate school. One researcher suggested that a lot had to change before it would be easy to find experienced people of color to do the research. Like the person quoted above, he suggested that "this field doesn't look all that good to a lot of them. They have alternatives if they're smart and have had opportunity and education."

But another researcher suggested that the reasons young people of color may stay away from the field are more complicated. She asked,

Is it that they're not interested in the field or that the present model within the field creates tension for them? I hear more [from young people] about the shifts that need to occur. It's like "let's make sure you fit in this existing mode," but reshaping it, creating a paradigm shift is something different.

Another researcher added,

In a way, we're asking people to become what some of them would describe as voyeurs on their own community. And when they understand that, they might not find that's something they want to do.

Interestingly, some of the younger African American researchers from the "trial-run" focus group suggested that their feelings of identification with communities of color were very influential in bringing them to the work and that it was a positive incentive, rather than a disincentive, as suggested by the researcher above.

Identifying with the Community

Acknowledging an intensely personal connection to a community that is the subject of study can be difficult for researchers for a variety of reasons. One, as suggested above, is that the feeling of setting oneself apart as an observer can be uncomfortable. Another is that the extent to which a researcher is perceived as allied with the community can diminish his or her stature in the eyes of other "outsiders," such as funders. One researcher put it this way:

We talked [with the funder] about evaluator roles, but it never got settled. To some, advocate sounded great and to others it was awful that we would become advocates for the ideas of the commu-

nity. There's a suspicion among some that the evaluator would "go native."

And while in individual interviews, many of the researchers (particularly people of color) we spoke with acknowledged that their racial background contributed to their sense of commitment to the work and to feeling responsible toward the communities, the group discussion did not surface this as a tension as poignantly. As one participant noted afterward,

I expected the group to be more radical. We were leaning toward the evaluator being more distanced to protect the integrity of the research. Involvement was seen as being dirty, and that consensus may have constrained a different opinion. Maybe it was too personal or threatening.

The consensus established in the group that this participant referred to can best be summed up by this comment from another focus group member who suggested that if a researcher becomes an advocate for a community under study, there is a "slippery slope" problem of losing credibility as an objective researcher in any context:

If you see no wrong, and you think your job there is to defend and justify, then I would say that the researcher does the community a disservice. I try not to encourage [a racial connection] because there's only one step beyond that which says that I lack objectivity and professional standards, or that I can't operate in any other community. It's just a way of dismissing.

Other researchers suggested that, while a researcher's feelings of connection to the community were important to consider, the issues of identity and context in community research were broader and deeper than race. Said one:

We've talked about this issue of being close to the action and working along with people, and

feeling this sort of pressure to explain something a certain way based on how you feel in terms of your connectedness: how you experience it, reflect on it, and write about it. But black people in this country are very diverse, and it's not just an issue of class. It's where you come from, what your experiences have been.

Incorporating race and power in analysis

In both interviews and focus groups, researchers agreed that race, power, and historical context get short shrift in evaluation and are critical missing elements, leaving out important depth to the analysis and vital information about why relations within the community or within initiatives occur as they do, what the story is behind area demographics, and how to distinguish between outcomes that might be site-specific and those that have broader impli-

Communities are demanding a certain level of accountability of researchers and external people: "Before coming into our community you must understand it."

cations for other communities. Many of the researchers we spoke with had no concrete explanation for why this might be the case, with the exception of the consensus that funders do not ask for this kind of analysis. Community members, on the other hand, seem increasingly to be demanding this depth of understanding. One researcher told us:

[It's] permeating beyond just the person who's doing the evaluation that may be of the same background, to the evaluation team, or the community. I think it's an important piece, but I haven't observed an effective way to integrate it into the evaluation discussion. Communities are

Can Professional Observers Turn the Mirror on Themselves? . . . Differences between Individual Interviews and the Group Discussion

At the outset of this project, we wondered how well professional observers could reflect usefully on their own role in community initiatives. In fact, their conversations revealed a great deal of self-reflection, in particular about power: how they made decisions about research and how those decisions played out in communities. In individual interviews, the researchers seemed more willing than in the group setting to speculate on the nature of their role, its challenges, and what they brought to it as individuals. In the focus group, as one member noted afterward, participants talked about power and race “in more cautious ways. People intellectualized rather than opening up.” Certain issues, which had been raised and discussed at some length in individual interviews, proved particularly problematic for discussion in the group, such as when being of a common racial background formed a special bond between a community and a researcher.

The researchers group also tended to practice its craft during the focus group—asking questions of each other more often than debating a point, or talking more about what they have seen in communities than about what they have done and thought as individuals and professionals in the community context. Some participants also observed that this group, unlike most of the others interviewed for the project, is a peer group that actively competes for contracts in a fairly small universe of work, and peer status is therefore important. “Researchers want to impress other researchers,” one participant said in the second interview. Impression management within this group, therefore, may have been more strategic than in other groups where professional competition was less of a consideration.

demanding a certain level of accountability of researchers and external people: “Before coming into our community you must understand it.”

A couple of researchers suggested that the people who resist doing this kind of analysis might have their own reputations and histories on the line. One said there had been consistent resistance to the idea of adding historical context in one initiative from both the funder and the research entity engaged for the evaluation. Another researcher provided this supposition for why that might be the case:

On the history piece, I think history forces us to go back and look, not just at the fact that there is a problem, but why there’s a problem. And there’s a danger that we’re asking people to go back and take some lumps for past projects, past decisions, past initiatives.

At a more mundane level, researchers said, they’re simply not given the room to write a lot about context in the current environment of shorter, simpler reports, and so it lowers the likelihood that complex issues will be addressed. Said one:

We struggle all the time with taking reports that begin with a lot more complexity, and they get reduced, and simplified, and captioned, and bulleted, and given sidebars. You can’t even write a report anymore that has paragraphs . . . So when we talk about these issues, there’s a tendency to say, “yes it’s a problem, yes we know, but you don’t think this initiative is going to deal with that, do you?”

Constraints on writing aside, how to bring a community’s historical context into evaluation proved a par-

ticular challenge for all the researchers we spoke with. To begin with, they said, a community's historical context is not just one thing. For all poor communities of color, there is a history of racism and its part in creating the poverty and isolation that CCIs attempt to ameliorate. And certain communities will have specific histories of redlining, civil rights riots, or exploitive institutions. Today, however, there is the added layer of modern immigration patterns that may be equally important to understanding the local fabric. For example, said one researcher:

In a community I'm in there's Haitians and African Americans, and the whole issue of immigration, who gets jobs in the community and who doesn't, and how you understand that is important. And it's no longer about race as such; it's a much broader kind of perspective. Only when we can really understand that in a different way will we understand racism and its patterns. There has to be more of a global perspective: it's the cross-cultural kind of research within groups that we don't do.

Many researchers noted that CCIs, set in metropolitan communities of concentrated poverty, assume correctly that the demographic makeup of the community is likely to be predominantly black or Hispanic. Even so, they suggested, reporting everything in black/Hispanic terms limits the understanding of the racial and cultural dynamics in any given community. Said one:

These projects are quite often with black and Hispanic poor, and that's a problem. It limits our understanding. If we just looked at patterns of black people across the diaspora, we're going to get a different kind of understanding . . . and we tend not to get that kind of understanding.

Complicating the job of capturing this kind of context is the high level of diversity in many cities across the country and, importantly, the rapid rate of change in some areas. Whether an area is changing, how fast, under what

circumstances, and in what direction all makes up part of the critical context. Researchers suggested that in addition to missing historical context, some CCIs fail to keep pace with newer changes. For example, one researcher told us:

The communities [in the initiative] were predominantly black, but now one is 90 percent Hispanic and the others are more than 50 percent Hispanic. And in [at least one], there's been a great power shift. The newcomers try to figure out how to be a part of the major institutions. In some cases, it's amazing how smooth the transition is. But in others there are lots of bumps. And the [funders] who target these communities don't understand that. They will grab hold of one faction and say, "you are the representation. You are the community."

Because CCIs attempt to bolster and enhance, and in some cases create, power bases in the community, understanding the political context of the community is essential to understanding the politics of change. Researchers in this project said that shifting cultural norms, dominant

Researchers said that shifting cultural norms, dominant ethnicities, the presence or absence of major funders or employers, and the history of leadership and influence in the city are all vital contextual issues that should be better captured in this kind of research . . .

ethnicities, the presence or absence of major funders or employers, and the history of leadership and influence in the city are all vital contextual issues that should be better captured in this kind of research and often are not, or are given only footnote status.

Finding meaning in CCI research

Researchers in this project reflected not just on what made community research more responsive to issues of power and race, but also on the business of CCIs, whether research was being critical enough of CCIs, potential to catalyze change, and the potentially corrupting effect of an increasing amount of foundation money available for this kind of research. Said one:

It's ludicrous to think that all this wealth—these foundations' assets and endowments—that's available for evaluation and research is largely because of the money made on the backs of the very people you're trying to serve. So while, on the one hand, you've got the opportunity to build capacity in this field to be able to do this work better, how do you deal with those contradictions?

Like the speaker above, other participants indicated that, while it is always important to gain understanding, their investment in the profession was guided more by a desire to be changing things for the better. And none of them could say for sure that the increasing sophistication in community building approaches was making a clear difference. For example:

I'm anxious about whether or not, as we become a bigger business, we're seeing the outcomes that we're concerned about. I have never seen families in greater jeopardy than I see today. We're getting more and more sophisticated, rigorous in our approaches and research. We're learning a lot more about techniques. I just don't see the outcomes changing. That's where I'm having a problem.

Another researcher, picking up on the theme, continued:

What's happening with the global economy is doing great devastation to poor communities in this country, and it's not something that a foun-

ation and a few hundred thousand dollars is going to solve. I'm skeptical about the ability of good intentions and a little bit of money to turn things around.

There was also a suggestion by one researcher (echoed by comments in some interviews) that making issues of race matching and foundation power central to this kind of discussion helped keep more important issues off the table. She said:

The power issues are much deeper than "what's the complexion of the person leading this group?" It's ultimately about chang[ing] the systems that cause the poverty and oppression. What are the levers to do that?

And yet, counter to that cynicism that all the researchers could identify with to some extent, were a number of examples of reasons to be optimistic about the current work in CCIs. Some researchers believe that one or two foundations have demonstrated a real interest in evolving away from old power relationships and are aware of the power of money and the need for flexibility in responding to community engagement. One or two pointed to examples where the research questions are changing in positive ways and where funders and communities are developing a greater tolerance for the slowness and ambiguity of change. And we heard about a community foundation that commissioned a review of racial bias in its grantmaking and actually changed its process and structure as a result. In light of these examples, it was little surprise that most researchers also felt that their work could potentially have a real impact in changing peoples lives.

There's an opportunity here for researchers, evaluators to play more comprehensive roles, to shape initiatives. Some of it involves a little more distance or integrity than those who are doing advocacy on the street. There's a great opportu-

nity for the evaluation component to help define and direct—maybe indirectly, maybe asking if there is a change, what do you want to accomplish here, how do you want to do it? Things like that make a big impact. And that’s a heady challenge to say, as a researcher, you have an opportunity to shape an initiative.

Endnotes

- 1 For an explanation of Theories of Change evaluation, see Weiss, C. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, & C. H. Weiss (Eds.), *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: Concepts, methods, and contexts*. Washington DC: The Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families. See also Milligan, S., Coulton, C., Register, R., & York, P. (1998). *Implementing a theories of change evaluation in the Cleveland community-building initiative*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families.

RESPONSE:

Attracting and Nurturing New Researchers for CCI Work

Thomas F. Burns

Thomas Burns is director of OMG Center for Collaborative Learning in Philadelphia.

A critical issue confronting senior researchers now engaged in CCIs is the need to attract talented young professionals, particularly minorities, into this growing domain of urban research. There has been much discussion lately about the need nationally to strengthen both

management and leadership in community development. Just as for other professional roles in the field, there seem to be relatively few young minority researchers inclined toward CCI work. This may be partly due to limited knowledge of the career opportunities and challenges that CCIs offer, but I suspect it is also because there are still relatively few avenues into CCI evaluation, and because the field has, without intending to, erected some barriers to entry that will have to be removed.

As a former teacher who has served as director of an independent nonprofit research organization for some years now, I have arrived at my own biases about how issues of power and race can be addressed in CCIs and other community development research. I see the greatest potential for impact on the field in three areas: how we approach the design of participatory evaluation research, how we compose research teams, and how we provide effective on-the-job learning opportunities for a new generation of community researchers. I would like to comment briefly on the latter two areas, noting some of the realities we have encountered in finding and developing talented young researchers, and what we have learned about nurturing their abilities to work effectively in teams that study change efforts in poor and minority communities.

Our own human resource challenge

In the main essay on issues of power and race in CCI research, some concerns about “mainstream community researchers” were well articulated:

[They] have little experience with the community dynamics that they record and analyze (and, therefore, can misunderstand or misrepresent what they’re seeing or hearing) . . . [their] training emphasizes skills that leaves researchers ill-equipped to deal with diverse populations or to appreciate nuances in community activity, and . . . the methodologies traditionally employed to evaluate the success of social or programmatic interventions do not fit with the complex, circuitous nature of community change.

Strategies of race matching in evaluation teams, sharing of power between evaluators and community representatives, and careful positioning of the evaluation between the community and funder were introduced as possible ways of confronting and balancing issues of race

Once they develop the set of skills that make them valuable as community researchers, younger minority professionals in particular are frequently hired away into other professional roles, usually as program managers and funders.

and power within individual CCI evaluations. Not discussed were the considerable challenges of finding and then supporting the development of individuals with the research skills and perspectives to help employ these and other strategies as part of effective evaluation teams.

If CCI research is to continue to add value and context to CCIs and at the same time have greater relevance within the urban research community, then it will have to be enriched by a flow of continuing new talent. But I am struck by several significant barriers that confront those now working in the field who recognize how vitally important it is to attract and develop new young researchers. Some of these are as follows:

1. Our urban-oriented graduate professional schools produce relatively few young researchers with either knowledge of or an inclination to enter the CCI field. For those few minorities who do graduate from relevant master's degree programs with knowledge of urban communities, competition is stiff. Moreover, most graduates exit with adequate technical knowledge but little direct urban community experience

to draw upon in effectively applying their new expertise in the field.

2. For a trained young professional planner or researcher with an interest in community research, it can take up to two years of additional on-the-job experience working with more senior researchers to develop the competencies required to become credible and work skillfully in community settings. For smaller research organizations, this is a substantial investment in staff development.
3. Once they develop the set of skills that make them valuable as community researchers, younger minority professionals in particular are frequently hired away into other professional roles, usually as program managers and funders. Although they continue to benefit the field as a whole, their newly acquired research skills are lost to the research teams and organizations that invested in their development. Like the community organizations they often evaluate, CCI research organizations can encounter their own turnover problems.
4. Funders of CCIs recognize the value of seasoned experts evaluating and documenting their efforts. But they have not always been willing to bear the additional costs associated with having less experienced researchers participate fully in research teams (including critical onsite fieldwork involving substantial additional travel expenses). As a result, senior researchers sometimes struggle with the dilemma of cutting back on valuable junior staff learning time in the field or burying that cost in their own organizational overhead.

Together these barriers constitute a significant human resource challenge for CCI research organizations. Unless these barriers are more directly and collectively addressed, the costs of attracting and developing new CCI research

staff will continue to be high, with broader consequences for the field of CCI evaluation.

OMG's research team model

At OMG over the past decade we have come to understand that the best way to develop the mix of skills and perspectives needed is by creating a “hands on” learning environment similar to that which exists in many apprenticeship models. To address specifically the challenges of

. . . the team experience itself provides very concrete opportunities for the entire research team to probe, challenge, and understand issues of race and power within itself.

working in urban communities, we have arrived at some general design principles. Ideally, the new researcher (whether minority or not) would join a research team with the following characteristics:

- Racial diversity at more than one level of seniority and experience.
- Senior staff with strong fieldwork experience and a mix of qualitative and quantitative skills.
- Pairing of junior and senior staff in fieldwork teams that are stable over time, to permit close interaction, observation and coaching, and the gradual transfer of research responsibilities from senior to junior staff over time.
- An organizational culture in which issues of race and power are openly discussable and can be reflected on internally and in communications involving both community and funder.

In our experience, working within team settings such as these provides younger professionals with rich opportunities for gaining research skills and for gradually increasing responsibilities as skills and confidence grow. But equally important, when the team composition works (and this is not always the case) the team experience itself provides very concrete opportunities for the entire research team to probe, challenge, and understand issues of race and power within itself, and to explore intrateam role definition and power sharing in a way that has longer term value to the new researcher and the organization as a whole.

An invitation for dialogue

Surely, OMG's concerns and experiences are not unique among CCI researchers. If it is true that the field as a whole should be concerned about attracting and developing more and younger researchers, particularly minorities, then there may be value in more focused discussion of the impediments to be overcome and the promising approaches that are emerging. Some questions to consider:

1. To what degree do CCI research organizations and research professionals share an interest in expanding the pool of younger professionals working in the field?
2. Are there steps that could be taken together to broaden awareness of the career opportunities in the field? Are there practical ways of exposing younger researchers to CCI work while still in school or immediately upon graduation?
3. Is there a role for funders to play in supporting internships, fellowships, or other programs that would encourage CCI researchers to invest more in developing CCI research skills and experience among younger researchers entering the field?

RESPONSE:

Reflections on the Role of Research

Morgan Lyons

Morgan Lyons is president of Lodestar Management/Research, Inc. in Los Angeles.

Stone and Butler have captured a number of essential issues and offered a useful profile of the state of the fledgling field of comprehensive community initiative (CCI) evaluation as it grapples with power and race. A number of themes—“friendly alien,” race matching and expertise, contextual analysis—and several points made in the “race and norms” discussion are particularly well constructed. This response offers some suggestions for continuing this exploration.

As the authors indicate, historical context is vitally critical here. The nature of relations among groups identified by race, ethnicity, language, or culture at the end of 20th century America, perhaps even more than power relations, presents community research with a set of complex, often poorly-defined, politically and emotionally charged issues.

Evaluating politically and emotionally charged issues is difficult enough, but can at least be seen as a measure of the relevance of one’s work. The complexity of issues and, especially, their poor definition are more serious challenges, at least to the technical integrity of evaluation. Social research requires extreme clarity of definition on many levels—intellectualization, if you will—in order to adequately design methodologies and measure and to communicate findings and interpretations. Further clarifying everything from issues to measures will benefit not only those who would evaluate comprehensive community initiatives but also those who would build them.

How might we proceed? Three general tactics come to mind: 1) being more comprehensive in our concept of power; 2) being more incisive in examining the role of group identity; and 3) in assessing the role of evaluators in this heated context, re-committing to the central role of principles of research.

Power: The bigger picture

Stone and Butler have conveyed well the group’s perception of the considerable power of the researcher to define what is important, and true, about the communities they study, especially to funders. The authors also note correctly that this power is essentially race-neutral, that it comes with the assignment.

But as noted by at least one researcher, and relayed in the essay, the discussion of power needs to be much broader, beyond funder-community dynamics toward the social “systems that cause poverty and oppression.” A less conflict-oriented version of that sentiment is a call to understand the broader societal functions of power within which interpersonal power exchanges of all kinds are conducted.

The most general sociological version of societal power is the concept of social class. This is essentially a structural concept that identifies the extent to which different groups or strata control resources and have political and economic influence. There is a perceptual component as well, and one not always in sync with the realities of power. For example, Americans use the term “middle class” somewhat loosely when talking about lifestyle and values, and tend to gloss over its huge range of wealth and power. We certainly don’t see it in Marxist terms. We like to think of socioeconomic status as more changeable than it really is, especially within generations. People outside our notion of middle class have taken on new characteristics in contemporary American mythology. The poor, in particular, once defined by many as victims or heroes à la *Grapes of Wrath* are more and more the underserving poor. To many, “rich” and “poor” are used as code for race and ethnic differences.

These are some of the aspects of the broader power context within which we are asked to evaluate an initiative where people with money to give away (grantmakers) try to change the lives and circumstances of people relatively without, and hire ostensibly well-heeled researchers to find out what happens. As researchers, we need to know how that form of power is perceived by residents and played out in the neighborhood. But we also need to find

out if, and how, CCI interventions actually change the broader distribution of resources and meaningful decision-making structures that affect the community. These questions may not be asked, or given priority, by either funders or community members, but may ultimately affect the initiative's success.

The challenge is to look beyond local interpersonal influence to the bigger picture of power, and to look not for simple indictments of “oppressive systems” but for the particular mechanisms of resource allocation and decision making that affect these communities. Real power, like real economics, is to be found in the community but even more so in the broader structures of government and finance that characterize regions and much larger geographies.

Group identity: Acknowledge and transcend

The discussion of the role of the researcher's group identity in community research is handled well in the treatment of “race matching” and elsewhere. As noted, sometimes

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the poignant difference between researcher and community member is not race but class, or authority (as bestowed by the funder) or education or expertise. It is surely not lost on community residents that the evaluator—like the social service provider, business owner, or CCI director—comes to the site in a nice car and from an upscale direction.

If, as the card is sometimes played, it “takes one to know one,” then evaluation by outsiders should cease. If,

on the other hand, evaluators and those who are evaluated establish core common ground (e.g., the value of information for social justice) and sufficiently transcend divisive identities, there is hope for useful evaluation by “aliens.” Identity politics can and will affect the access and accuracy of evaluation. Stone and Butler have gathered and presented a number of ideas about how to minimize group identity barriers.

Standing for principles

There was clear consensus among focus group members that good research must withstand the complications that arise from such matters as funder power, group identification, and conflicting evaluator roles. Guiding principles recently outlined by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) perfectly subsume the sentiment expressed by the focus group: commitment to systematic inquiry, technical competence, honesty and integrity, respect for all stakeholders, and responsibility to the broader public good.

These are values—premises—not conclusions. Evaluating CCIs, even more than evaluating single programs or other more limited research, calls on all of them. The focus group participants would agree that adherence to these principles can render many of the issues of power and race—for example, evaluator role tensions—more manageable, if not fully resolved. The full AEA discussion of these principles, found on the web, is recommended to CCI evaluators.

Left brain, right brain

Challenges such as interacting with community representatives and understanding community dynamics require both “technical” and “experiential” expertise. One group participant noted that the former is more valued than the latter, at least by the research community. There is no arguing the value to evaluators of having first-hand, intimate experience with the working of CCI types of communities, which may or may not correspond to a match of sociodemographic characteristics. A more contentious issue is whether evaluators need to have an emotional

bonding with community members, or with each other, in order to really know or discuss what is going on.

Focus group participants were asked to consider preparing themselves for the group session by creating a “journey map,” a self-reflection, in this instance applied to one’s personal experiences with “oppression and privilege.” This private exercise was meant to stimulate individual thinking about both personal and professional aspects of how power and race affect the evaluation of CCIs. It did, and it might have been a useful icebreaker and stimulator of insight and conversation had we shared those experiences early in the focus group meeting.

However, it should be clear to all researchers that our most important task is intellectualization, however we arrive at it. The critical *research* issues linking evaluation, power, and race have little to do with our own personal histories or the deep but transitory emotions that accompany disclosure. The task is more outward looking than that—to tell other people’s stories that are typically very unlike our own, and to understand the macro socio-political context that is so important but not directly experienced by either residents or evaluators.

The researcher’s answer to the accusatory question “Do you have to analyze everything?” is still “Yes.”

RESPONSE:

Facing Power and Race in the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Sharon E. Milligan

Sharon Milligan is associate professor and co-director at the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

How can evaluation researchers address or uncover the power and race dynamics found in neighborhood changes? Though we (focus group members) did not answer this

question, maybe we will begin to think about it in more interesting ways. In this essay, I would like to take a critical look at theory-of-change evaluation, which is gaining popularity because it brings community stakeholders into collaboration with evaluators in pursuit of understanding change. In particular, I’d like to talk a little about how even theory-of-change evaluation misses opportunities to explore issues of power and race.

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) are a part of the effort to build strong community supports for poor neighborhoods. A “strong” community provides its members support in finding employment, receiving services, and sustaining self-respect. Because CCIs are being implemented mostly in poor communities of color (and especially African American communities), theory development about how these interventions work to build these sorts of supports should pay careful attention to the contextual dynamics of race and power. However, most program theories, initiative designs, and evaluation reports barely mention these dynamics. Why is this so?

Theory-of-change evaluation should, in theory, allow for those dynamics to be raised as part of the likely process of change and identification of desired outcomes. Some authors have argued that the theory-of-change emphasis on collaboration between evaluators and program staff may help people to reflect on their practice, think critically, and ask questions about why the program operates as it does (Weiss, 1996). Program people learn from the evaluative stance of questioning a point of view, and become reflective participants in the social change process. It is believed that this stance will empower them to make midcourse corrections, continuously improve the workings of the initiative, and be better participants. This is the basic underpinning of a theory-of-change evaluation.

But little is known about how to effectively include community residents in this collaborative evaluation process. The empowerment and participatory research literature focuses on empowering program staff rather than community residents. How you develop the capacity among community residents to participate and use evaluation findings is missing in the literature. Thus, “stake-

holder” groups in evaluation research have traditionally been defined as, or dominated by, sponsors (those who pay the bills), program managers (those who administer the project), or program implementers or developers (staff with direct contact with consumers or residents). But real stakeholders are those who are not in the initiative’s main-stream. Because they live in the community, they are also the ones who may be harmed by an initiative and, by implication, by an evaluation of that initiative.

The inclusion of residents in the evaluation process is a critical step in changing the balance of power between evaluators and community residents. Residents can make explicit any unequal or prejudicial relationships within a

The inclusion of residents in the evaluation process is a critical step in changing the balance of power between evaluators and community residents.

neighborhood change initiative. In many ways stakeholder inclusion can be an empowering experience for those involved, including residents (Bailey, Milligan, & Persse, 1998). Through the inclusionary evaluation process, community residents can become a major audience for the findings, and by using the information, they will benefit from the knowledge gained. Moreover, bringing multiple perspectives and voices into the research conversation by getting the less powerful involved can only add authenticity to the findings and conclusions.

With better involvement of community residents, we might have a different set of outcomes to measure in an evaluation. For example, CCIs seek not just to improve community conditions for poor households, but to find ways to retain or reattract middle class and professional residents. These households carry with them the job contacts, familiarity with the metropolitan opportunity structures, and respect for human capital investment that the

community needs to overcome intense isolation. The presence of such households in the neighborhood can also help command the attention of various public entities such as police and school personnel, essential to the comprehensive revitalization goals of most CCIs. But seeking to broaden the income and racial mix of a community can be a controversial goal. It evokes fear about the displacement of poor people and people of color and the real estate speculation that leads to gentrification. So for political reasons, such a goal may not be made explicit when conducting a theory-of-change approach to evaluation, with the result that it goes unobserved.

Moreover, the successful collaboration of CCI residents (who are often African American and poor) and non-resident stakeholders (who are often non-African American and middle class) in an evaluation might in itself be worthy of note in an evaluation. Such collaboration in these initiatives to create positive neighborhood change might themselves represent a change in community power dynamics worthy of note in an evaluation study, as would a simpler explanation of the diversity of race and income of actors involved in the process. Rarely have I seen or been involved in reporting this sort of information.

It seems to me that part of the resistance to true inclusion of community residents is a reluctance to share power in the evaluation research process, or perhaps a lack of understanding of what that would mean. Meaningful research power sharing is the involvement of stakeholders in the formulation of questions, data collection and analysis, report writing, and the dissemination or communication plan. Many tensions exist in the effort to include residents, not the least of which is a low tolerance for extending an already lengthy process.

In theory-of-change evaluation, the program stakeholders have to examine and re-examine their assumptions about how the program works (Weiss, 1995; Milligan, Coulton, Register, & York, 1998; Milligan, Nario-Redmond, & Coulton, 1997). Thinking through their expectations can reveal to them components that need to be rethought and goals that need to be supported by activities. When evaluation includes all stakeholders in

consensus building about assumptions and theories, the initiative is likely to benefit from having a cohesive plan. But such an approach also assumes that we (evaluators, residents, and program staff) can tolerate the iterative process of program theory development. As we debate the program theory, the program goes on. Initiative stakeholders have to be willing to engage in continuous reflection on the theory and simultaneously work on keeping the initiative going. Because all CCI work is hard and often slow, it's very easy for the intense involvement in the evaluation process to become an excuse for not keeping the initiative going. Program staff (and residents) can put an enormous amount of time in program theory development and data collection at the peril of managing the initiative. Power sharing in evaluation means that a balance must be struck between the goals of the evaluation process and the enormous effort it takes to run an initiative.

In summary, both power and race are important contextual issues in the implementation and evaluation of comprehensive community-building initiatives. Evaluations of these initiatives, in particular, should be used more aggressively to uncover these dynamics and how they impact neighborhood change.

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Looking at Power and Race from the Director's Chair



Introduction

The formal structure of a CCI typically involves some paid staff who are hired, often by the funder or its designated local intermediary, to carry out the day-to-day work of the CCI: convening and staffing meetings, providing an interface with agencies and city representatives, responding to questions or demands from funders, supervising other staff and local volunteers. Though they may have different titles (e.g., “executive director” or “manager”), what we have called the site director is the person in charge of this work for a specific site.

Because site directors are often not residents of the initiative community,¹ the relationship between this paid staff and community residents or members of a community collaborative board can surface some tensions, particularly over the integrity of the empowerment aspects of a CCI’s vision. Community “insiders,” a term used most consistently to refer to residents, may question how hiring a non-resident, or “outsider” as a leader will help accomplish the empowerment goal. On the other hand, they may also see the director as bringing essential skills and knowledge to an effort. A non-resident director hired by outside entities, therefore, potentially both stands between *and* provides a key connection between external stakeholders such as the

funder and community stakeholders such as residents, local service institutions, and business owners. Reflecting that tension, the individuals interviewed for this project described the job as some combination of “teacher,” “referee,” and “straw man,” creating an image of the role as simultaneously powerful and vulnerable to challenge.

The six individuals participating in these discussions found much in common with each other, despite very varied backgrounds. In the group were three African Americans, one Mexican American, one Chinese American, and one white of Irish descent, with four men and two women. Among them, they have been involved with community work in California, Tennessee, Maryland, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. Their personal histories, shared with the group as part of the preamble to the focus group discussion, revealed both the subtle and blatant influences of race and class on their current consciousness, and gave extra meaning to the emphasis these individuals placed on the importance of perspective and personal style in the role of site director.

In both interviews and the focus group, site directors explored the nature of their role and the perspective it gives them on power and race in community initiatives. When considering power, the issues of local power dom-

inated conversations. For example, participants talked about the problems of internal power struggles among those who are not accustomed to power; the contrast between poverty and privilege in preparing individuals for exercising power; the ambiguity of “partnership” between poor communities and wealthy foundations (a power imbalance complicated by a racial imbalance, they said, since most foundations have predominantly white staffs and most CCI communities are communities of color); what constitutes power in poor communities; and how site directors negotiate power with initiative staffs, governing boards, and the city, respectively. This essay will explore each of these areas more fully.

On the topic of race, site directors’ comments again tended to focus on the local context and CCI relationships. In the focus group, for example, when asked about the history of racism and their local experience, directors talked mostly about how individual residents or local organizations are affected by specific, local racial history. In one community, a history of experimentation on African Americans at a local hospital and manipulation of social and economic life by a university means that some residents will never work with or prefer not to patronize those

... race was both an intensely personal influence on their work . . . and an important lens through which power dynamics could be understood.

institutions. That reality presents a particular challenge to bringing those institutions into a collaboration with residents. Another neighborhood that was founded as an African American, home-ownership community is now grappling with intra-racial class issues as they try to attract higher-income professionals back to the neighborhood. That initiative must try to surface and address these class divisions, but has trouble doing so. In yet another com-

munity, a well-organized Hasidic population is very mobilized around the legacy of the Holocaust, prompting tensions with other immigrant groups who do not share that history in the same way and making neighborhood-wide resident collaboration more difficult.

For site directors individually, race was both an intensely personal influence on their work (for example, as it related to their feelings of connectedness to the community in which they worked, or their interpretations of personal and political interactions) and an important lens through which power dynamics could be understood. For example, one African American site director commented that “racism creates a perception of inferiority for anyone of color. The perception is that if you are a person of color in a leadership role that you have certain limitations that would not be assumed of a Caucasian person in the same position. It’s being aware that on a day-to-day level, you’re assessed from a negative posture.”

Finally, while site directors thought of CCIs as trying to alter local power dynamics, most stated that CCIs were not really designed with a bigger picture in mind: that issues of wealth distribution, the local impact of global market competition, and the dominance over those issues of the power elite could not realistically be challenged in the context of a CCI. Part of that, they said, was a general failure of CCIs to recognize and grapple with these larger issues. Part of it was also a sense that they, as individuals and as people with power within the CCI structure, have struggled to find ways to address issues of power and race in the context of the work. These issues, too, will be further drawn out below.

Learning to handle power

According to site directors, their job is mostly about learning to handle power: learning (personally and with community members) how to respond to and work with powerful entities such as a mayor’s office, the city council, or a major foundation; learning how to handle responsibly the power of their own position; and helping community residents, individually and as collective governing boards, learn how to exercise increased authority and involvement

in planning and policy decisions affecting the community. We'll talk about each of these in the section that follows.

Power and Local Politics

Many CCIs begin with the underlying tenet that, as one participant put it, the initiative “tries to find ways to shift power relationships . . . from the city, from the banks that had walked out” to the residents, because “the most vibrant, vital community change will happen when residents actu-

. . . the most vibrant, vital community change will happen when residents actually can make decisions about the future of their own community.

ally can make decisions about the future of their own community.” This view is consistent with comments from many participants about power in general: that it is about “who controls your destiny,” and that CCIs are part of a larger goal to “shift fundamental power, the issue of quality of life for the neighborhood, toward the community.”

In site directors' interviews and group discussion, “the city” frequently exemplified the power elite from whom power needed to shift. “The city” in these instances could be planners, the housing authority, city council representatives, or the mayor's office itself. The power elite was most often characterized by attitude or action, referred to by some as “the suits” and seen as indifferent or even actively hostile toward resident input. Said one interviewee, “When I first came here, I seriously thought that city employees had to have taken a class on how to be ignorant about communities.”

Power plays by local officials come in a variety of forms, said directors. One participant described the following scenario when the city was trying to establish scattered-site housing in their area:

The city would call a community meeting when they knew that the [local neighborhood association] had their monthly meeting scheduled, and then they would also fax a notice of their meeting to us at 4:00 P.M. Monday for a meeting on Tuesday. It's a sure way to say, “we held a community meeting and no one came.” They were manipulating this thing where they could do whatever they wanted to.

Other participants talked about the way racial divisions within a community might be manipulated to distract or divide a power base. Said one participant:

The inter-race dynamic that you see in a lot of communities creates opportunities for people to exploit. If you're wise enough and you really want to control power, you pit people against each other. You know, drop seeds here that so-and-so's trying to get too much power in the next group. And you have this interracial group conflict that allows everybody else who's outside of it to continue to control stuff.

Still others talked about how community empowerment can be sidetracked when certain individuals become favored by the attention of a power elite. This can disrupt internal consensus-building because, as one director commented, “people are so easily moved by these things that give them image.” Another comment reinforced the sense that the powerful can do damage to capacity building by expecting too much, too soon:

[Residents are] told now they have power, but they weren't given any preparation to properly utilize it. And the model [for exercising power] is what they see in the society: that you dictate everything, control it for your vested interest. In a lot of ways, they're almost set up to fail.

Even when a community process has been successful in developing some capacity to capture and exercise authority over decisions affecting the community, however, it doesn't

How [do you] nurture the empowerment of individuals without simply creating new local despots, or playing to divisions that might already exist within a neighborhood?

necessarily mean that power is sustainable. Community influence can come and go with the changing political structure in the city and in the community itself. What one official may do for political gain, said site directors, another may ignore because the relationship garners them nothing. If there is no history of community input to decision making over the allocation of resources, or if that input has been dependent on a single influential individual, community control will remain episodic rather than being embedded in the life of the community. It is embedded, sustained control for which CCIs strive. As one participant told us:

The trick in all this is how do you unfold a process, provide information, have enough transformation of individuals that it becomes community momentum: where people feel they have the right to decide, the tools to decide.

Community Power and the Collaborative Board

The first part of the comment above raises another important point surfaced by the site directors, and that is how to nurture the empowerment of individuals without simply creating new local despots, or playing to divisions that might already exist within a neighborhood. "Power within the community" is critical, one participant told us. "Every neighborhood has to play this out."

There is a tendency, surely not unique to community initiatives, said many participants, for individuals who

get a little power to act like those who have wielded power over them: they push independent agendas, promote their own gain, and stifle the input of others. What is particularly important for CCIs which typically operate in isolated, disenfranchised communities, said one director, is that "sometimes the people who have the least experience with power tend to become the most abusive when given authority because they imitate the behavior of power brokers they have experienced." Another participant commented that in their initiative, the CCI "had developed some great leaders, but there's an imbalance in the exertion of leadership." Many said that this seemed to be a particularly sensitive issue in poor communities of color. Commented one participant:

Oppressed people learn where [an individual] can possibly have power. So we have to really reach for what's meant by resident power. *Community* power. If you replace the city, lord it over your neighbors, forget it. It's important that no individual substitute themselves for the institutions we fought for power with.

Another said,

This group of people who never had power before is just really, really difficult. And a lot of times, [there may be] people benefitting from it, because they want to run for political office or because of whatever other gains may be there. But I think [part of the job is helping] the community and board keeping their eye on why they came there. Is the mission [of community benefit] being fulfilled?

An especially complicated piece of the CCI power dynamic, directors told us, is the collaborative board, a governing body typically made up of various community "stakeholders" who guide the initiative and frequently make decisions about resource allocation. Many site directors said they considered a large part of their job to be help-

ing the community members and local boards adapt to having more influence, while keeping sight of the larger picture of community power and staying true to the principles of inclusion, empowerment, and collective benefit.

But site directors have to work hard at showing that they themselves are committed to those principles. Because site directors are often placed in privileged positions by other influential outsiders (such as funders or government representatives), their role or allegiance can be questioned, particularly as it relates to the position of the governing board. One participant said that “the mayor and the person who oversees the project said to me, ‘OK, you’re going to be the voice of the community. The community likes you and we like you,’” but that as soon as he was perceived as a part of the power elite’s “team,” by community members and as a part of the community team by the initiative’s benefactors, both sides started to criticize his loyalty.

The anointing of a site director as a local leader can also add to political tensions within a community. As another participant said,

I think because the executive director is put in the position of sitting at the meetings when the media comes, that’s the person that they talk to, the community/board feels like, “oh, our power has been taken again.”

Most site directors said that a non-threatening personal style and a consistent record of acting in good faith on behalf of the initiative (i.e., the whole community, rather than one or two players) were their best tools for negotiating relationships within the community. Some also argued that board training was essential to making these relationships work, though few initiatives had dedicated resources

The Focus Group as Support Group

Unlike some of the other participant groups who have more regular opportunities for peer interaction, site directors in the focus group setting warmed rapidly to the sense of collegiality in the room, especially the level of empathy toward the challenges and frustrations of this particular job. Because there is no membership association or field that connects site directors, their feelings of isolation on the job can be intense.

We also heard from this group how hard it is to do community work, how hard it is to play all the power games, how hard it is to convince outsiders to involve residents, convince staff to value a consumer’s position, convince residents to take stock of what youth have to offer, how hard it is constantly to make judgments that may or may not cost you an important relationship or even a job. And we realized how much people need to vent in a supportive environment.

For site directors, the focus group seemed to fill this void for a day. Participants said it was a “huge relief” to let down with others in the same position, to be with others “who know what we’re talking about.” This had interesting consequences for the conversation. On the one hand, participants went into wonderful detail with stories and examples of every point raised. The group covered an enormous amount of territory during the day. On the other hand, the topics often wandered away from a specific question to a more general area of concern. Most of the time, these meanderings did not appear to be diverting the group from uncomfortable topics, but rather following a remarkably quick comfort level on a range of tough issues. Occasionally, however, such as when one participant suggested that both gender and skin tone were uncharted issues within African American power dynamics, the group allowed itself to pass over a topic that may have been fruitfully discussed in so compatible a group.

to this. In an exchange that clearly resonated with the group, one participant talked about this tension between site directors and collaborative boards in the following way:

The greatest fear of an executive director is to be micromanaged, but for the board, the greatest fear is an executive director run amok; it's this continuous struggle.

A final wrinkle in neighborhood power dynamics arises when community power struggles get played out within an initiative's collaborative board. One participant recounted an experience when an agency director on the board of the initiative, disgruntled by a previous report

You have to balance that instinct to fight for the group with the instinct that it's more important that they fight for themselves.

suggesting that human service agencies in the community were resistant to resident leadership, chose a foundation visit to strike back:

[Agency directors] are articulate people, and they're going to protect their own interests in this. We had a major foundation site visit and so we set up a meeting with some of the leadership of the collaborative, and one member—in our presence—used the opportunity to pitch his agency and argue that [the funder] should give less money to the [initiative] and more to [his independent effort].

Site Director Power

Most of these directors talked about the real strength of their position lying in their ability to be a source of infor-

mation, or to be a convener of relationships among disparate actors. But because of the various tensions described above, directors talked about being especially cautious about how they exercise their own influence, given that, as some participants put it, “staff has a lot of power” and “at the same time, there are always elements in the community that will question how I got there and what my intentions are.” One participant told us:

Part of my challenge is to keep my relationships as tight as possible to the groups I'm representing and make sure that I communicate back and forth. And I have to be really honest in my role of articulating the community's position, as opposed to my own. At the same time, I can articulate to these power brokers where there's an advantage to dealing differently with the community. That's the opportunity. And if I don't do that, then the question is, well why am I there? What purpose am I serving if nothing's coming out of it that's going to benefit the community?

Which battles a director chooses to engage in and how s/he engages reflect on the credibility and authority of the role, said participants. One commented that “progress is more important than your emotion of that moment,” and explained why not exercising authority can be as important as choosing to:

When you're dealing with centers of power, be they elected government or community, you've got—as others have mentioned—the organizational and the personal risk. And you have to be very thoughtful about both of them for all your own reasons, but also for the credibility of what you're trying to do. If you jump into every single fray, you'll lose credibility faster than anything else you can do. But you have to balance that instinct to fight *for* the group with the instinct that it's more important that they fight for themselves. You have to be patient, and sometimes

you have to be quiet. That's part of your role as well . . . so that in the long run you're there to see that when the dust settles, there is progress.

Foundations and Their Power

Like other groups in this project, site directors were critical of the behavior of some funders involved with CCIs, but in particular they noted the degree of control CCI funders still wield over initiative structure despite rhetoric about partnership, community definition and control. One

While funders struggle with how to make the promise of a different relationship with communities work, . . . communities also need to adjust what they expect from foundations.

participant noted that foundations seem to be slow to learn about the impact they have:

One community fell apart because of the way [the funder] insisted they structure themselves. [But] then when we said we'd have to restructure how the resources are used [for our site] in order to bring key representatives to the table, there was resistance to *that* [from the funder].

While funders struggle with how to make the promise of a different relationship with communities work, initiative directors and others struggle to articulate what it means to the community to have the control they've been promised. And they acknowledge that both sides must struggle to change, that communities also need to adjust what they expect from foundations. Said one:

[The funders] say they won't intervene because

they want to make residents in control. But the residents look to them in a way that—in a lot of ways, they're God. I mean it's like anything you say must be right because you have all the resources of power.

The notion of partnership between a community and a foundation is sometimes further complicated by the city or state government also playing a "partnership" role. In those instances, the foundation may find itself in the middle if residents square off against a city decision. Similarly, initiative participants in the community may also find themselves with some distasteful choices in the name of partnership. One director told a story where residents working on the initiative had been told by a funder to stay quiet about a controversy in the neighborhood because "the city is a partner with you, and you have to respect [their] position in this matter."

It is particularly difficult to change the funder/community relationship, said some directors, when the source of funding is believed to be well-meaning. For example, said one:

[When the funder] is benevolent, cares about you, that's the toughest audience. The time came to say—and we tried for years—"listen, we appreciate it, but we have to define what's real for us. We want your help, but we don't want you to design how that should happen." [The funder felt] slapped in the face.

Race and its relation to power

While most of these participants felt that race was personally important to them, there was consensus in both the interviews and the focus groups that personal style, and not race, was the most important factor in their success or failure as directors. Yet the examples given of power dynamics suggest that race influences how power is exercised and how the exercise of power is interpreted and received in different quarters.

Talking about Race across the Insider-Outsider Divide

The insider-outsider tension is typified in CCIs by the relationship of a funder to community residents. Many participants pointed out that funders (both foundation boards and program officers) are predominantly white, and residents of CCI communities are predominantly of color. Said one participant, “at the collaborative table no one talks about it but part of the tension that exists comes from this white organization controlling the money meant for people in this black community.”

Typically, however, said directors, these racial dimensions to already difficult power relationships do not get surfaced or discussed, except privately. Participants in this group and others talked about “the meetings after the meetings” where, as one participant described it,

People will be talking about something, and somebody will say, “well, why didn’t you say that in the meeting?” And the white person will say, “well, I couldn’t say that because I’m white. And black people may not want to hear that from a white person.” And there are black people who have things [they want to say], but because the person is white, they don’t say it. This sort of came to a head last week: it came out that there are people who want to say things but because of this issue of black and white (and we also talked about class a little bit) there are things that we don’t say.

In the above example, the participant said that maybe “the next conversation” would be about this set of issues, now that they were “on the table.” But reticence on the issue of race is common, say directors, for a variety of reasons. People of color, suggested one participant, are particularly sensitive to the perception that they’re complaining when race is raised.

It’s an important topic that gets buried because the moment you raise stuff, people say that you’re whining. And it’s a real cool reflex mechanism

that exists, that the moment you say those things, you’re seen as someone who’s being defensive. [But] it’s a lot of the . . . stuff people carry.

People of color, or particularly people for whom English is a second language, directors told us, are especially quiet in large groups. Participants told us that they had seen this dynamic in everything from collaborative board meetings to large community meetings. Said one, “In a group of 300 people, most folks don’t talk. What do you want community people to do? Some of them don’t speak English. They’re not going to give any feedback.” If culture or language (or gender, as another participant pointed out) may make people reluctant to speak at all in certain settings, suggested directors, it is even less likely that they would comfortably talk about the reason for their reluctance.

Another source of reluctance to have conversations about race is the fear of appearing racist. Said one participant,

One of the focuses of a survey we did was education, and our purpose in asking one question was to find out what people’s experiences were with institutional racism in the school system. So there was this question to parents about whether your child has experienced any difficulties because of their racial or ethnic or language background. And there were parents who made the interviewers write on the questionnaire, “I have taught my child to respect everybody, regardless of their background.” They took it as a question about them and whether they had problems.

Race and the Insider-Insider Tension

In the discussion above, participants described how internal racial or cultural divisions can be manipulated by outsiders to throw a wrench in a community process. But a real problem, said participants, is that those internal tensions are there to be exploited in the first place and can be exploited with such ease. Said one director:

The city had very successfully done this thing where the African blacks and the African Americans were up in arms against each other. And I thought, for all the openness, for all we did that was positive, because we didn't address this stuff directly, it's still there. It is still there.

The most commonly described racially-charged scenarios in CCI communities reflected in this project fall into three categories: 1) those where an African American population feels challenged by a newer black Caribbean or black African population, causing friction because the immigrant population typically has swifter economic success and may feel little empathy for the African American population; 2) rapidly diversifying urban neighborhoods, generally changing from predominantly African American to a mix of African American and Latino, where the Latino groups may be diverse in terms of both race and national origin; and 3) very diverse mixes within and across neighborhoods of ethnic whites, growing Asian immigrant populations, and a combination of well-established African American and Latino groups. Ethnic and racial groups

You have to be diplomatic in how you present a situation so that you are not accused of making it a matter of race.

will tend to have their own leadership structure, some deeply embedded in cultural traditions, presenting enormous challenges for CCI directors who may be both ideologically inclined and required by the directives of an initiative to promote and achieve inclusiveness and equal representation in the local effort.

While participants were able to identify attempts at addressing racial divisions within communities, most concluded that these issues are rarely talked out or effectively acted upon. Indeed, while there seemed to be consen-

sus that by working together on a common problem even divided community groups can "get past" issues of race, there was a fundamental difference of opinion in the group about whether getting past these issues is helpful in the long run. The following exchange exemplifies this point:

Participant 1: We know that in our communities the race stuff is big, it's bigger than we ever want to admit. People don't talk to each other, or they can't talk to each other. And it's not a topic that's easy to discuss. So what we've done with the [people] we work with is we never discuss it and we always get past it. We have to continue to move our communities forward. We've got to remember not to fool ourselves about [race] because we have a long way to go. But while we're making progress, it's great.

Participant 2: I am actually for a more direct conversation . . . We have to re-knit something because we haven't figured out how to deal more proactively. You know, deal with what we still have to learn about each other, but also deal with what it means institutionally. If we can't deal with the institutional stuff, then our kids keep thinking it's them. They're told that it's them, that there's something wrong with them; that's why they can't achieve, that they have bad genes or something. All that stuff that you think we put away 20 or 30 years ago, it's back, strong.

As with other participants in this project, site directors' comments on race reflected the enormity of the issue, and the helplessness that can be felt at the local level when faced every day with a different (or with many) facets of its complexity. For example, in addition to the issues raised above, we heard about some whites' sensitivity to insinuations of racism and how that can constrain a diverse group from really talking about race and racism. As one director said in an interview:

White people are really convinced that it's all over, or at least they try to be convinced that things aren't done as a matter of race. So you have to be diplomatic in how you present a situation so that you are not accused of making it a matter of race. I find it challenging to always try to turn race into economic or other social cost terms so that people can get it. Then, if they begin to see it as racist, you can discuss it.

Among the other micro-level challenges of handling race issues on a day-to-day basis, one participant spoke about political manipulation of race: "It's a tool that people pull out

Site directors noted that a real challenge of CCIs is trying to do this complex human-relations work in unrealistically short time frames

when they want to maintain their power base." Another talked about American historical amnesia about race and racism and how hard that makes any kind of discussion:

Things in this country that are racism never happened: we didn't take this country from the Indians, and we didn't steal southern California from the Mexicans. We didn't put the Japanese away in camps. We didn't bring Filipinos over here and pass laws that they couldn't get married because we wanted them here just to work.

Yet another said that understanding issues of class are as important as race to urban change: "It's not just the Caucasian community that sees the inner city as a place they no longer want to be at. It's people of color. You can hear some of the same negative comments in terms of how they talk about the people that remain." These are issues

that pervade both insider-outsider and insider-insider relations, and site directors must negotiate them all in putting together and holding together fragile coalitions.

Lastly, site directors noted that a real challenge of CCIs is trying to do this complex human-relations work in unrealistically short time frames, time frames that are often dictated to them by funding sources. The nature of the communities in which they work makes "simple" bridge-building extremely difficult. Said one:

We can't take it for granted that just because people are in the same area and even look like each other that they are comfortable with each other. I mean, I've been to meetings where people have been asked to come and decide on some major activities, like how money is used and decisions are made, and these people have never met each other, don't know each other, and you're expecting them to sit down and have some real significant dialogue without any trust or any sense of who they are. But we're outcome oriented. You've got funding realities and timelines. Sometimes the hardest decision is to try to free up that time to work through the relationship issues, as opposed to meeting that deadline of having a decision on something that has nothing to do with what's going on in the community itself.

CCIs and the big picture

While site directors concentrated their remarks largely on the very local and day-to-day context of their work, the focus group participants noted a number of times that CCIs and their potential had to be seen in a larger context, and that part of their job was articulating this context at the local level. One director suggested that "we're not even in the same game" with the power elites in the country. "I think a lot of the work we do is recognition that there are factors out there that we can't control."

The largest such factor discussed in the group had to do with macroeconomic forces, and the consequences of global market forces, exemplified by persistent inequities

in income and other resource distribution. Said one participant, “You got, what, two percent of the population owning most of the wealth, and the majority of us—98-99 percent—are going along like this is permissible.”

And while directors agreed that part of their job was to raise and distinguish the importance of these issues at the local level, they also concurred that it’s difficult to do so when residents are not accustomed to thinking systematically about local problems. More than one participant had a story about trying to trace a local problem back to systemic issues. One said, “every time I bring it to meetings, they say, ‘oh, yeah, we know that’s a problem’ but it just gets played over and over. Nobody is really looking to do anything.”

What hooks a local CCI effort back to the big picture, directors suggested, is the idea that community action is a building block, not to solve all the problems, but to give the sense that the problems can be solved and that local voice has a role. One of the participants, reflecting on the potential of CCIs to address all the power and race issues raised in the discussion, concluded:

In many communities, the stress is so overwhelming, one of the best things we can do is just create environments, safe spaces where people can share and begin to realize that they’re not the only one feeling overwhelmed. You begin to appreciate that you’re all in the same battle together, that you don’t have to hold on to your little area and protect it. Because that perpetuates the issues that are there. And hopefully you can get enough strength from collective support that you can talk about the hard issues because people can feel comfortable that the expression is not going to kill you. *That’s* the challenge that we have in developing strategies.

Endnotes

- 1 In our participant group, most of the site directors lived outside the initiative neighborhood before being hired to staff the initiative.

RESPONSE:

Wealth Creation is Key to Community Economic Development

Mustafa Abdul-Salaam

Mustafa Abdul-Salaam is a managing director of Smith Whiley & Company in Hartford, Connecticut.

Since my participation in this project, I have made a significant change in my professional life, going from a long career in the not-for-profit arena to working in the private financial sector trying to put together financing for inner-city business and capital development. The change has been an important learning experience for me—not just showing me how much I had to learn about finance and the private sector, but driving home some realities about power and how we go about helping poor communities of color lay a foundation for revitalization.

One of the things I’ve learned is that for-profit and non-profit are different cultures, different value systems, and we

I’m convinced that the community development world is stuck in a way of thinking that doesn’t begin to acknowledge the bottom line of development. Money is power. Wealth creation is the bottom line.

don’t have enough people who can bridge those systems. In my past life with various children and family services organizations and as director of the Hartford site of the Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative, I brought a real depth of understanding of the non-profit community side of things. I wanted to save the world, and I thought there was a lot of sense in what the Ford Foundation was saying about comprehensiveness and building local involve-

ment. I knew a little about development, and I figured I could be the bridge. But where I am now, I've learned a lot about finance, and a lot about the cultural nuances of the private sector. And I'm convinced that the community development world is stuck in a way of thinking that doesn't begin to acknowledge the bottom line of development. Money is power. Wealth creation is the bottom line.

I know now that you cannot do community economic development without private investment. But the truth of private investment is, unless you can frame it in terms of value added and potential returns, investment won't happen. Social benefit is, frankly, irrelevant to the question of how to attract private dollars to the inner city. Some of that can be blamed on the culture around money-making. I see it every day—when you deal with finances all your life, you lose track of the importance of people. I sit in meetings with people who've been doing nothing but making money for 15 or 20 years. Their value system is embedded in that.

And there's racism. Access to capital is the greatest difficulty in business development. Most of the folks with the investment dollars are white, Anglo-Saxon males, and their comfort level is not to invest in inner-city communities of color where they see no value or potential. When you look at the data available through the Small Business Administration, it becomes obvious that there are both structural and systemic barriers to accessing capital for people of color based solely on race and ethnicity. We do need to overcome the racially-motivated drag on making capital available to African Americans, in particular.

Mostly, however, institutions need to identify their self-interest in investing in the inner-city, providing capital to people of color. Today, self-interest means being able to answer "yes" to the question, "Is it going to contribute to growth and development regionally?" Inner cities are fundamental to regional health. You can't get around it. The corporate sector tried to run away from this reality for years, but now they're starting to see it. Still, it takes really enlightened corporate leadership to do more than "what we can" to develop the region they're committed to—investing in things like housing, schools, business capital—instead of building bigger fences around the decay.

So we need to help communities demonstrate where the returns will be. In the corporate community now, there's a lot of consolidating going on for survival. They're connecting rather than competing. The African American community needs to buy into that model. We're oriented to be individualistic: start your own business. That's not working. It can't work in this reality. We have to do the same thing the corporations are doing—pooling resources to maximize them. If you bring value, other people will look at you differently and want to invest because they see that value.

Securing investment for poor communities is also going to require a whole restructuring at the community level of how we market the community. We have got to get rid of the deficit mentality in the non-profit sector. Even with the Ford initiative, which talked about self-sustaining economies and comprehensiveness, it was still deficit-driven. What I didn't understand in NFI was the depth of buy-in to the deficit model by the community. Initially, I really thought the Ford model created an opportunity for communities to evolve to another level of doing economic development, but the community responded to

... as important as community participation and resident involvement are, they're the opposite of what economic development is about. You can't do economic development by committee.

Ford's money the same way they responded to other non-profit funding—spend as much money as fast as you can. Any real long-term impact on the community was a secondary consideration.

The truth is, as important as community participation and resident involvement are, they're the opposite of what economic development is about. You can't do economic development by committee. The corporate structure gets

things done because it's bottom-line oriented. Community people have legitimate concerns and deserve to be involved, but they have little specific knowledge of economic development, and so there are limitations on what they can contribute. The result is, you spend all your time on process issues. And community process in these initiatives has nothing to do with development. Very little got developed in NFI, except process. Groups of people met together for a long period of time and got to know each other real well. But where's the long-term impact?

A big challenge is getting these deficit-driven communities to be attractive to private investment. Traditionally, public money and foundation money has flowed in around deficits. Communities buy that model. They see less as more. Needs assessments look at poverty and single parenthood because that has always brought in dollars. They don't look at potential consumers and profitability. The non-profits in those communities are driven and defined by that deficit model. They have a vested interest in maintaining this deficit model because it justifies their existence. Removing deficits would require many non-profits to redefine themselves or go out of business. This is how a market-driven economy operates. Private investment, on the other hand, looks for assets and values. If all you have is deficits, there's no return and no reason to invest.

In the profit-making world, you create opportunities for people to succeed or fail. The real world is market driven, and that includes failure. In CCIs, we've been trying to guarantee success. What benefit does that bring? Very few inner city communities have the capacity and technical expertise to undertake real community economic development. Unless funding sources like Ford are truly committed to building that specific capacity, they will continue to set up these communities to fail and perpetuate the deficit model.

Even the foundations who talk about that capacity building, about empowering, about focusing on assets,

are caught in their own split personalities—one foot in the private sector and the other in non-profit. Can foundations really be the advocates for wealth redistribution? They have probably the greatest interest in maintaining the status quo. It's where they get their money from. It's who they represent. They have money because of the economic gaps they're paying to fix. The disparity of wealth in this country created the foundations. Foundation staff may agree with redistribution intellectually, but can they really want to put themselves out of business? There's this separation of what they do programmatically to promote social good and maintaining their corporate integrity. Foundation staff don't want to confront the people who give them their resources, so there are always these opposing ideologies sitting in a single institution, and protecting the money wins every time.

The reality in this society is that wealth is power. If we're really going to help communities of color, we have to focus on building wealth in those communities. If you're not engaged in wealth building, you remove yourself from having any influence in terms of power. You perpetuate your dependency. In these communities, we need to focus on the impact of wealth building. The initiatives to this point, although they may have some elements of wealth building, have not made it the focus.

Some of the major players (i.e., foundations) in community development will be threatened by that because what's driven this country is the attitude of "how do I maintain my money and my control?" They see wealth as fixed. The opposing view, which I hold to, is that resources are *not* limited, and I can help other people create wealth and make money without losing mine. We have conflict because such a small percentage now has the wealth and tends to hold the first view. How do we change that? That, it seems to me, is the real challenge.

RESPONSE:

Sharing Power to Win Power at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

May Louie

May Louie is the Rebuilding Communities Initiative project director at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's story is one community's journey to reversing decades of racial redlining, disinvestment, and powerlessness. DSNI's formation fifteen years ago as a comprehensive community-building initiative, long before the term was coined and the concept popular, organized this neighborhood's intention to take control of its destiny. The failure of government, business, philanthropy, and other institutions was obvious in the rubblefilled, garbagestrewn stretch of vacant lots.

At what was intended to be DSNI's founding meeting, the sector with the least power, community residents, challenged the unilateral efforts of local agencies and a local funder to form this new organization without them. It is to the credit of the meeting's organizers that they accepted this criticism, listened, went back to the drawing board, and made room for a new powersharing arrangement. The result has grown into DSNI's model for resident-led change through community organizing and planning toward a shared vision. This was institutionalized in a neighborhood governance structure that recognized the extraordinary voice that residents must have by creating a resident majority on the DSNI Board of Directors, and by having 100 percent of the board comprised of local stakeholders. More than that, the founders made this body accountable to the entire neighborhood by establishing biennial community-wide elections for the board. Thus, from its inception, this neighborhood, long powerless against regional forces, chose for itself a broad, democratic, community power sharing structure.

This diverse community in Boston's Roxbury/North Dorchester area (37 percent African American, 29 percent

Latino, 25 percent Cape Verdean, 7 percent white), again took the approach of maximizing participation when it set up an equal number of board seats for each of the neighborhood's ethnic groupings, regardless of their proportion within the population. This action helped create ownership and welcomed everyone into a common effort. This initial commitment to inclusion has been continued through trilingual literature, community meetings, and staff and board composition.

Thus the vision with which the community dealt with issues of power *within* gave it the internal strength and unity, the integrity, and the moral authority to vie for power *without*.

DSNI's mission is to "empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create, and control a vibrant, diverse, and high quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners." The focus of DSNI's work is to create the ways and means for residents to develop shared vision; to engage in comprehensive community planning based on community standards; to secure strategic information and skills; to establish respectful partnerships; to create needed community tools and forums; and to organize to get the control, i.e., the power, to guide the creation of a vibrant urban village. Each of these is a complex task. It is a luxury, and yet a necessity, for a community to have an entity whose job is to organize and build this kind of capacity among residents, a function that neither community development corporations nor social service agencies can fulfill. Without this role, residents cannot come to CCIs or other change efforts as equals with government, the business community, funders, and community agencies.

DSNI's successes have often come from doing things contrary to the conventional wisdom, against the advice, and sometimes the insistence, of outside professional experts, and in total defiance of stereotyped expectations. This sense of innovation and the determination to turn obstacles into opportunities comes from the residents. A good example is the neighborhood's securing of an unprecedented tool for community control over development—eminent domain authority over the vacant land in the most devastated portion of the community. We were

thus able to compile the critical mass of land parcels needed to begin the physical rebuilding process. The dramatic physical transformation has been accompanied by a revitalization of the spirit and the reknitting of community fabric as people saw that they could make a difference, that they were not helpless, but in fact had power.

It is my hope that our relative success to this point will encourage public agencies and funders to look deeper at

CCIs can work if partners believe in the community's expertise about local affairs and its collective wisdom in setting direction, or, at least, accept that the community should be the master of its own fate.

their own role. CCIs can work if funding partners are willing to learn and grow and take risks along with the communities—rather than seeing themselves as the experts or the missionaries coming to save the community. CCIs can work if partners believe in the community's expertise about local affairs and its collective wisdom in setting direction, or, at least, accept that the community should be the master of its own fate. Race-based assumptions, holding onto power and purse strings, and political agendas and timelines can undermine the most well-intended interventions.

The Riley Foundation, the initial investor in the DSNI dream, has provided “no strings attached” support. They encouraged innovation and risk-taking by their own example, joining a community in the initial stages of its attempts at change with no assurances of success. Similarly, the initiative manager of the Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative, Garland Yates, has said to us, “We are going to hold you accountable to your own community-generated plan.” As a major national funder, they offer assistance, expertise, resources, but not a prescription for change and not long-distance micromanagement. They understand that the content, the pathways, and the

pace of change must be organic in order for positive, sustainable change to occur. After all, communities have a life and death stake in success.

In this short essay, it's not possible to explore all of the many aspects of race and power and the way they play out at DSNI. There remain many challenges, especially as success renews the threat that gentrification will displace those responsible for the revitalization. We must continue to insist on partnerships that recognize the community's role, and to influence public will and public policy to be pro-neighborhood. Within the community, DSNI's job is to continue to develop the tools and settings for broad based community dialogue and decision making under resident leadership, and to urge local agencies and community development corporations to participate in that process and respect its outcomes. New leaders and new ways of leading must arise to serve the dynamic, ever changing challenges of the revitalization effort. DSNI staff, agency representatives, and established resident leaders need to know how and when to get out of the way. The wisdom and vision of our founders in creating the most democratic and inclusive effort that they could, provide the foundation and the mandate for us today and into the future.

RESPONSE:

Finding Voice, Exercising Power

Beverly Perkins

Beverly Perkins is the executive director of the Orange Mound Collaborative in Memphis, Tennessee.

In May of 1999, the Orange Mound community in Memphis, Tennessee, met to develop a common agenda with another community. Once a stable, working-class African American community, Orange Mound is still a predominantly African American urban community, but today the median income is under \$15,000. The other community is a predominately white suburban community with a median income over \$100,000. The two neigh-

borhoods are separated by a few miles and connected by a major thoroughfare.

Despite their material differences, there were few differences in what the two communities wanted: both were interested in safety, education, economic development, housing, and public infrastructure. However, one major difference between the two communities is that the suburban area is an incorporated municipality, meaning it has power—power to regulate zoning, finance capital projects, etc.—that Orange Mound does not. So for exam-

. . . before communities can contemplate power shifting/sharing with the external forces, the internal players—by which I mean the initiative board, staff, and community—must first learn how to share and responsibly exercise power.

ple, while both communities are home to a controversial gas station/convenience store chain, the suburban community could dictate to the company what type of facility could be built in their neighborhood. Orange Mound, more at the mercy of Memphis government, must use its collective voice to exert this kind of influence over policy decisions at the local level.

Orange Mound is also one of four communities in the country participating in a comprehensive community initiative (CCI) sponsored by the Ford Foundation entitled the Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI). NFI was designed to give Orange Mound the means to develop and exercise that kind of voice.

Learning to exercise power

For the past four years, I have been on the staff of NFI, first as a program officer in the community foundation managing NFI in the Orange Mound neighborhood, and later as

the executive director of the organization created as a result of NFI. Working in a CCI one discovers that the quality of the relationships of those involved often serves as a thermometer for the well-being of the CCI. These relationships need to exist on a variety of levels (internal and external to the community). I will focus on the internal relationships because I believe that before communities can contemplate power shifting/sharing with the external forces, the internal players—by which I mean the initiative board, staff, and community—must first learn how to share and responsibly exercise power. Too often, unaddressed internal conflicts among these groups are an obstacle to taking on significant issues related to power, such as economics.

In addition, CCI participants sometimes view conflict as a negative element and try to avoid it by not saying anything. It has been my experience that when left to fester and develop momentum, the residual, unspoken effects of the power struggle can consume the work of the CCI. If left unaddressed—and this is what tends to happen—the participants abandon the initiative, the process starts over, and the struggle for power begins again. This survival-of-the-fittest battle alienates many well-intentioned individuals. It also hampers the initiative’s ability to engage needed external players, particularly when those players insist that these “internal issues” get resolved before they can become involved.

The board

In NFI, members of the board represent an array of interests (i.e., community residents, social service agencies, government, funders, business owners, corporations, etc.) all of whom theoretically have an equal voice in the initiative. For a variety of reasons, this is not so in reality. First of all, some individuals—because of who they are, who they represent, or because of race—are perceived to have more power. Second, in CCIs some individuals choose to participate because there is money involved while others are chosen to participate because they have connection to financial resources. This dichotomy often results in the money (how and where it gets spent) being the focus of deliberations, and those who bring money or

other resources to the table are viewed as having greater power than those who do not.

Deliberations about money can be a major impediment to progress, resulting in the development of personal agendas being pushed to the foreground. Money is desperately needed in community building, but it can have an overwhelmingly negative effect if it overshadows development of a vision for the community. In Orange Mound, the dollars provided through the CCI funder were small in comparison to how much money is needed to truly rebuild a community. But the NFI board focused on divvying up the initiative funding instead of looking at how to use the funds as a leverage to harness other economic resources for the community and its residents.

While some internal conflicts stem from money, it is definitely not the sole cause. Sometimes it is not the fight to obtain power, but the misuse and abuse of it that causes the greatest problems. Keep in mind that for years CCI participants have observed how others have used power to manipulate them, and sometimes the example that has been set in the past is followed.

There are lots of reasons why these things happen. First, one is frequently dealing with individuals who did not know one another prior to their involvement with the initiative. Power struggles can be a part of the getting-to-know-you, or “bonding,” process. Time has to be given to allow the players to develop a level of comfort with one another—something not always taken into consideration by the funders of CCIs when they are crafted.

Second, even though having a community board was a new way of working for most of the people involved, little time was given to developing how it would work: who has what authority, how decisions are made, what the roles of members and staff will be. These and numerous other responsibilities must be assigned and accepted in order for the initiative to succeed—particularly if it’s to function beyond the support of the initial funder. In order for the organization to be able to realize its vision, it must have a governing body that can make informed decisions.

Unfortunately, most individuals who join the board are not interested in personnel policies, operating budgets, and

organizational charts. Most people became involved in the initiative because they were interested in providing quality housing, creating jobs, and developing youth and other program-related activities. And while it’s logical that the programmatic activities were foremost on people’s agendas, the importance of preparing individuals for the other, more business-oriented roles that they are undertaking by serving on a CCI governing body, cannot be stressed enough.

Board training can be a huge task. The community-based board may need training on everything from how to run effective meetings, to understanding financial statements, to understanding the basic duties and responsibilities of a nonprofit board member. The semantics and jargon associated with CCIs can also be overwhelming. And it is not enough for only a few to understand. As an NFI board member told me, “if only a few people know, they can take advantage of those that don’t know.”

Community residents and staff

One key principle of most CCIs is to empower community residents. When initiatives are announced, they are often accompanied by fanfare about huge financial investments in the neighborhood. Residents are told that they will have a voice and role in the (re)building of the neighborhood. But what does this really mean? The dictionary says “empower” means “to give power or authority.” In CCIs are we really giving authority or are we providing a mechanism to exercise that which was already there? How does a CCI begin to function so that it is in tune with the neighborhood’s agenda and—more importantly—allows the community to have an active voice in the initiative’s activities?

For example, communicating with the neighborhood is a major undertaking that typically falls to the residents on the board. So the resident board members have an enormous task: in addition to learning how to deal with the various players, these CCI participants must also face their fellow residents and provide explanations for what is or is not occurring in the neighborhood. And yet they may feel very ambivalent themselves about their participation.

The management of staff can also be a new experience for some members of the CCI board. Keep in mind that

prior to a CCI, similar kinds of work in the community may have been done entirely by volunteers. And while paid staff provides the labor needed to fulfill the organization's mission in the community, those board members who have previously participated in all-volunteer activities in the neighborhood may view the addition of staff with suspicion. Staff may be seen as overtaking and getting recognition for the ideas and work others have labored over for years. The resident board members who harbor resentment because they are not being compensated when they believe they are giving as much, or more, as the paid staff person, can make the staff person's job difficult. Often at the root of the issue is money, fueled by the fact that someone else is being paid for his/her involvement and the resident/board member is not. This tension can be heightened when paid staff are not residents of the community.

Finally, the historical impact of slavery and the continuing effects of racism also have major implications for how African Americans and communities of color perceive themselves and relate to others. I've lived in Memphis all my life, so I do not know much about how people of different races interact in other parts of the country. But Memphians say that Memphis is a city where race (black and white) defines most issues. Here, the Sanitation Workers strike created racial rifts and stereotypes that persist 30 years later. One of the most vivid memories of the strike is black men wearing signs saying "I AM A MAN." Years later, a great deal of time was spent in NFI "testing"

the relationship between the (white) community foundation that administered NFI and the (black) advisory board that supposedly was responsible for the vision and action. While these issues were about power, not race, it appeared that one race had it, and another did not.

Conclusion

When I first began to think about the issue of power, I thought that trust among all individuals of the community was the missing element needed to balance power (irrespective of race). Now I see that it may be a while before this can be realized. Over the years, many citizens have become disengaged, thinking that the power for change rests in government, elected officials, corporations, and others. We must fully believe that the power and responsibility for change rests collectively in us. Perhaps the first step toward this is a shared vision for the community that all parties can honestly support.

I am often reminded of an analogy used at a planning retreat where the speaker compared the participants in community building to individuals in a row boat. He reminded us that in order for the boat to move forward, we must all row in the same direction. Otherwise, you stay where you are or go in circles. Rebuilding a community is a team effort. All those we empower should be held accountable to the team. Until that power is exercised, we will continue to get the same results we have had in the past.

TA Providers: In the Middle of Power, Race, and Community Change



Introduction

The comprehensive nature of CCIs demands new kinds of efforts from many of those involved in community change. Residents and agency directors may be new to the notion of resident-driven collaboration, many of the staff may find the principles of CCIs and community building difficult to interpret and implement, and racial or cultural divisions within a neighborhood may complicate attempts at collective discussion. Most CCIs try to engage local leaders and key residents in planning, and those individuals must be identified and recruited for the task. Each CCI also brings with it the imprint of the sponsoring funders, a set of objectives and time frames, and the need to make sense of new kinds of partnership both within the community and between residents, other stakeholders, the funder, and often the local government. To help navigate all these challenges, CCIs frequently employ consultants, typically referred to as technical assistance (TA) providers.

The term “technical assistance provider” consistently made those we interviewed uneasy. First of all, not many of them feel that they provide “technical” advice. Second, many call themselves something else, such as community organizer, consultant, or sometimes researcher. Our participant group consisted of people from across this

spectrum, and included two women and three men, with two African Americans, one Asian American, one Latina, and one white of mixed European descent.¹ Because of their collective discomfort with the title, they decided in the focus group that a better descriptive term would be “professional resource person” to community initiatives. As professional resources, they are paid to provide a range of services from community organizing to specific trainings, and from meeting facilitation to research. One or two initiatives have begun to use the term “coach.”

While exploring the power they have and the issues of power they perceive in CCIs, these participants talked a lot about the quiriness of their role (“my parents still don’t understand what it is I do for a living”), why they do it, and how effective they are or could be. This discussion became particularly intense and self-critical when participants talked about their own personal reasons for engaging in the work. It was clear with this peer group, for example, that a commitment to social justice and a desire to do something actively to promote that agenda provided the key motivation for most of them. Their discussion of whether CCIs were a useful part of a social justice agenda (whether, in other words, real power shifts could happen through these new “partnerships” between the pow-

erful and the chronically disenfranchised) threaded its way throughout discussions of other issues, and concluded the focus group discussion.

This group also insisted on the consideration of culture and class as tied importantly to the concepts of race and power. One participant described the conversation

Grappling with class and culture, said TA providers, allows the discussion of oppression and justice to include consideration of how privilege is assumed and conveyed.

about race in the country as a cover for talking about class. Another saw class as the key dividing line between “insiders” and “outsiders,” with race putting even more distance between the two. Those who feel like outsiders in the U.S., he said, are generally not “landowning white men.” Yet another participant spoke of power as being some combination of culture, class, and race that boiled down to a feeling of either belonging or not belonging: “The issue of belonging is a key arbiter of power in this society.”

Grappling with class and culture, said TA providers, allows the discussion of oppression and justice to include consideration of how privilege is assumed and conveyed. They agreed that CCIs needed to understand the context of privilege as well as the context of oppression to understand CCI power dynamics. For example, they said, professionals within CCIs sit in privileged positions and typically come from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds than residents of CCI communities, but there is also a hierarchy of privilege within a community. They noted that it is easier to explore this issue with those who “have the freedom” to acknowledge privilege (such as funders), than with those who may not feel they can afford to do so (such as local community leaders), suggesting that this is another barrier to having effective conversations about power.

These TA providers also reflected on the power and obligations of the technical assistance role vis-a-vis those they seek to help, the ambiguity of who they work for in a CCI context, and what they characterized as a misplaced faith in mainstream technical assistance by CCI sponsors. This group sees “mainstream TA” as driven by a management-consulting paradigm which emphasizes bringing answers to the client, rather than asking questions of community stakeholders to determine what’s needed. When TA providers come in with answers, said this group, it does more harm than good. And, they said, because so many TA providers are white, funders’ reliance on mainstream consultants also perpetuates a white cultural bias in the field that has gone largely unexamined. This critique extended to those who hire TA providers, with the suggestion that many CCI funders further exert their own power by determining which technical assistant provider will be used or what kind of assistance will be funded at a given site.

Although united in their belief that their ranks needed to diversify and receive better training for community work, and mostly agreeing that consideration of skin color, background, and cultural awareness were relevant to the choice of TA provider, some of these participants were ambivalent about their personal roles in recruiting, training, and helping to bring more people of color into the technical assistance field. The “jack of all trades” nature of the job, the typically low pay for independent TA providers, their reluctance to form a TA team with anyone whose capabilities are unknown, and the difficulty of identifying promising individuals of color to recruit were discussed as barriers in this regard.

Finally, because in their interviews TA providers had seemed to distinguish different issues of power and race for African Americans than for other racial and cultural groups, these participants talked in the focus group about whether the situation of African Americans is unique within the spectrum of racial and cultural diversity issues, how that affects their work, and what it might mean to CCIs. Raising this issue with TA providers illuminated some key issues for CCIs, for example how the rapid growth

of both Latino and Asian populations, and the influx of new black immigrants, is changing local politics in many CCI communities.

Challenges of the TA role and perspectives on power

Though TA providers may wear many hats, there is consistency in the patterns of work that fall under this umbrella. Said one, “you help those folks who do [live in the community] make better decisions about, and have more information to make decisions about, what they want to do.” Central to doing this well, said these providers, are a number of factors relating to the perspective, orientation, and behavior of TA providers, such as whether the TA provider is trusted by community “insiders,” who is hired to do the work (and by whom), why individuals want to do this work in the first place, and how they identify and approach particularly sensitive issues of power and race. Sometimes, they said, these are issues of their own power or effectiveness in the role. Most of the time, however, these TA providers were more concerned with the power they leave behind in the communities with which they work. These themes will be drawn out below.

Insiders and Outsiders

These TA providers had many routes to their current positions, but all saw the role as a necessary element of community development work that helps the disenfranchised (residents of a poor community) negotiate effectively with an elite (typically, government or a foundation). As such, the role is usually filled by someone from outside the community who has a reason for wanting to play this role and believing that they can do so effectively. Said one:

We were first and foremost community organizers and we did community development because there was no one else who would do it. We saw it as an extension of a power analysis. When the questions would come up about, “how can you beat up on City Hall at the same time that you’re asking for money?” [we said] “you gotta do that.

You’ve got to be powerful to do stuff.”

Another participant characterized it this way:

Technical assistance is a role [rather than a profession]. It’s about trying to mobilize change, being part of alliance building. Sometimes I’m an advocate. Sometimes it’s about research because there isn’t enough known about what’s happening.

A third suggested:

TA providers remind [those in the community] that they’re here to help, but that [community residents] are doing the work. That we [i.e., community members] actually know more than we think we know or we have more power than we think we do.

When technical assistance is ineffective (i.e., failing to facilitate local action), these TA providers suggest looking at the fit between the provider and the community. Much of technical assistance work, they say, is performed by management consultants, whose approach tends to be a bad fit with CCIs because it is “formulaic,” and so misses the point of empowering the community to find its own answers. “It’s not power based,” said one participant. “It’s not based on values,” and so can’t be easily adapted “to tackle any tough, broad issue that’s connected to real life.”

Those in this project, none of whom came from that tradition, agreed that they think of themselves as “professional community resource people,” with backgrounds in other community development work such as working for a community development corporation, working as activists or organizational directors, or doing community organizing. Moreover, while most acknowledge that they are not usually residents of the communities with which they work, their self-image tends to be with the disenfranchised, rather than with the establishment, and few work from a set formula. Said one participant,

I've struggled with what my role is, why do I feel comfortable in [other people's] communities supposedly trying to help? And I think the connection is that I've felt outside [too], I've had a real hunger to own this country, this place. And I've been pissed off that I don't feel that this is my place, these are my opportunities. And that's the way other outsiders feel.

A good community TA provider, said another, exists on a continuum between insiders and outsiders, and part of the job is to understand that continuum:

One of the things is how do you understand [the community] framework? There are times when you can have some aspects of being an insider because you've been in similar experiences and you can appreciate where they're coming from. And you also need to know when you are *not* in a position to have that understanding. For example, you may be similar in race, but you're not in class and that fundamentally changes your [perspective]. If you're going to provide assistance, understanding the framework—what the dynamics are—is critical to helping them make better and more informed decisions about what they need to do.

Some TA providers define “community insider” differently, drawing on their own sense of identity to help determine how they work or the jobs they take. For example, one African American acknowledged that “my work is primarily focused on black people and black communities. My personal agenda is really helping black people be able to make it a bit better.” But this provider does not accept either race or geography as determining his “insider” status:

How we define community is key. I work with a community of concern. It's not bounded by geography. It sometimes takes a while to figure this out, but if I'm working with a community

of concern that I'm a part of, then I'm an insider. If not, our relationship doesn't last long.

Another, a community organizer by training, believes that part of the fit between the job and the provider involves becoming a resident insider:

You're never quite a part of the community around you . . . [but] I know I'm a better organizer when I live in the neighborhood and I make a personal life commitment to that neighborhood. So now I choose my jobs depending on where I want to live and the people who I want to really live with because otherwise, I know that the work is not going to be as effective, and as a person, I'm not going to feel as complete.

Hiring, Accountability, and Serving Many Clients

It is worth noting that, although these participants identify themselves as resource professionals for marginalized communities and may identify with the residents at a personal, spiritual, or political level, they are most frequently hired and paid by foundations or other CCI sponsor-

I choose my jobs depending on where I want to live and the people who I want to really live with because otherwise, I know that the work is not going to be as effective, and as a person, I'm not going to feel as complete.

ing institutions. Who pays for the service can influence the expectations placed (implicitly or explicitly) on a TA provider, but because of the array of stakeholders in a CCI, there may be multiple expectations from different quarters about who the client is and how the TA provider is supposed to serve that client. When a TA provider also

brings a particular set of convictions to the role (such as those discussed above), there may be tension between the TA provider's expectations and those of others in the CCI that can impede the development of trusting relationships that TA providers say are basic to effective work.

Some of the TA providers in this project said the client is "whoever pays." Another said the client is the agenda of the community initiative. Others suggested that the source of the paycheck wasn't relevant, that the TA provider serves many clients within a community initiative. But one participant noted that the contractual arrangement can have a big effect on how she operates, sometimes limiting discussion about what she believes ought to be central:

Maybe it's because that's my only source of income, but those that hire me . . . their perspective really impacts my role or my ability to fully carry out that role. Even if I know that I want to help be a facilitator of the interest of the community, I haven't [always] been successful in doing that. And I just now had a revelation [that it's because] this whole field of comprehensive community [initiatives] isn't based in real, critical perspectives on social justice. It's not a culture of social justice. I [never] felt like I could talk about what to me is the concreteness of our work, which is the underlying questions of the sources of oppression and of privilege.

Another participant said that he gets around the ambiguity of his relationship to the hiring foundation by using his intermediary status to translate the foundation's perspective in a different way, for example explaining areas where the community has power they may not recognize:

My role is to help translate what I think the foundation really needs out of this, that they need a success out of this. [I tell sites], "that's what they're looking for; that's why they're pushing you, but you've got to be clear about what you

want to do and push back. That's your power. They're not going to kick you out of the initiative. Why? Because they're proud of their selection process; they don't *want* to end up kicking one or two out." That's raw power. If you know that, you can do something with it.

Power, race, and paradigms

Explaining power, helping to build power bases and shift the locus of control, interpreting the world of the powerful, all involve understanding whatever is considered "the norm," explaining it and finding ways to challenge it.

. . . this whole field of comprehensive community [initiatives] isn't based in real, critical perspectives on social justice. It's not a culture of social justice.

These TA providers described themselves as embedded in this process, and all felt that issues of race, culture, and class were woven intricately through the process as well. Delving into those issues, TA providers focused in on the confusion of language and perspective of those involved with CCIs, particularly the tensions between the perceived values of the power elites (foundations, business, and government) and those of advocates for community building and change. Their attempt to describe these tensions informs this next section.

Clashing over Social Justice

As one participant said, "The client doesn't define why I do my work," and in that statement lies a key point of this group's discussion: to what extent what they do, and what CCIs do, is consistent with why they work in this way. As suggested in a statement above, these TA providers look upon CCIs as vehicles for social justice, or what some characterized as empowering the disenfranchised to challenge

and transform socioeconomic and political structures of oppression. Empowerment, for them, is a basic tenet of the business, even if they are not optimistic that CCIs are *effective* vehicles for that agenda. As one participant put it, “the number of people who are coming [at this] from a social justice paradigm is actually not that [great].” Their commitment to social justice, they felt, distinguished them not just from other mainstream TA providers, but also from many of the others involved in CCIs and community development more generally. One participant summed it up this way:

Part of the problem with the field of comprehensive community initiatives is that the paradigm is not a racial equity one. I don’t believe that what the foundations and the government have tried to do really comes out of a sense of equity and power, or a social justice movement . . . I hear the terms “insider” and “outsider” and it gets defined as “do you live in a geographic community or do you live outside.” I don’t think the field understands the values that are embedded in its work. Like when you talk to foundations, they don’t want to hire a TA provider who’s from the community because you’re gonna be “too biased.” That’s the framework: what gives you credibility is your distance, as opposed to your ability to have existing relationships of trust that you may be building on.

Not only is a social justice “paradigm” a dividing line within the world of CCIs, it is also a dividing line within those who share the same kinds of roles. One TA provider said:

I started on this mission about fifteen years ago basically saying that community development corporations can and should be organizing [and] should be concerned about power and social justice. And of course the CDC people said, “what’s up with you?” And the organizers said, “you’re wasting your time.”

The Exceptions That Prove the Rule?

Our group of TA providers told us that their group was unrepresentative of the technical assistance field because it was so diverse. In the conversations with this group, the strong consensus was that the field of technical assistance is predominantly white and that that reality bears on most of the questions raised in these conversations. But it is important that this was the consensus of a group that had only one white person participating. How different the conversation may have been had we pulled together a group that was statistically comparable for race and gender with the field is anyone’s guess. We do not even know that such statistics are available for this slice of the community development/ comprehensive services fields.

We were also told by our participants that, by choosing individuals who were independent contractors or worked for small institutions (for the most part), we biased the conversation away from more traditional views of community change and the potential or need for technical assistance, and toward the perspective of those who had a more personal agenda for the work. They worried that it might give a false impression of the state of the art, particularly around race and power, that their level of concern was more attuned, more likely to be focused on these sorts of issues than that of more mainstream organizers or intermediaries. This may or may not be true, but it is a valid point that we did not have anyone from a large consulting practice participating in this project, and that such firms are much in evidence within the operations of CCIs.

Indeed, so strong was the commitment in this set of TA providers to the social justice agenda, it would have been difficult for anyone to voice a different perspective in the focus group setting. But in the individual interviews before the focus group, this issue was raised in much the same way. Because it was also consistent with conversations in other groups, this one topic seemed to capture a core tension for those involved with CCIs.

Matching, Trust, and Diversifying the Field

One of the issues that illuminates the difference between having “a racial equity paradigm” and simply “taking race into account” is matching. Like researchers in this project, TA providers talked about the importance of trust to the work that they do and the impact of “sameness” or “fit” between TA provider and residents that affects trust. They also noted the sensitivity of foundations to the racial mismatch between most foundation staff (who are predominantly white) and residents of CCI communities (who are predominantly of color), and how race matching in technical assistance is used as a vehicle for closing that perceived gap. In particular, they discussed how matching gets defined and implemented, how it can both help and harm their work, and the importance of separating the issue of matching from the need to bring more people of color into the field of technical assistance.

While these providers agreed that establishing a sense of trust with community members enabled them to provide better assistance, they distinguished between the kind of instinctive trust that occurs when you recognize a sameness of perspective or thinking in others, and the kind of trust that needs time and repeated testing to hold.

The first kind of trust may allow TA providers to know whether they’re likely to be able to work productively. Said one, “I can only work with people that I trust . . . situationally. I know that when we think, we’re thinking around the same things. We’re approaching this from a shared concern.” But the second, more elusive trust cannot be superficially established, and is seen as having more lasting effects as well. Another TA provider put it this way:

It really surprises me how quickly we supposedly build trust in this work. It takes me a lot longer to feel trusting of someone as a friend than we pretend in our work. You go and have a few meetings with somebody and you see that you have things in common or you kind of respect the other person’s work or background, and all of a sudden there’s trust and a solid relationship to do work? I just don’t think that works in the long run. Trust building is a much slower process. We have instincts [about whether] there’s a good fit, but when there is one, I think it takes longer than we give time for.

Because of the short time frame for establishing trust, say TA providers, race is often used as a proxy for “having things in common.” But these participants suggested that funders do not see much farther than those superficialities. Along these lines, one participant said, “yeah, it’s really coverage for the foundation. We’ve got the team with African Americans and the Asian and the white guy, so we’ve got coverage on our sites. It doesn’t often get much deeper than that.”

And while race matching can add something to the situation (“you may understand more about the kind of prejudices someone faces, or it may give you some insights into reality”) said these participants, matching “gets way oversimplified when you just talk about someone’s skin color” and that can be dangerous to the work. Said one:

It’s not so much just how people look. It’s a combination of how they look, their sense of values, their world view, if you will. One of the worst things you can do is have a TA provider that looks like the people in the neighborhood, but is not of them at all. Doesn’t understand them. I call it culturally detached. [If the fact that] you look like them is supposed to mean something, and you get out there and you’re culturally detached even though you look like these people, it’s terrible. It simultaneously creates a set of

expectations and then it's just blown all away. And what happens is a very unhealthy kind of cynicism on both [sides].

Apart from the superficiality of appearance, one participant noted that there's a "situational issue" in matching:

What's the most relevant match [to consider]? Sometimes skin color is the match. Sometimes it may be about language. It may be your ability to talk to people from a certain class background, or it may be an issue of gender. And some of it is situational about time. If someone's got the sensitivities, the openness, you can build trust, understanding between groups. That can be fostered over time. And that's good, especially because communities are not monolithic. There aren't too many [neighborhoods] in California that are one ethnicity, so what it means to be matched to that community is a much more complex prospect.

Despite these participants' different perspectives on matching, all agreed that the technical assistance field is "too white," and that the dominance of Caucasians is a

. . . people [believe] "oh, it's so hard to find a [person of color] who has the qualifications" . . . And many times, that's used as a rationale for ending up not finding the best person for the job.

problem for many reasons. Said one participant, "I don't want to [imply] that if we don't have to worry about matching around skin color, then we don't have to worry about this being a predominantly white field." Said another,

"folks that are at the apex of the field are white and the networks and resources emanate from there. That's where the biases come in."

One of those biases has to do with the networks that bring new people into the profession. All of the participants in this group suggested that their own networks of people "who can do this work" are limited in some way. One said that "it's hard to go out and expand the network of people that I would feel comfortable working in a team with," and another that "it's expensive to teach [novices], to provide an opportunity." Moreover, there is an unspoken consensus in the field that (as one participant put it) "we couldn't find people of color, particularly black students, [at the entry level]. There were never good ones 'around'." But another participant suggested that this is the thinking that has to change:

One of the problems about the whiteness of the field is that people [believe] "oh, it's so hard to find a [person of color] who has the qualifications." They really believe that it's almost impossible to find someone like me to do this job. But I totally disagree. I know all these great people, but it's this "who do you know and who do you trust" thing. The people hiring me are mainly white people. They don't know any people of color they might be friends or colleagues with. And they really do think it's hard to find. And many times, that's used as a rationale for ending up not finding the best person for the job.

Partnership, privilege, and oppression

Cutting across all CCIs is a new theory of stakeholder investment, whereby the sponsoring foundation becomes a more active participant, or partner, in an initiative, counting itself as a stakeholder along with residents and local agencies. In addition, the emphasis on resident empowerment in CCIs also demands from local agencies a higher level of commitment to resident representation and decision making, and it demands from residents and com-

munity institutions a willingness to reach out and share power within the neighborhood and beyond it. For everyone in most CCIs, this has involved some getting used to.

In the case of foundations, both grantees and program officers, accustomed to the more traditional grantor/grantee relationship, have had mixed success accepting and learning to work within these new partnership arrangements.

In a clearly imbalanced power relationship, all parties need to work to acknowledge their position.

Further complicating the partnership is the acknowledged status quo—the foundation still holds the resources, and local community agencies or representatives are most likely in CCIs to be “invited” into this partnership by the foundation, not vice-versa.

TA providers, hired in part to help these partnerships work more smoothly, had a number of different perspectives on the nature of CCI partnerships. In particular, they noted that in a clearly imbalanced power relationship, all parties need to work to acknowledge their position. Said one,

You’re hired by a CDC or whatever to do community organizing, and right away you know that there are different interests at play in this. What’s important to the organizer or TA provider in that situation is there’s got to be some clarity about what the nature of this agreement is. That’s what you work for: to create the reality that everyone who’s involved in this partnership anticipates what they can get out of it. There’s [different] realities, [different] sets of interests, but if you think those are all legitimate, then, as I see it, the job is to keep everybody honest to those, to the reality that they’re trying to create. I’m not saying it’s not imbalanced; of course it is. The foundation has

more power than the sites, but the sites have power. And when they understand it and begin to use it, it makes for a more honest partnership.

In that context, participants said, while it is not uncommon for those with less power to point out power imbalances or to challenge oppression, it remains difficult for those in privileged positions to talk about the impact of that privilege. Sometimes, this is because privilege occurs in many guises, including among those who consider themselves oppressed or allied with the oppressed group. One participant put it this way:

Our role isn’t just helping those who are oppressed see where they actually have power, but also to see where they have privilege and where that privilege is oppressive if they don’t realize it. That part of the work is really hard; you have to be very sophisticated to do it well. Like the directors of an initiative or a CDC, those people, when you start talking to them about the dynamics of controlling the conversation in a room, or the way you set up a meeting that’s really alienating or marginalizing to some. It’s harder for them to take it than a funder. ‘Cause a funder is going to be like, “oh, yeah, this isn’t my world, and I’m learning. I need to learn.” But that same criticism for those who are supposedly representing the interests of the community, for them it gets a lot harder.

Another noted that in community work, “you gain legitimacy by showing how oppressed you’ve been. So it’s hard for people to talk about privilege or acknowledge that you have privilege.” And while privilege was mostly construed as related to class (“people from privileged backgrounds have a harder time relating their experience to this work”), these participants also talked about the privileging of race within the context of CCIs, and the need for the field to understand better the status and changing fortunes of African Americans, in particular.

A Unique Status for African Americans?

In one sense, said these providers, African Americans have been privileged by having what one participant called

What does it mean when you've gone from being a major political force to the smallest minority group in the state? That's a big shift, and it's creating some major challenges . . .

“most favored minority status.” Many of the traditionally African American communities, however, are undergoing significant demographic shifts with the influx of Latino, Asian, African, and Caribbean immigrants. With this shift, said providers, two significant power issues emerge that are unique to the African American experience: first, the experience of new black immigrants tends to be closer to that of past European immigrants than to African Americans. Said one participant,

They establish businesses; you see the mutual aid societies. At election time, they vote for so-and-so because he's from the same place we're from. These are communities of people, not neighborhoods. Importation is just very different from immigration.

Second, what many referred to as “traditionally African American communities” are undergoing dramatic demographic shifts, and yet because “CCIs deal with ‘lead organizations’ that were a part of the [African American] tradition,” those organizations and the individuals who built them are “being challenged to deal with this population transformation.”

One participant gave the example of two areas in California which have important histories as cornerstones of black power.

What does it mean in a state when you've gone from being a major political force to the smallest minority group in the state? That's a big shift, and it's creating some really major challenges for the community-based organizations which got political power in the '60s, but have not seen their dreams realized. [They] have not seen people's life opportunities dramatically change, yet now they're being asked for “affirmative action” for Latinos who want more representation in their organizations.

In the context of CCIs, these different perspectives of those who have repeatedly been left behind and those who see a path forward can make local organizing and initiative problematic. One participant gave this example:

In one housing complex, any African American with any means got out. First the jobs left the community, then the violence got worse. So the African Americans [remaining] there were the ones with the least economic resources. But the immigrant Latinos saw the public housing as a step up for them. They finally had their own house as opposed to living all cramped up. Their sense of what it meant to be there [was totally different]. For them this was a step up. It creates a different sense of your reality. [The African Americans] were stuck there, without any means of moving out.

This difference of perspective was echoed by the story of another participant who recounted the reaction of an African American audience to the video concerning the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston. In that instance,

Everyone said it was a great story, but a bunch of folks in the group said, “this really isn't about African Americans. It's about immigrants.” They saw a difference in their own experience. They

[said] “this is an immigrant story because it’s about people who still have a lot of hope. We don’t have that kind of hope in our community. We have a lot of cynicism [because] we’ve been through the mill twelve times.”

Another participant further argued that multiple effects of the historical treatment of African Americans need to be attended to in the context of CCIs. In particular, he noted that racial history can be a factor in a particular group’s readiness to accept or implement the tenets of CCIs (e.g., power sharing, resident leadership, partnering with mainstream institutions), and that funders and designers need to address how the individuals and groups being asked to engage in an initiative may differ in what it takes for them to be a part of such an effort. He said:

Because the African American community has this different set of historical issues, the way we deal internally with stuff is different. We struggle for favor, for patrons, rather than building partnerships. I don’t think [changing that is] something a CCI could foster. It’s internal. It has to begin inside. So the group has to first be able to build some sense of autonomy prior to being able to build relationships of parity with other groups. Power brokers could take a very courageous step and say that we understand this needs to happen, and we’re going to make resources available to do this on a parallel process with the other stuff. We’re willing to let our resources be used by you to do what you think you need to do, not just the anointed among you.

Exposing power and race dynamics in the context of CCIs

These TA providers agreed that “part of the equation [of taking race and power into account] is doing your job really differently. When you do your job better around race, language, and culture issues, [you do] the job better on a lot of other issues.” But they were less optimistic as a

group that they were doing a really good job of grappling with the issues within the context of CCIs.²

One participant said that, although “for me, race is the most challenging part of the work, this discussion makes me wonder why I haven’t been more aggressive” about putting it on the agenda of initiatives with which he works. Another participant talked in an interview about

The big fight comes with funders when they’re confronted with whether they are really going to be able to change. Do they really want to change this community, and by extension, the world that they’re players in?

community meeting dynamics that reflected cultural issues, yet said he had not pursued what those issues might be. A third suggested that the role of TA provider may not be as useful for raising up these issues as it initially appears. She said:

There are people in every group who are pretty wise about these issues [of power and race]. The problem is when the group is silenced. People don’t feel comfortable talking about it. And it’s also very contextual. People have very different cultural norms about expression of emotion and anger. And while culture is in part formed by our racial experience, behaviors and norms of communities are all about how we’re raised. TA providers have to build trust in order to facilitate. You have to honor all that in what you bring to them.

Others suggested that CCIs themselves, because they tend to be sponsored by mainstream institutions and, as stated earlier, don’t have “a social justice paradigm,” are not well designed to be vehicles for changing power and

race dynamics. One participant, following a long conversation about how TA providers need to stay committed to fundamental changes in power dynamics, said:

My problem is that I see this disconnection between our jobs, the work we do in communities, and CCIs. When you put CCIs next to the social and economic justice issues raised here, it feels really small and not very important. If you count up all the folks that are leaning in this direction and you ask them what they spend their money doing, it's really not building power.

Or, as an African American participant characterized it:

This white guy who's running this foundation is [going to be] faced with the fact that, if he succeeds, if the logical extension of their comprehensive community initiative plays out, then it's just as likely that his child or grandchild is going to come to a condo association where my grandchildren are going to be deciding if he can get in. I'm not convinced that many people are prepared for that psychologically. And the big fight comes with funders when they're confronted with whether they are really going to be able to change. Do they really want to change this community, and by extension, the world that they're players in?

Where the group had the most intense disagreement was over this question of scale. Some took heart from "small political" victories at a very local level, or the change in individuals that inspires others to believe change can happen. Accumulating these local victories, we heard, may still be the key to eventual power shifts. The countervailing position was that local level successes can happen in a larger context of diminishing resources and power, even annihilation, and that marginalized people could be further marginalized by fighting hard for control over less and less.

CCIs, therefore, were seen as vehicles for the small victories, but these TA providers were ultimately less optimistic

that they had the kind of committed backing to become vehicles for largescale shifts in the distribution of power. For some, that raised basic questions of whether CCIs were worth the investment of human and financial capital now being devoted to them. For others, it merely confirmed that the real value of CCIs has yet to be identified.

Endnotes

- 1 Because of a family emergency, one African American participant was absent from the focus group conversation. The focus group, therefore, had only four participants in this one case. To try to compensate for this and continue to include the participant in the project, we shared the transcript and did another extensive interview covering topics discussed in the group and his impression of the conversation. Those comments are included in this essay along with the others.
- 2 This consensus had one exception, and so it should be noted here that one of the participants runs an organization whose mission is to address issues of diversity in the context of social services reform and community-based efforts for change. Naturally, there is some distance between how well she believes diversity issues are addressed in her work and how race and power have been addressed by individual TA providers not specifically focused on those issues.

RESPONSE:

Multiracial Teams: An Essential Tool for Learning About Race and Power

Hedy Chang

Hedy Chang is the associate director of California Tomorrow in Oakland.

In my experience, learning to understand, navigate, and address dynamics of race and power is both deeply rewarding and extremely challenging. It involves working from

my heart as well as my head. It requires examining who I am and what I do as a person and as a professional. It is a long-term, multilayered journey (that I believe is vital to make in an era when diversity has become our dominant sociopolitical dynamic). It is a journey still in progress.

An essential ingredient of my journey has been having and creating opportunities to work in diverse, multiethnic

. . . multiracial teams are . . . an explicit recognition of the fact that our racial, cultural, linguistic, and class experiences indelibly shape the way we do our work, interact with others, and interpret the world around us.

teams for the provision of technical assistance to community efforts. One reason *multiracial* teams are important is that appearances do make a difference. The absence of people of color often serves as a warning sign that some form of discrimination may be taking place. The presence of a team member from a particular racial background sends a visible message that the team values the talents and skills of people from that racial group. Often, having racial background in common can enable a person to quickly establish a rapport with people from the same background. People frequently assume—though it is not always true—that a person of the same racial background will have had similar life experiences and share common values. This ability to establish a rapport can be important especially if time is limited and the goal is to get a group to absorb the information rather than question the messenger. At the same time, a concept is sometimes seen as being more valid precisely because it was conveyed by a person who was not expected to take a particular position given their racial background.

Diversity allows a team to strategically determine when and how race matters in terms of getting the work

done. When they operate effectively, diverse teams send an important message. They stand as living proof that people can build alliances and find common ground across differences in racial, cultural and class backgrounds.

Done well, multiracial teams are about even more. They are an explicit recognition of the fact that our racial, cultural, linguistic, and class experiences indelibly shape the way we do our work, interact with others, and interpret the world around us. Depending upon the circumstances, our backgrounds can be an asset or a liability. Personal experiences with prejudice, especially the more subtle forms of institutional discrimination, often make a person more aware of bias and how it is playing out. If, however, a person grew up mostly in privileged situations, he or she may be blind to racism or sexism or the lack of opportunities for people without financial resources. The cultural norms we grew up with as well as the languages we speak, for example, can offer insights and skills for communicating and establishing trust with people who come from similar backgrounds. At the same time, our lack of familiarity with people from a particular background can make it difficult for us to know the right thing to say or do to establish trust. Until we have opportunities to compare experiences or interact with people who are different from ourselves, however, we are often unaware of how what we believe or how we act is shaped by our own backgrounds. We simply believe that the way we operate or talk is what is “normal.”

Working in diverse teams has offered me opportunities to both be more aware of my own biases and strengths and to draw upon the assets, insights, and skills of people with different backgrounds and life experiences. Several years ago, for instance, I was part of a team assessing how issues of race and power were playing out in an integrated services initiative operating in a rural California community with a significant population of Native California Indians. As part of the process, we interviewed people from the different ethnic communities as well as agencies involved in the initiative. One team member, who was herself a California Indian, kept asking each of the Native American interviewees to tell us about their tribal back-

ground. At the end of the day, she observed something that had completely escaped the attention of the rest of the team—all of the Native Americans being interviewed were from tribal groups outside of California. Her observations made the rest of us much more aware of issues of tribal sovereignty. It also helped us to reshape our work plan so that we could truly hear from the local community. The next day, we modified our interviewing strategy so that she spent time visiting the local tribal groups while the rest of the team conducted the other scheduled interviews.

Some of my most profound learning has occurred when I have had the opportunity to work with a team to facilitate a meeting or conduct an assessment of an initiative and then made the time to debrief what happened with my other team members. I am always amazed by our different opinions about the power dynamics in the room or community as well as our different observations about what is or isn't working and for whom. For instance, what I may have seen as an innocent statement or act, someone else may perceive as a power play. By the same token, when everyone feels that a particular strategy or action was successful, I feel much more confident that we are being effective. Important, though sometimes difficult, learning has also emerged when enough trust has existed for team members to give me hard feedback about the impact of my own actions or words. Did I realize, for example, that my "linear" style of facilitation and task orientation changed the tone of the room and did not allow the voices of people who took a more "circular" approach to expressing themselves to be heard? Did I recognize that my position of power in the room influenced the way that people reacted to my suggestion? While I may not always agree with the perceptions of my colleagues, I always find that I am better off having their feedback to take into consideration. The point of sharing perspectives is not to fight about who is right. Rather, by understanding the multiple truths and perspectives that may exist, all of the members of a team can be more strategic because everyone has a more comprehensive picture of what is happening and what works for whom.

Being able to draw upon the strengths of diversity does not just happen. It involves time and attention. The

first task is simply recognizing and utilizing the multiple opportunities that exist to create multiracial teams. The most obvious approach is to figure out how each opening for a new staff person or consultant can be used to recruit a person from a different background and set of life experiences. Sometimes this may require going beyond our traditional networks to reach out to potential employees or consultants. It might also involve reassessing whether some of the hiring criteria we are using is in fact necessary and might unintentionally be exclusionary. Another strategy is to identify joint projects involving work colleagues from different backgrounds who work in other agencies. If you are providing technical assistance to a particular initiative, identify and work with a staff person from the initiative itself. Identifying the members of a team is, however, just a first step.

For the past several years, I have been working as a part of a diverse team of staff and consultants examining the implications of diversity and equity for technical assistance in community efforts. Our team is diverse across many dimensions—race, gender, age, language, and discipline. Making our dynamics work has involved an investment on the part of all the team members. It has required creating opportunities to learn about each other—how we are alike and different—so that we can better understand the context for our beliefs and insights. It has entailed encouraging each other to question why we believe or do what we do. Often, we have found that we need to stop a conversation to make sure that we really understand what has been said, rather than assuming that particular words have the same meaning for all of us. Taking the time to appreciate and acknowledge our differences and how they contribute to our mutual learning has also been important.

A healthy team environment is a place where I can be challenged and challenge others. It offers me an opportunity to develop and hone skills that I need to operate effectively when working in our increasingly diverse communities. Such skills include being able to recognize and build upon multiple truths, being able to create opportunities for people who have been oppressed to have their voices heard, and being able to take into account the

strengths and biases of my own racial, cultural, and socioeconomic background.

RESPONSE:

Building Capacity to Raise the Village

Gregory E. Hodge

Gregory Hodge is the executive director of Safe Passages: the Oakland Child Health and Safety Initiative in Oakland, California.

In his book, *The Healers*, West African author Ayi Kwei Armah defines a healthy community as “a community where everything that should work together, works together.” How can “professional resource providers” best contribute to the process of getting key stakeholders—residents, service providers, activists, funders, businesses—to work together to build community, to create positive change, to bring significant social justice? The strategies required to “raise a village”¹—to build an effective intersection of relationships, resources, and readiness to take advantage of opportunities—have not typically been the focus of public discourse, but activists, policy advocates, organizers, funders, community residents, and other would-be change agents have been grappling with that question for quite some time.

In particular, the issues of power and race inherent in any effort to re/build urban communities in America, rarely discussed in broader circles, have begun to find a hearing in the settings where the provision of “technical assistance” is part of the range of considerations in developing community-building initiatives, or CCIs. In this context, do the race and privilege (either real or perceived) of the “professional community resource provider” matter? Does the “insider – outsider” status of the provider make a difference in establishing long-term, trusting relationships with those who have the most to lose if community-building efforts fail? Are capacity-building activities dependent on the values of the technical assistance provider?

While race does play a major influence in setting initial expectations and tone of a “TA” relationship, the quality of the interactions between providers and the intended beneficiaries of these capacity-building activities is mostly based on the type of work being done, the longevity of the commitment and the integrity of the providers and their clients.

Providers who come from different backgrounds have life experiences wholly apart from the communities in which they seek to work, and those who assume that culture and class have no place in shaping the engagement commit the most egregious errors. In other words, the white technical assistance provider who asks people of color (either implicitly or explicitly), “we’re all the same, aren’t we?” has missed the mark completely. Unfortunately, this question is too often posed and answered “Yes!” in the provider’s own head. Communities of color, however, reply, “No. We are not the same nor have we been treated that way!”

These issues are relevant even where the provider is of the same race, gender, or some other immutable characteristic. Clearly, the TA provider who understands the community where he or she is working by virtue of being

Most providers either cannot or will not risk losing a contract with an influential funder by “telling it straight.” Successfully walking the tightrope between community residents and funders, while serving both, is exceptional.

a member of that community has an extraordinary head start in creating meaningful work relationships. But that head start can quickly be lost if the depth of the interaction remains superficial and wholly based on shared history.

For example, not all residents are willing to engage with well-intentioned providers who are “coming back

home.” Community residents may view well-educated, skilled TA providers of their own race or ethnic group with skepticism and mistrust simply because the provider is no longer poor or has moved to a more affluent neighborhood—even though that person has been fortunate enough to gain access to information and strategies which could benefit the community. Where the provider can temper the opportunity he or she has had with respect and humility, if he or she acknowledges his or her limitations and engages in a learning process while seeking to teach and facilitate skill building and problem solving, the community often accepts that person as “one of its own” who has something significant to offer.

Residents who engage in community-building work need and deserve quality advice, no matter who it comes from. That advice can only be heard where there is a developing trust which is broad and deep, and that also depends on who the TA provider is perceived as working for. Do TA providers (coaches/community-building mentors) work for the funder or the community or both? The old view that providers work for funders in a management-consulting type relationship is obsolete. Too often we have seen precious resources squandered where the funder seeks to impose diagnosis and prescription based on externally perceived symptoms and violates an unspoken oath to “do no harm.” This tension is heightened where the funder is perceived as white-male-dominated-downtown-interests-of-a-missionary-ilk. Fortunately, the basic dynamics of these relationships are beginning to change.

In CCIs, for example, where funders are becoming real partners, sharing decision making, and being candid about the limitations of the relationship from the outset, there are more promising results. But a TA provider who can help manage these kinds of promising relationships is rare. Most providers either cannot or will not risk losing a contract with an influential funder by “telling it straight.” Successfully walking the tightrope between community residents and funders, while serving both, is exceptional. Where the balance can’t be struck, the relationship can be ineffective at best and dishonest and harmful at worst.

Given these tensions in the client-contractor-third party beneficiary triad, should we begin to redefine the role of technical assistance provider as “community-building mentor?” The “mentor” would be one who helps all stakeholders navigate the challenges of community reengagement, pointing out opportunities and pitfalls while the parties take ownership of their own fate, holding others accountable as well as themselves. This redefinition will require a paradigm shift on the part of funders who have not yet seen themselves as partners or investors. It will require the same of community-based organization leaders who are accustomed to speaking for “dis-empowered” residents when residents can begin again to speak for themselves.

We have a unique historical opportunity to create “villages” which resonate fairness and justice because they are in fact being rebuilt based on these values. We can continue the processes that many of us were schooled on which promote a sense of collective worth and human dignity. We can help families rebuild themselves. We can bring the people together to work together in “family reunions”—where members of a specific community value and celebrate their own group history and record of achievement. We can go further to create a “reunion of the families” (as Dr. Wade Nobles has put it) which demonstrates mutual respect and seeking after common, life sustaining goals among diverse groups working in a neighborhood. This work will require a new generation of mentors, coaches, and healers. Will a new cadre of change agents please step into the circle? We need you now more than ever.

Endnotes

- 1 I am indebted to Emily Menlo Marks for providing this formulation of the question in *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 1996.

RESPONSE:

Claiming the Power to Define

Keith Holt

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An essential power is the power to define, but this power seldom resides in the neighborhoods targeted by comprehensive community-building initiatives (CCIs) or other “community-building” initiatives. We recognize this as fact and commit to do something about it. We are living proof that one can derive a modicum of success in this society without submitting to the hegemony of the prevailing culture. We accept as reality that there are people in every neighborhood who, like us, are compelled to recreate their world. We acknowledge that they may not yet know this or have not yet been confronted with the right vehicle.

Our mission revolves around helping these individuals focus their vision and articulate their voice toward

We either recreate a world that nurtures us or we accept one that suppresses. We know that the world our children inherit is the one we recreate. This is a daunting task.

the creation of an activist corps with the capacity to act. Our work involves helping that corps grasp the CCI (or community-building initiative) as their vehicle for change. Our efforts combine with theirs to create our Community of Concern—our Constituency for Change, in which all of us are stakeholders with specific yet evolving roles.

This Community of Concern is a living organism that is no more bounded by geography than it is accepting of the status quo. A semipermeable membrane of purpose

and potential delineates its perimeter. Once engaged, it permanently affects the power dynamic at the most fundamental of levels in that it connects a critical mass of individuals who are intentionally defining their futures. Unlike organizations or movements of the past, it has no leader to lose. It is led where it follows and does so by design. It is intentional in its movement. Who are we? What do we do? On what authority do we act?

We are professional agents of change. We have the distinct privilege of supporting our families by assisting in the building of our collective futures. We are hired as trainers, organizers, facilitators, technical assistance providers, resource people, and an assortment of other positions. Our backgrounds are eclectic. Our training is interdisciplinary. We have rich repertoires. We are not afraid to disclose our personal histories to advance our collective future. We defy neat categorization. Our defining traits are predominantly acquired. They are seldom ascribed.

While our struggle against cultural hegemony marks us as “outsiders” in our country of residence, it prepares us to be citizens of the world that we are building. We are, therefore, the universal “insiders” because we respect the sanctity of culture and revere the flexibility of community. It is clear to us that we have no real choice but to do this work. We either recreate a world that nurtures us or we accept one that suppresses. We know that the world our children inherit is the one we recreate. This is a daunting task. It is not realistic to expect anyone other than us to embrace it. We are not utopian idealists. Conversely, we are pragmatic realists.

Our tasks are complex in their simplicity. We connect with people where they live. We help them visualize what they want to accomplish. We help them recognize that they have the potential to make the transformation. We help them structure themselves and develop a plan of action. We help them harness the resources to implement the plan. We help them assess progress. We help them refine and replicate the process. A variety of change agents are inevitably involved in the process. We will move from “project to project” as nodes of activity grow and require the application of particular skills.

The process may take much longer than originally considered by the designers of the initiative. The CCI's guidelines spawn organic processes that will produce outcomes that are not necessarily related to the goals outlined in the initiative's seminal documents. The natural life of the initiative, an internally determined span, will significantly exceed its formal existence, which is a function of external factors (i.e., funder priority, political climate, etc.). We help people understand this and take steps to build the internal capacity to nurture and sustain the evolutionary process in an environment that may in fact be less and less supportive over time.

Personal ethics are frequently tested in this work. I am often confronted with "given this situation what should we do?" I never offer an answer to that question. I remind people that in such situations it is useful to pause and ask themselves "Whom do I work for?" I contend that if they can answer that one question they can always identify the appropriate action.

Several years ago, in closing a training session I posed that question to the group. The retreat ended and we went on with our respective places of residence. Last year I was visiting the neighborhood where the retreat participants resided. A young man who had been in the session was showing me what had been accomplished since my last visit. Now a professional community worker himself, he reminded me that I had posed the question in the retreat. He asked why I had not offered "the answer." I told him that only he could answer "his" question. He acknowledged that he often wondered what my response would have been but more importantly, he frequently asked himself the question as he went through his work. Although we live many miles apart, he and I are of the same Community of Concern. There are many of us. We know that we work on something larger than a project. It is clear that we work for someone in addition to our client. We play a variety of roles. We reclaim our power to define.

CCI Funders: Sitting Atop a Bottom-Up Process



Introduction

One of the key elements distinguishing CCIs from other community initiatives is the guiding influence of private foundations. For most CCIs, a foundation has been involved from the beginning, typically before the residents or agencies in a “target” community are invited to take a role. The foundation develops the idea (often in consultation with others outside the foundation), determines the level and duration of its financial commitment, assigns staff to the project, and then seeks “partners” in the initiative.¹ These partners might be community-based institutions—such as a community development corporation (CDC) or a community foundation that becomes a “lead agency” for the initiative, state agencies that commit to work in a different way with the community organizations, or community action groups that have already developed to the point of representing a resident-focused change agenda. Regardless of the number or type of partners, however, the foundation continues to play a dominant role throughout the initiative because of its early, formative role and its ultimate control over the allocation and release of funds.

Because of this conspicuous influence within an enterprise designed to promote local control, foundations (and their program officers who represent the foundation with

grantees) have become something of a lightning rod for criticism about power imbalances within CCIs. Both the actions of individuals and the motives of a foundation as a whole can be called into question, and frequently are.² And because private foundations are typically headed by well-to-do whites, both in their executive offices and on boards of directors, the work that is done “in partnership” with poor communities of color can involve very delicate issues of class, race, gender, and power, regardless of whether those issues are acknowledged.

Our participant group of funders included three women and three men, with two African Americans, three whites, and one Latino.³ All of them had substantial responsibility in their foundation for community initiatives, whether as divisional directors, program officers, or both. It should also be noted that, of the foundations represented, four are large, national foundations and two are community foundations. Participants noted a number of times that there are significant differences in the way national and community foundations operate, both internally and in relation to grantees.

These funders readily acknowledged the tensions described above, but their interviews and group conversation uncovered some other significant issues pertaining

to power and race that challenge them in their work and that they perceive as challenges to the philanthropic community involved with CCIs.

In particular, said these funders, the new emphasis on foundations being “partners” in community initiatives can heighten the tension inherent in the typical grantor-grantee relationship, because “it’s hard to change the dynamic between a community and a foundation when the money dynamic doesn’t change.” But it also provides a framework in which program officers do become more active in the life of the CCI. And while they concede that “funders are never equal partners,” because of the con-

The whole notion of partnering with people in a different way is what’s at the crux of change in the sector itself.

trol of resources, these funders identified multiple opportunities and challenges to making the partnership model work. Among them are learning to partner with other mainstream institutions such as banks or state agencies in the context of garnering support for an initiative, “being mindful of the varying roles that a funder can take” in local community decisions such as hiring of community-based staff or selection of a community governance board, tolerating different and greater levels of risk for their investments, and being clear and honest with all the partners when a foundation has a non-negotiable position. As one funder suggested, “the whole notion of partnering with people in a different way is what’s at the crux of change in the sector itself.”

Within a foundation, CCIs present new challenges as well. A foundation program officer may be assigned to manage the initiative directly, becoming a hands-on senior staff to the CCI rather than what one participant called “a traditional program officer” who is less directly involved in operations. Other times program officers oversee the

initiative as one of several grants that they manage in a portfolio. In the latter case, a non-foundation person may be hired to manage the initiative on the foundation’s behalf (see chapter six on initiative managers), or the initiative may be managed at each of several sites by the “lead agency” chosen by the foundation. Regardless of the specific design of foundation oversight, funders said, “the CCI investment is so much larger [than other typical grants] that the attention it receives within the institution is heightened as well.” This has the secondary effect of raising the profile of the individual(s) responsible for the initiative, and that can make officers “want to be a more active player” in the initiative.

Another part of the internal dynamics of foundations involved with CCIs is the institution’s recruitment of people of color to work in this area and the treatment they receive as foundation staff. These funders suggested that how race issues are handled in an initiative is often mirrored by how race is handled internally in the foundation, and vice-versa. How and in what foundation contexts one can raise the issue of race and its relevance to community work, the risks associated with being perceived as “the one who plays the race card” internally, the reluctance of most foundation boards to discuss race explicitly, and the difficulty of having mixed race conversations about either internal foundation dynamics or relations between the foundation and a CCI community were all discussed in some detail.

In interviews, there seemed to be a distinction made between the level of engagement around these issues among foundation staff and the lack of such engagement at the board level. This distinction, and the claim raised by others in the project that one need only look at the makeup of foundation boards to understand that foundations are part of the “white, male power structure” in the country, led to a lengthy conversation in the funders’ focus group about the nature of working with foundation boards, how projects and issues embedded within them are raised or not, and the efficacy of forcing a board to engage in this sort of discussion. The different types of organizational structures, different rules among foundations regard-

ing staff interaction with board members, and a calculation of personal and professional risks were all cited as influencing whether funders felt that challenging the board to discuss power and race would be worthwhile.

In general, these funders were cautiously optimistic that CCIs could be “entry points for real pathways to change,” despite substantial obstacles presented by the many power and race issues they discussed. They concluded that, although uncertain that CCIs themselves “are about big change,” doing CCI work is nonetheless important because of the capacities built in a community. Said one funder, a CCI “positions communities to take on other stuff.”

Unequal partners

The concept of partnership is at the heart of what’s “new” about the funder relationship in CCIs. Within most foundations interviewed, adjusting to this new concept has proven a bumpy road. For example, most foundations demand high levels of accountability for their program investments. These days, this is described as a focus on “outcomes,” and funders typically demand some proof from the grantee that they achieved what they set out to do with grant funds. But while the financial investment made in CCIs is often very substantial compared to other program grants, said funders, foundation officers cannot expect the money alone to accomplish the often very ambitious goals of the CCI. Rather, the active personal involvement of foundation staff is also considered a resource to the process. Explained one funder:

The small amounts of money that we put in these communities is not enough to bring about any lasting change. That real change happens when these communities get access to the big decision makers, the public dollars, the information, and the networks. The foundation money is just the walking-around money that we hope will give them that access. So when we think about partnership, what we bring is our influence to help them get access, to make those connections.

Playing that partnership role, said funders, has involved the foundation talking directly to high-level state agency staff or business interests about working with community residents or institutions. When a foundation explains that its investment will reduce the risk to others of investing in a community, said these funders, other powerful entities are more willing to be flexible as well.

Thus, these funders told us, the CCI “partnership” framework moves program officers from being “stewards of resources” to being more personally and actively invested in an initiative’s actions and progress. And these funders all agreed that adjusting to the different power dynamics of partnership is “a real learning process” for foundations, community grantees, and other community stakeholders alike. Most of those we talked to considered this a worthwhile challenge, even characterizing this enhanced involvement of foundations as “a logical way of using these trusts of personal wealth on a longterm basis.” But some openly wondered whether foundations should even attempt this kind of change in approach and surmised that CCI partnership can be as irritating to grantees as the traditional approach. Said one participant:

From the community perspective, I think a lot of the response is “give us some money and get out of our business. We don’t want your ideas. Don’t talk to us about best practices. We’ve survived so far, we have a payroll, we’re responsible for people’s livelihoods and we have tremendous impact in our communities.” And especially those in emerging communities that don’t have much power right now, want to be able to control their own destiny, they really resent the paternalistic concept that underlies the desire to start a community-building initiative, which says “we know how to do this, and we want to impart this knowledge to those who don’t.”

Ironically, another participant who agreed that the partnership idea can be badly received in the community

suggested that part of the irritation is being told by the foundation that “we don’t have the answers.” Grantees, she suggested, are more accustomed to dealing with the foundation as a source of direction and can resent having that dynamic change.

Partnership as a Challenge to Traditional Foundation Power

Learning how to operate differently can be a process of trial and error within a foundation, said funders, with some program officers taking to the idea of partnership more readily than others. Said one participant:

In our work with communities we’re trying to make some great strides in trying to mitigate the role of power of the foundation, and we’re trying to do that in a very thoughtful way. But we have [program] officers who have been in the foundation for twenty years, whose life, whose professional status, whose sense of self-worth is driven by the fact that they can either dole out or take back dollars and resources. Many are not prepared to give up that power.

Indeed, even to those who embrace this new kind of work, some of the changes in the grantor-grantee relationship can be irksome. Said another funder:

[When] I was a traditional program officer, I got a whole lot more respect than I do now. I have come to expect a certain professional behavior from organizations that are in a business relationship with us, and I see far less of that now. I’m shocked sometimes at the things people will do and [how they will] push you to the point where you really do feel like calling up every funder [you know] and saying, “don’t ever give this group another dime.” I don’t really have that power, but if people thought I would do that, they wouldn’t pull some of the things they do.

Partnership in the Community Context

While learning to work in partnership with business and other powerful entities on behalf of a community presents many challenges, it is the complications of the relationship between the funder and community members that these funders talked the most about. On the one hand, they said, it’s hard to be consistently even-handed when there are still obvious inequities in the relationship. Said one, “There are going to be times in the relationship when we say, ‘this is what’s got to happen in terms of timelines, or whatever.’” On the other hand, community grantees often balk at changing the traditional funder/grantee relationship as well.

Funders suggested a number of reasons that community partners might have difficulty with the new relationship. In some cases, a community entity might question whether a foundation should try to work differently. “In

. . . conflict can arise when the foundation’s agenda involves giving more power to individuals, which requires a redistribution from institutions that have it now.

any of these initiatives,” said one participant, “you’re going to have somebody who feels that you don’t belong there as more than a funder, a banker. And I respect their feelings.” Said another,

[There’s a question of] self-determination, in my mind. I think this whole notion of partnership has to be qualified. There are degrees of partnership. Especially in light of the behavior of foundations which stay with things for a set period of time and eventually remove themselves, this question of partnership has to be viewed in that context.

Partnership can also meet resistance, said funders, when foundations who come into a community talking “partnership” are perceived as threatening a local power structure. One participant put it this way:

There are a lot of institutions that have power in any community and we come in with a social change kind of organization talking about redistributing power. You run into a lot of opposition from those that have the power and might suspect that in the process created by the foundation, they might lose some of that power. Commonly, that power is held by local elected officials, governing boards, and executive staffs of large nonprofits and in some cases major employers, and conflict can arise when the foundation’s agenda involves giving more power to individuals, which requires a redistribution from institutions that have it now.

Other funders suggested that the greatest challenge of getting a CCI off the ground is convincing or cajoling grantees to use community residents, rather than the foundation, as arbiters of how to use a foundation grant. It is not necessarily suspicion of residents or foundation intent, they said, as much as it is shifting from “the foundation says to do this, and a mentality of that’s how you do it” to one of “don’t ask the foundation, ask the community.” This is particularly hard for community institutions that have developed a history with a foundation and a particular way of working with them. Ironically, it is this sort of established community institution that is most likely to be chosen by a foundation to be the “lead agency” for a CCI. One funder described the conflict this way:

You’ve got an organization that met our test of capability to handle a million and a half dollars, to have the track record and the management to do that, the credibility with the community. So they get the [CCI] grant on behalf of the community. And it’s very hard [for them] to have to

give up their power of decision making about how to spend that money and what to do, who to hire, and how much of it gets spent on building their own capacity as opposed to the capacity of other groups in the community. They don’t want to give up any power, and it’s very, very hard to change those dynamics.

Partner or Investor?

Some funders suggested that “partnership” confuses grantees when foundations talk in the same breath about community ownership and control. Using the term “partner” in that context, they said, overstates the intention of most foundations in CCIs, implying greater equality of input for communities than is in fact the case. One participant said:

I’ve learned not to use the term “partner” because I found it got interpreted in ways that weren’t helpful. Like partner meant a permanent relationship. Or it was interpreted [by grantees] as “I can do whatever I want and you don’t really have any expectations.”

A number of these funders agreed that “the bottom line has to be clarity” to manage the continuing power imbalance and make the partnership work.

One way to clarify the relationship, said two of the funders, is to talk about “investment” in the community rather than “partnership” with them. In particular, they suggested, “investment” reflects a foundation’s real interest in outcomes and its likely—if unpredictable—insistence on a few issues over the course of an initiative.

One issue that exemplifies the confusion over partnership is the process of hiring initiative staff, and to what extent a program officer wields influence over the process. Many of the participants used this as an example of how different from traditional grantmaking the funder role feels in a CCI, and how challenging it is to “assert [your involvement] in a way that doesn’t crush people’s sense that they have a level of self-determination.” Said one:

In traditional grantmaking, you don't get mixed up in hiring the staff. But once you cross a line into a CCI or something akin to that, you're much more of an equity investor or a venture capitalist and you're as tied up in that bottom line as

Once you cross a line into a CCI . . . you're much more of an equity investor or a venture capitalist and you're as tied up in that bottom line as they are.

they are. It's not just a grant that might not work out, it's something you're tying up your professional soul in. So I will stay involved [in hiring] to the extent that they'll allow me to, but my role is still regarded as suspect if I interfere too much. This is where it's real clear to me that there is still a [traditional] funder/grantee relationship going on here.

Race and the foundation role in CCIs

"Scratch the surface of any challenge in this work and really look into it," said one funder, "and you get to these issues of power, race, and class differences." For example, she said:

Back decades ago when the clients of social workers were European immigrants, the emphasis was on getting people settled and grounded and participating in the larger society. Now that those populations have changed and the clients are more nonwhite and poor, the focus has changed to treating dysfunction. And a lot of that has to be traced to race: who is seen as a permanent problem, and who needs help in a transition.

Race and Partnership

In the context of CCI partnership, funders suggested, many of the power issues raised above are also about race—the race of the program officer and the way that this affects relationships, the predominantly "white, European" cultural dominance in foundations and their programming, or perception of racism in funders' behavior toward communities of color. A funder's preferences for a certain type of person to hire for a lead initiative staff position is a good example, said one participant, of where funders can be racially or culturally biased. "The whole notion of qualities and strengths that you feel this individual needed to have in order to do this job well, a sense that they have a certain level of credentials in order to understand the implications of practice and policy" can be sources of bias "that need to be on the table." Another participant gave this example of how his foundation's bias was costly to the progress of an initiative.

The foundation dictated to the lead agency how it should organize its approach to community fundraising. But we didn't understand the culture [and the approach wasn't appropriate]. We did finally accept that the lead agency was right [about how to approach local fundraising], but they had to put on a campaign of passive resistance [to accomplish that].

In the funder/grantee relationship, the *perception* of how race affects a CCI process may be particularly salient in part because openness is rare, and so perceptions can persist without challenge, many of those interviewed suggested. Explained one funder:

I don't think power or race are discussed much, but see, I'm a funder. I don't have many honest conversations with a lot of people in this project. I was a little naive about that in the beginning, thinking that [with CCIs] "I'm not really a funder," but now I know there's no way around that.

So there might be plenty of conversations among other people active in this project about [these issues]. I'm not going to have those unless it's somebody that I have a unique relationship with.

Of particular importance to the perception of funders' heavy-handedness, said some of those interviewed, is the racial disparity between many program officers and those they work with in CCI communities. "We have to be thought-

We have to be thoughtful about how white program officers in communities of color assert their power and influence.

ful," said one, "about how white program officers in communities of color assert their power and influence. It might not be about race for you at all, but when you call a question, is it [also questioning] competence? Credibility? The perception out there is something you need to be mindful of."

Other funders noted that these issues of perception and bias are not limited to white program officers in communities of color. Said one:

A lot of people label class issues as racial. They assume that people of color interacting with a community [of color] "covers" the problem. That's not true. [There's] this assumption that middle class blacks will care about poor black children, that same race people will agree. They don't always. It's class.

Another also suggested that race is too simplistic a category for analyzing these tensions:

As a funder of projects in low income communities, generally what stands out is that you're talking about neighborhoods where there are con-

centrations of people who are Latino and African American, and we are an institution that is dominated by white people. Right there you've got a clash, but there's a difference in style and background, too.

People of Color in "White" Foundations

In interviews and the focus group, the issue of foundation staff and leadership being predominantly white continued to crop up as a basis for understanding the complicated role that foundations play in funding CCIs. It was raised as an issue that affects community-level perceptions of program officers individually and foundations in general, as an issue for people of color with programmatic responsibility within foundations, and particularly as an issue for foundation boards in discussing, setting direction for, and supporting CCI work.

One legacy of foundations being seen as white institutions, these funders noted, is that program officers of color face unique challenges both within and outside the foundation. In CCI communities, people of color representing the foundation may be welcome because they're expected to have a better understanding of local context. But they can also be dismissed by locals as unlikely to wield any influence within the foundation. Said one funder:

I think minority communities feel that we send "small" people to them, that the "real" power is back home. And they spend too much time trying to get to the "real" power. Sometimes that means they assume that a person of color can't really have that power, so they're trying to find a white person. Even when they're wrong.

While most of these funders noted that foundations engaged with CCI work have more racially diverse staff now than in the past, participants pointed out that racial diversity within foundations does not, in fact, mean that the leadership or operations have changed. Community grantees, they said, pick up on that. Said one funder:

To say that minorities are more involved [in foundations] shortchanges reality. It's really important—the decisions foundations make about who frames [ideas] inside and who interacts with com-

The issue of foundation staff and leadership being predominantly white continued to crop up as a basis for understanding the complicated role that foundations play in funding CCIs.

munities. It's really important to stop and think about who it is we send out to represent the foundation. You have to have that personal credibility and power back at the foundation. [If you don't], it's like cats who can tell if you're afraid of them. Your vulnerability shows.

Program officers of color, we were told, not only face challenges within a community (such as those described above), but have to negotiate an ambiguous internal environment as well. Said one:

Being a black foundation officer in a foundation where there aren't very many of us, and there haven't been historically, is also a challenge. It's a personal challenge about one's confidence, about one's credibility, the value of one's thought.

There is a certain element of catch-22 that some of those interviewed identified: while many people of color hired by foundations to work on programs for poor, urban communities of color, "are called upon to identify issues around race," they are also "viewed as calling it even when it's not in the room." Said this participant, "I don't want to be a race card all the time."

More typical of those people of color interviewed was an interest in promoting a different approach to community funding at their foundation. For example, one program officer talked about believing in and promoting ethnic-specific funding. Another suggested that his private agenda was to bring in groups to the grants portfolio that were "nontraditional" or more grassroots—groups that didn't necessarily come with the same pedigree as more typical grantees. But there's a special cost to having this kind of explicit agenda, said one participant. "I really want to push the issue of capacity building of residents. But you become 'the resident person' or the 'community person' and clearly in institutions like this you want to be more than that."

The influence of the foundation board

Internal foundation racial dynamics can be complicated, all these participants agreed. For example, said one African American participant:

There are times when it would probably help me to ask a white person about some situations, but I don't. I talk to a black person. Like in a situation where you feel your white colleague exhibited some behavior where you could sense the eye-rolling among the community folks. Afterwards, I don't have the courage to talk to the white colleague. I talk to another person of color about it.

But most of those interviewed also said that conversations about race and social equity among staff at the foundation are more wide-ranging and open than are such conversations with the board of directors. It is in the interplay with the board, they suggested, that the most substantial tensions around race and power within foundations are revealed.

It is the historically white and affluent makeup of foundation boards that contributes to a pervasive perception that foundations continue to be philosophically dominated by a conservative and elite culture, often referred to by participants in these conversations as a "white, male culture." Thus, funders and others also suggested that the

More on the Role of the Foundation Board

In the focus group, discussion of the role of the foundation board in setting a tone for work, determining the scope of actual projects, and interacting with program officers took up much of the afternoon. Below is a piece of that discussion, a conversation between two participants about whether and how a board's discussion of power and race could affect the way CCIs are designed and managed.

Participant 1: One of the things we talked about in the break was how [the board] influences our ability to advocate for certain elements of [an initiative]. How we think about developing CCIs or supporting CCIs is one of the things I'd be happy to be able to push on a little bit more effectively. I hope the environment can change inside the foundation that would change what these things look like as they get rolled out. That would be the one conversation I'd like to be able to have: more explicit conversation about race, about power, about some of the class dynamics. I think we lose a lot by not having that conversation.

Participant 2: That's what I've been struggling with all afternoon. What is it that would happen in that conversation? I can't see how it could be structured in a way that it would feed directly into questions of how you structure a grantmaking strategy. It's just that you always have a mission in a board meeting; you know, you're selling something. And so you don't invite controversy that might upset the apple cart.

Participant 1: But implicit in that is that you have some notion about what will upset the apple cart, and those are the things you don't talk about. And so often, those are the things you should be talking about.

Let me give you a specific example. At our foundation, we don't support community organizing, and I've had great difficulty trying to create a rationale for putting some money in local communities that are doing wonderful things [in this regard]. And it isn't like we have historical bias. We've supported [organizations that do organizing]. Those are decisions that have been made in an "insider advocacy movement" in our foundation. Those are those conversations between board members and some folks who have connections to them when the rest of us aren't in the room that end up in our programmatic interventions.

I'd like to get those conversations out into the bigger room. I think it would be a more honest process. And perhaps we could find a way to do some of the things in helping communities organize themselves as a way of changing some of the power dynamics. But there's a growing fear of two things. The community organizing piece of it is a fear in many foundations.

Participant 2: In many foundations. You are not alone.

Participant 1: And the use of the word "advocacy," which is what people who are disenfranchised need a lot of help structuring and carrying out. Or just support to organize it, print flyers, and everything else.

And I think that if we could say to ourselves internally that community organizing is a piece of what we want to be able to do, that would be very helpful. And I could get some money to a few grantees [instead of] some backdoor deal where we're giving them support to do a specific project, and not the community organizing piece of it. That's how you fund a lot of what you know you need to be doing: by gathering up little bits from here and there. Let's be a little more honest about it.

dominant “culture” of most foundations is quite different than the dominant “culture” of CCI communities which are typically poor communities of color with significant numbers of women heading households. And, while many across the political spectrum may espouse “empowerment” as a goal, the political philosophy of many foun-

. . . the philosophy of CCIs emphasizes giving political voice and power to communities that have been isolated by the actions of the same powerful elite assumed to be running foundation boards.

ation boards is typically described in contrast to the philosophy of CCIs which emphasizes giving political voice and power to communities that have been isolated by the actions of the same powerful elite assumed to be running foundation boards. Whether and how any CCI program officer raises these contrasts with the board, therefore, was the topic of considerable discussion, as was how CCI work can be talked about at the board level without mentioning race. In particular, participants talked about how the board dynamic and reticence on these issues affects how effective CCIs can be.

In general, most of these funders believed that it was either too difficult or not worthwhile to try to talk to the board about the racial issues inherent in CCI work. One participant recounted the following from a board meeting:

I was giving a report to the board about lessons from CCIs, and the last lesson was race. I talked about why I thought it was important and how I’d seen it play out. The board had a discussion [of all the lessons] and then the person chairing the meeting signaled that the time was gone. Then a prominent member of the board leaned forward and said,

“you know, that last point about race . . . [where I live] we have lots of different people coming in and it seems to me that it’s really about adapting and assimilation. The real point here is about the transition into American society.” My narrative just got corrected. I had said race was different than other issues, and this board member just replaced it with, “no, it’s a larger story about assimilation.” The problem was, we had no chance to discuss the implications of that change. My take was that they just didn’t want to talk about race.

Another participant said that, though the race discussion “needs to be had,” it is not only whites who shy away from confronting it. At his foundation’s board meeting, he recounted, an African American member of the board objected to the suggestion that race would be the focus of a new project.

The board member said, “no, no, no, this issue is not about race. The issue is diversity. Why are we talking about race in such a narrow way?” And the program officer, who was also of color, responded that “these are the kind of discussions that unfold: discussions around diversity. And you never get to the issue around race. You never have a direct conversation. You know, diversity is important. You need to talk about that. But we’re talking about these issues around race. That’s the focus.” And it was really evident that this person of color on the board was uncomfortable discussing race among their colleagues. And they made a real attempt not to have that conversation.

A number of funders suggested that one reason for the pervasive discomfort with the topic of race was that there was rarely a sense of what kind of concrete action a conversation would lead to. Said one funder who felt somewhat more comfortable raising these issues with the board:

I think the discussion on race has to do more with, “well, what kind of solutions are you sug-

gesting?” It’s not so much that we shy away from it, but the rubber hasn’t yet hit the road. We haven’t gotten down to, “and this is what we intend to do about it.”

Another program officer suggested that there was little point in having these discussions with the board, and that board meetings in particular were inappropriate venues for trying to push a discussion of race or power in CCIs.

Board meetings are one of the most staged, unnatural, disingenuous . . . I mean it’s a show. Let’s not kid ourselves. It’s a show that the staff puts on for the board. Maybe in family foundations it’s different, but when you’re talking about presenting a slate of some multimillion dollar set of grants, your job is to get those grants through that board. You don’t sit there and have an honest conversation about what you’re doing.

Another funder said that boards can and do support CCI work without having to discuss the race or power implications. Moreover, she said, there’s some complicity between community grantees and foundation staff in getting the board to agree to a CCI agenda without that discussion.

All [the board] wants is results, you know, they like self-sufficiency, they like this boot strap stuff. We’re not kidding ourselves or [the community folks]. They know where this money comes from, and when it’s time to do a song and dance for [the board]. They are our partners to do that song and dance, and that is a power piece for [the community] because they can do the wrong steps and make us [at the foundation] look stupid. So it’s sort of a balance of power, steeped in the reality that we’ve all got to sing for the organ grinder.

But while most funders agreed that these discussions were at best problematic at the board level, they disagreed about whether it was best simply to set them aside. For one

thing, many of them agreed, what happens at the board sends a signal within the foundation about what’s important and what’s not. Said one funder:

Yeah, one can figure out how to get through whatever you want pretty much without engaging [difficult topics], but what’s *not* talked about does drive decisions, it drives relationships and it drives hiring. It plays out at multiple levels.

Another funder emphasized that within foundations, those who push issues of race can be marginalized and that a different tolerance for consideration of the topic at the board level could help change that. “The board has that power,” he said. “It can say, ‘this is an issue we would want to address.’ And that would change the kind of dialogue I have with my colleagues.”

There is considerable irony in feeling that race and power issues are taboo topics with the board, some participants point out. Many of these funders’ dockets are full of projects to which race and social equity, in their eyes, are central. “We fund proposals concerning urban economics and people never mention race. All the code

The board . . . can say, ‘this is an issue we would want to address.’ And that would change the kind of dialogue I have with my colleagues.

words come in like ‘low-income,’ ‘inner-city,’ ‘disadvantaged,’ and we don’t need to say race. People aren’t comfortable with putting the issue on the table and defining how issues of race will impact our initiative.”

CCIs, race, and power

With their large, multiyear budgets and ambitious, comprehensive nature, CCIs often stand out within founda-

tions as highly visible and particularly risky endeavors. That visibility and risk, said funders, elevates CCIs as vehicles for more than “boutique economic development,” as one funder put it. They have the aura of being more serious about “real change.” So it is particularly frustrating to many of these funders when the foundation environment, including both staff and board, does not welcome discussions such as those described above. Said one funder:

If you’re going to talk about CCIs, you can talk about changing the social and economic health of communities. But if you don’t talk about race, then you’re missing what I consider to be easily 60 percent of the discussion.

What it Means to Talk About Race

As discussed earlier, many of these funders believe that some conversations on race fail because they are just conversations about tensions and personal interactions. Within CCIs, however, they suggested there is potential for a more specific, more tactical conversation about race and power that needs to be had. Said one funder:

We need to recognize the difference between racially charged interactions and the real institutional racism which is much bigger and much deeper. And always keep the latter on the screen. Institutional racism is the root: systems are set up to keep people down in some cases. I don’t like leaving the conversation at the issues of people just getting along across race. It’s getting building capital together and then not being able to get it insured. Or not being able to get zoning changed. I think foundations don’t get this. Community folks know it, but foundations for the most part don’t. Our guidelines even prohibit political organizing, while communities have told us that you can’t get to real, deep change without that kind of work.

Other funders raised different examples of what it means to talk about race, such as the role of race in keep-

ing young black men from getting entry-level jobs for which they are qualified, or the racism inherent in allowing affirmative action to be eliminated while preferential acceptance of children of a college’s graduates remains unchallenged. They also noted that these are often the topics most difficult to raise within the culture of the foundation. Of these topics, the most challenging view to the foundation culture, said one participant, is when you start seeing “the system” through a lens of structural inequity and racism. He suggested that view opens the door for strategies that most foundation leadership would never adopt. As he put it:

It’s not that folks in this community don’t have jobs and something’s broken, they’re not supposed to have jobs. The white middle class kids are getting a fairly good education. The poor black and Hispanic kids largely aren’t. That’s what [the system] is supposed to do. So then we have to think, OK, why is that? What are the power issues at the county commission level, or the lending practices at the bank, or who votes in a school board election, or how the papers report something that reinforces this set of incentives and barriers? If we really want to change something, what kinds of power need to be brought to bear on the system? Maybe instead of some tepid community organizing, we should support a coalition of grassroots groups to purchase research on banks’ lending practices. Maybe staging some highly selective sit-ins at prominent banks will much more powerfully loosen capital than a little economic development thing in a particular place.

Are CCIs About Radical Change?

While largely in agreement about the challenges of race and the magnitude of the issues around power within CCIs, the participants differed in their assessment of whether the CCI approach had the potential to begin shifting the locus of control from existing power elites to disenfranchised

communities. Indeed, one or two funders suggested, it is the disjuncture between the magnitude of the forces at play in depressed communities and the likelihood of CCIs affecting those forces that should give some pause. Said one:

We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that there are some forces out there that are beyond the control of the community and the foundations, these

I'm beginning to think that if we're really about the redistribution of power at the neighborhood level, then CCIs may not be the right horse to hitch our wagon to.

global forces that are making life so much more difficult. How does a small community do [what's necessary]?

Another spoke along similar lines:

How will communities where folks have been disenfranchised through disinvestment and other strategies really begin to alter the balance of power? Because that's what CCIs are about. For me, it's a fundamental realignment of the balance of power. That's where I'd like to start these conversations.

One funder suggested that CCIs aren't designed to effect radical shifts in power. She said:

The foundation's situation is not going to change if we were to succeed and actually extend more power to residents. It's not going to affect us directly. We are still here with assets from a lot of wealthy people and that's not going to be affected by whoever might gain in this project.

A whole lot more than this initiative would have to be done to society before [places like] the foundation are affected. So I'm beginning to think that if we're really about the redistribution of power at the neighborhood level, then CCIs may not be the right horse to hitch our wagon to.

Many of the funders saw CCIs as having two major strengths: they opened the door for discussing structural inequity more concretely, and they provided a starting point for foundations to try some different sorts of "power-based" strategies. Said one:

As we work on the close-to-the-ground building blocks of change in community, people have to do that work in the context of understanding these larger issues [of power and socioeconomic inequity]. That's where the capacity building and the network building and the political development have to be headed. That's the ultimate phase of this work.

And while many of the funders agreed that "CCIs actually can have an impact much larger than what actually goes on in the individual communities themselves," not everyone was comfortable with the idea of foundations just taking small or intermediary steps. Said one funder:

One question this project has raised for me is whether or not foundations really should go into low-income communities that are undergoing all kinds of changes and dynamics, and present themselves as a source of resources and a partial sort of direction changer. I think that's certainly part of the whole power equation, and I'm not sure it's a proper role [for foundations to play].

On the whole, even those funders with reservations about the assumptions and management of CCIs in their own and other foundations found something substantial to like about the current investment in these kinds of strategies.

Some funders said that CCIs were about relationship building, about intangible strengths in the community such as leadership and cohesion, caring for one another, spiritual connections, and collective will that “provides a vehicle, some leverage that can have an impact on the way we do business in a variety of areas that are important to folks.” Others suggested that CCIs allowed foundations to both bolster and learn about community dynamics and empowerment in a new, more intimate and informed way so that “we’re dealing with a more organized community, with an active and independent community that will tell us what it needs.” But most agreed that elements of the foundation/community relationship in CCIs contributed a unique set of challenges and opportunities to the philanthropic community that could not be found in more traditional grantmaking, and that they were not yet ready to relinquish the opportunities for doing something important for poor communities, even in the face of the many challenges they acknowledged.

Endnotes

- 1 It’s worth noting that this process is rarely as unambiguously linear as this description suggests.
- 2 For a detailed account of the role of foundations in CCIs, see the Chapin Hall discussion paper *Foundations and Comprehensive Community Initiatives: The Challenges of Partnership* by Prudence Brown and Sunil Garg. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. April 1997.
- 3 One of the participants who consented to the long first interview changed jobs and withdrew from the project before the focus group. Her interview comments are included in this analysis.

RESPONSE:

New Faces, New Relationships

Herb Castillo

Herb Castillo is a program executive in the area of environmental, economic and social justice with The San Francisco Foundation.

I paid a visit once to the director of a large youth organization serving immigrant families. He had been in the United States nearly 7 years. As I was leaving, we talked about the tensions between his community and the African American community, tensions that had spilled over into violence in public housing settings and other neighborhoods. What I remember most of that conversation is what he said as I was leaving. “African Americans, they played a role in this country’s civil rights struggle, didn’t they?”

How we think about race relations in this country is undergoing a profound transformation. At one time in our lives, how we talked and thought about race was determined by the state of race relations among blacks and whites. It was about virulent and systematic racism, a one way relationship between two parties. Never mind the fact that Native Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and other non-white communities had made significant contributions to this country, but continued to struggle under the yoke of our obsession with color. The legacy of slavery, emancipation, freedom rides, and civil rights had come to define and set the terms of engagement for people of color with one another and with the descendants of European immigration.

Revisions to our immigration laws in 1965 changed all of that. When Congress eliminated the racial restrictions that had dominated our immigration laws since the late 1800s, a system that guaranteed that nearly 85 percent of all admissions to this country would originate in Northern Europe was turned on its head. Today, nearly the same proportion of new arrivals are from Asia and Latin America.

It needn’t surprise us to hear newcomers express confusion over the role of African Americans in the context

of the civil rights movement. Neither having experienced the 60s in America nor having been schooled in the significance of the civil rights movement, newcomers as well as many of our own children for that matter simply don't appreciate nor understand the significance of one of our country's most important social dramas. In the context of rapid demographic change brought on by record levels of immigration that compares in number to the turn of the century's Atlantic immigration, the white-black paradigm no longer provides a practical reference point. Now this

One can argue that white-black relationships remain the barometer or standard against which race relations are measured in this country. However, race relations are being redefined as multinational, as multiethnic immigration assumes a larger role in our social, political, and economic arrangements.

doesn't mean that white-black race relations are irrelevant. In fact, one can argue that white-black relationships remain the barometer or standard against which race relations are measured in this country. However, race relations are being redefined as multinational, as multiethnic immigration assumes a larger role in our social, political, and economic arrangements.

At one time Miami was the quintessential Southern city, where African Americans were confined to the margins of the economy by whites. As Cubans became more established, they came to occupy employment niches that had previously been held by African Americans. Their growing influence in banking, construction, business, and other sectors, combined with a feeling of mutual responsibility for their own, resulted in virtually shutting out African Americans from participating in this economy in any significant way. African Americans who might have

expected Cubans to extend a hand of solidarity to a fellow minority group learned that economic exclusion is not always attributable to racism. The combination of large numbers, physical concentration, an exile identity, and ethnic solidarity combined to virtually assure that job connections, loan references, and electoral votes would revolve almost exclusively around being Cuban.

In San Francisco, the recent infusion of Chinese immigration has been aided significantly by a solid institutional foundation that originated largely out of the anti-Chinese sentiment at the turn of the century. Segregated and banned from many forms of employment, San Francisco's Chinatown formed mutual aid associations, hospitals, schools, churches, and businesses. Saul Alinsky would later describe Chinatown as one of the best-organized communities in the United States. Today, Chinese newcomers are greeted by service providers, effective public policy advocates, and familial networks that provide access to rich pools of social and human capital. These networks, anchored as they are by ethnic and family identity, are what make the Chinese effective competitors for jobs, admission to elite universities, public contracts, and political connections. Their growing competitiveness and insistence for resources plays out in the realm of race relations.

Take, for example, the recent lifting of a federal desegregation formula that governed student admission to San Francisco's elite high school for 15 years. The formula was a result of an NAACP suit years earlier to ensure representation of African American (and Latino) students. Ironically, the formula was lifted at the request of a group of Chinese newcomer families. They discovered that despite high test scores, their children were being "capped out" of the school. Their success is more than just another example of the erosion of affirmative social welfare policies that once enjoyed broad public support. Significantly, they have signaled that people of color are not necessarily of one mind when it comes to notions of equity and justice.

Our assumptions about race relations have been shaped by the struggle for freedom by African Americans. Although other groups have shared in this struggle, it has

been the African American community that has provided the voice and conscience of this movement. Their struggle has defined much about how we think about race in this country. Our concerns for fairness, diversity, inclusiveness, and parity, as well as many of our educational and public welfare policies, have come out of their efforts. Today, however, with immigration changing the complexion, and more importantly, the political and economic power structure of many of our communities, the centrality of the white-black paradigm to race relations in this country is no longer valid.

The impact that changing demographics has on communities is not to be underestimated as we become engaged as foundations in the community-building process. Newcomers represent changes in communities, often shifting the balance of power through the electoral process or through the formation of capital. These changes are not novel. They happen in all communities undergoing transformation. What is new, however, is how non-white communities engaged in this dynamic situation will interpret matters of race without benefit of the history and assumptions that have guided our relationships the last thirty-odd years. We're learning that newcomers aren't beholden to old assumptions. In fact, they may not even be aware of them.

RESPONSE:

How Foundations Can Focus on Race & Power

Ralph Hamilton

Ralph Hamilton is a Fellow at the Collins Center for Public Policy in Miami, Florida, and at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois.

It will surprise no one, I suspect, that issues of race and power are persistent and problematic for foundations both internally and externally. Despite their reputation as agents of social change, foundations are not much different from

other dominant institutions in our society: they are simultaneously dedicated both to societal progress and to the maintenance of the status quo. They reflect our norms, our hopes, our limitations, our values, and our self-interests.

Many foundations have not invested significantly in understanding how race plays out across a range of policy and practice issues. As a consequence, the development of sophisticated tools to identify and understand the impact of race has lagged, and has resulted in a void in theory and policy analysis.

Thus foundations often reflect the same racialized hierarchy of thinking and acting that is deeply, though uneasily, embedded in the American soul. Structural racism is not well understood by many foundations, but neither is the operation of race and privilege well understood by most other powerful institutions or by many of us.

Yet to argue that foundations are a form of organized hypocrisy misses the point. Without such imaginative humbug, positive social change might not happen at all. Likewise, it is also important that we not substitute one dominant narrative for another: saying that foundations are perpetrators of racial privilege is not more true than saying foundations are color-blind institutions. The ambiguity of their position in American life is inherent in an enterprise that encompasses as many different contexts, relationships, histories, roles, and ambitions. And nowhere is this more evident than in their interactions with poor communities in general and with CCIs in particular.

This essay identifies four useful areas for consideration: foundation thinking about race, power, and social change; foundations' strategies for grantmaking; founda-

tions' working relationships with CCIs; and foundations' internal operations. I will comment briefly on just a few of the more salient possibilities in each of these areas.

Thinking

This has to do with the way foundations think about social change and about the approaches they use to inform their internal discourse and strategy development.

Many foundations have not invested significantly in understanding how race plays out across a range of policy and practice issues. As a consequence, the development of sophisticated tools to identify and understand the impact of race has lagged, and has resulted in a void in theory and policy analysis. For instance, how might a race-conscious analysis shed light on the multiple pushes and pulls that supported the massive federal investment in suburban growth over the last 30 years which has mostly benefited whites, and what might such an analysis suggest for an effective foundation strategy?

In a related point, many foundations have not always been shrewd or unsentimental in their analysis of power. Things usually are the way they are for good reasons: someone is often benefiting in some way, however perverse or indirect. Unless one understands how the benefit structure works in a particular place, how public opinion is shaped, how private and public capital are allocated, how influence is successfully exerted in public decision making, one may miss the larger opportunities for leverage and for lasting change. Where might a more forthright analysis of power lead foundations? For instance, how imaginative have foundations been in exploring the opportunities for promoting social change through private market mechanisms as opposed to the public realm? How attentive have foundations been to the enormous and multiple impacts of public transportation dollars?

Finally, although the communities targeted by CCIs are part of a broader context of local and regional social and economic exchanges, many foundations have acted as though the predominant means to accomplish their project goals were located primarily within the target neighborhoods. Further, they have often shied away from or dis-

couraged explicit discussions of power and politics. What other kinds of investments, and at what scale, might be needed to support CCIs' success?

Strategy

Greater understanding of race and power might lead foundations to consider a range of complementary grant strategies to bolster the potential of CCIs. These might include:

Enforcement. Although various laws are in place that prohibit discrimination in housing, lending, and employment, they are not always enforced as effectively as they might be. Foundations can support education about the laws, testing, and monitoring of discriminatory practices, and independent analysis of patterns or practices.

Analysis and tool development. Analysis of powerful sectors that affect CCIs can offer useful leveraging tools and can present complementary opportunities for foundations. For instance, a well-publicized analysis of discriminatory policies and practices in the local school district might open up new possibilities for change. Likewise, before pushing a major publicly-financed revitalization of housing in its inner city neighborhood, with foundation support a CCI might commission an independent study to identify companion approaches that would open up closed housing opportunities in more stable neighborhoods, or might detail an approach to blunt the negative effects of gentrification.

Citizen mobilization. Organizing and activating citizens to be more effective participants in democracy is critical to CCIs and has important foundation potential. In addition to the more neighborhood-based organizing, foundations might also provide support to identify, develop, and maintain broad-based coalitions, and to gain access to the information and technical assistance needed to develop effective campaigns around targeted issues.

Communications. The vital tools for shaping perceptions (and, arguably, for shaping reality) have not largely been

available to CCIs. Foundations have significant occasion to support communications strategy development (market identification, targeted polling, market testing, and message development) and to support its long-term implementation.

Capacity building. Given the ambitions of CCIs, the knowledge and skills they will need as they mature are extensive. Although foundations have supported organizational capacity building, opportunities exist to expand that assistance to include information and networking about public and private financing opportunities; the regional context of local problems; monitoring critical local and state public policy developments; political organizing and advocacy; private market structure, operation, and opportunity; communications and media; fundraising for advocacy, and so forth.

Grantee relationships

The cultivation of a more mature balance between certain institutional characteristics and certain qualities in program officers, might help CCI grantees. These include: 1) a more hard-nosed foundation analysis of how change happens, the scale at which certain changes happen, the kinds of power needed to foster and maintain that change, and a willingness to support the development of that capacity; 2) greater practical clarity internally and greater honesty externally about what the foundation really expects to happen within a given time to justify its investment; 3) an increased willingness to listen to, learn from, and apply the lessons of social change in a particular place; 4) an ability to share value-adding information, resources, relationships, and access; 5) a willingness to consider complementary supporting grants to other organizations and efforts in the target area; 6) a capacity to assume different roles, or no role, in response to the needs of the project as it evolves; 7) more careful attention to the process by which grantees are selected on the front end, and once selected, a greater willingness to stay with them to build long term success; and 8) increased self-awareness of one's limitations individually and institutionally, of one's appropriate boundaries as a funder, and an ability to discuss both with grantees.

Internal operations

Among the approaches foundations might consider to address some of the internal issues noted, include 1) developing training and other forms of support for program officers; 2) heartening white foundation staff to take more responsibility for initiating discussions of race and for supporting strategies more reflective of race and power conscious analyses; and 3) encouraging and rewarding more imaginative approaches to exploring internally the structural aspects of race, power, and social change.

Our hope as a society, and foundations' best hope as institutions, lies in the candor and courage with which we acknowledge and purposefully harness (to quote Michael Ignatieff on the Bosnian conflict) "the deeply complex mixture of willed amnesia, guilty conscience, moralizing self-regard, and real understanding to transform our racial heritage."

RESPONSE:

One Funder's Response

Patricia Jenny

Patricia Jenny is the director of the Neighborhood Strategies Project, a special community-building initiative at The New York Community Trust.

In the chapter on CCI funders, Ben Butler and Rebecca Stone identify many of the critical issues of power and race that a foundation-initiated comprehensive community-building project creates. Among these issues are the following:

- The expansion of the role of the foundation from a banker or funder in a low-income neighborhood to a more active partner in overall community revitalization;
- The clash of cultures between the white and wealthy foundation world and a low-income and African American, Latino, or other ethnic minority neighborhood; and

- The difficulties in fulfilling the goal of involving “unaffiliated” residents in a community-building initiative, rather than only staff of nonprofit organizations.

In the end, however, the conversations on which the paper is based beg the question of whether comprehensive community initiatives (will) result in more effective outcomes that address fundamental social justice agendas.

Foundations generally invest far more in comprehensive community initiatives than in traditional grant-funded projects, with the intention of achieving more expansive outcomes—such as affecting large numbers of residents in a particular community, creating a new venue or institution that outlives the initiative, providing a par-

I would speculate that the fundamental imbalance of power and the distinct racial differences between foundations and low-income communities make a true partnership very difficult. The troublesome struggles between the foundation and community leaders, in fact, can jeopardize any significant achievements.

ticular group of residents access to greater power or resources in the wider community, or increasing the political skills of a specific group of formerly disenfranchised residents. The investments are greater because they usually involve multiyear support and the active participation of a foundation staff or even board members. The expectations of the foundation are greater as well.

The question to be addressed is whether these expectations are correct. Does a community-building initiative present a more effective foundation tool for comprehen-

sive community revitalization than a series of more traditional grants? I would speculate that the fundamental imbalance of power and the distinct racial differences between foundations and low-income communities make a true partnership very difficult. The troublesome struggles between the foundation and community leaders, in fact, can jeopardize any significant achievements. The reasons for these struggles arise mostly from race and power issues. Furthermore, they are often avoided in more traditional grantmaking relationships. Let me identify several potential land mines.

Often, the awkward aspects of a new relationship between a foundation and its partner low-income neighborhood pose the first set of problems. In low-income neighborhoods, like any other community, there already are a set of relationships between the *haves* (local politicians who wield public contracts and access to power brokers, well-heeled nonprofit organizations whose business is serving the needs of the poor residents, or a large local employer) and the *have-nots* (start-up nonprofit organizations, perhaps representing a new ethnic constituency, disenfranchised residents). Enter a new partner with access, power, and money, in the form of a foundation initiating a multiyear community revitalization project, and the power structure must shift in many ways to accommodate it. This is a complicated dance, requiring sophistication and the highest levels of integrity on the part of all stakeholders, as well as a very good communication system.

As a comprehensive community initiative progresses, some accommodations are made on everyone’s part. Let’s assume that the foundation is eventually welcomed as the well-intentioned actor with resources aimed at the community common good. Then, how does the foundation enforce accountability to a mutually agreed upon agenda of action? Since the foundation is no longer just a funder, the role of setting the standards of achievement may be compromised. The implied balance of power between the foundation and the community partners means that the community can determine how far to reach and can define what success is. What if the foundation does not agree? In

raw terms, whose power counts more—the foundation with the money, or the residents and local institutions whose livelihoods are bound up in the community?

The racial issues are more difficult to sort out. As noted in the paper, direct conversations about race among foundation staff, board members, and community-building initiative actors are rare. However, in terms of low-income communities where foundations initiate these comprehensive initiatives, the struggle of African American, Latino, or other ethnic minorities to gain control of local institutions is quite clear. A community-building initiative will, by definition, become enmeshed in that struggle, sometimes unwittingly. A foundation staff cannot ignore the political deals made for votes, for contracts, for power among certain constituencies. They are an important part of the landscape and will impact the progress of any community-building initiative.

Despite these and other quagmires that issues of power and race present, a comprehensive community initiative does indeed provide a platform and opportunity for local actors to work together over a number of years on an agenda that will expand opportunities for residents of a community. It is an unusual opportunity, and requires careful tending by all stakeholders. In the best of all worlds, the involved actors will seize the community-building initiative as a very effective platform for building and expanding bridges across the many cultures and strata of any neighborhood. In other cases, the initiative will become the purview of one element in a neighborhood, and part of the ongoing power struggle. For better or worse, the foundation probably does not control which way its initiative will be handled.

The more traditional forms of grantmaking offer a foundation coverage, if not more effective tools, for accomplishing a long term social justice agenda. Examples include issuing a request for proposals to nonprofit organizations, requiring that they collaborate if that is desired, or designating a local lead agency as the project manager and providing support over a long enough period for that lead agency to establish credibility, or making grants to community organizing groups that have developed pro-

posals for specific campaigns over a period of years. However, such an approach requires creative design and management to keep all parties on a desired track over a sustained period, if the foundation's aim is to accomplish significant change in a particular community.

Clearly the stakes of a community-building initiative are higher than traditional grantmaking in a neighborhood. By taking on an expanded and more activist role, the foundation must resolve a host of other community issues beyond the banker role of expanding financial resources for a community development agenda. In the race and power arena, these are indeed uncomfortable issues at best. As an institution, a foundation is not necessarily appropriate as a neighborhood force, even with the most laudable intentions. In the end, the success of a community-building initiative depends on the ability of all local actors to rise above the natural power and racial tensions so as to maximize all of the benefits that such an initiative presents.

RESPONSE:

Changing Foundation Assumptions and Behavior

Sandra Brock Jibrell

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As a group, funders of comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) have to undergo significant shifts in both the assumptions that we hold and in our behavior, if we are to be effective catalysts for the level of change that we envision in distressed communities. The list of assumptions and behaviors that we need to change is extensive and challenging, and includes broad categories such as: 1) behaviors and decisions that reflect our inclination toward being the ultimate expert and authority on most topics and issues; 2) our tendency to marginalize the disinvested communities that we work in, regarding them as “sites” in a traditional treatment modality, rather than communities

of people with the same needs and aspirations that we have; and 3) our tendency to avoid addressing the difficult balance of power and equity of access issues that are the real barriers to accessing the good life for families in these communities. The issues and problems that this last tendency implies are infused into every content area of our comprehensive agendas.

My intent here is to surface some of the assumptions and dynamics inherent in power and race differences in this work that, as funders, we need to be aware of, and that are not revealed at the many tables that we set for dialogue about CCIs, nor are they lessons from the growing

Significant and sustainable improvements in the lives of families through CCIs are impossible unless foundation people and community people, across race and class differences, achieve a level of mutual trust and honesty that enables them to act together on a shared commitment to change the local balance of power in favor of the community.

literature on CCIs. They are learnings that evolve from the push and pull of relationships (internal and external) that foundation program officers develop and nurture in the course of their work on CCIs. Let me first offer two core assumptions underlying much of our difficulty dealing with race and power issues, and then a set of challenges to my foundation colleagues involved with CCIs.

Assumptions:

The first assumption is that a good amount of the complexity is due to the fact that none of us has much experience talking about race and power differences outside of

our same race groups, or with those whose levels of power and influence are very different from ours. Since we generally learn by doing—both foundation staff and community people in the close-up mixed groups that typify CCI work are at a distinct disadvantage when called upon to address race and power issues that we don't know how to talk about, except among ourselves. This is a fairly innocent phenomenon that we should recognize as such, and not prescribe to it a deeper meaning or negative connotation. None of us is armed with the precise strategies or solutions, or even the right guidance for how to have these conversations, but the real danger is not having them at all. Race and power issues are emotionally and politically charged, and as such, they fester and undermine when left unattended.

The second assumption is that the traditional configuration of race and power struggles in communities—people of color who live and work in the community push for power and access that they perceive to be controlled by whites (or their agents)—has changed in many places. The current crop of race and power issues and conflicts that arise in the CCI context may involve class struggles among people of the same or different race, and conflicts between settled minority groups and recent immigrants, or between settled people of color and newer gentrification whites. CCIs draw foundation people deeply into these issues, and one risk is that they can lead to an uneasy challenge to the white power structure that is often the ultimate stakeholder resistant to change. The irony here is that the traditional configuration may actually be intact.

Challenges:

Significant and sustainable improvements in the lives of families through CCIs are impossible unless foundation people and community people, across race and class differences, achieve a level of mutual trust and honesty that enables them to act together on a shared commitment to change the local balance of power in favor of the community. In this process, a unique relationship develops between the two and takes on new meaning:

- Foundation people become dauntless entrepreneurs whose boldness of vision and bravery of effort match that of the community people in whom they invest.
- Both parties commit to surfacing and addressing race and power issues with openness and honesty.
- Foundation people give up the perception of self worth as inherent in the power to dole out or take back money, and understand that their power is in bringing a valued resource to the community effort—their active personal involvement and advocacy.
- Community people give up the notion that they can “play” foundation by using the power inherent in their knowledge of and relationships in the community to leverage control in the relationship. Sharing of contacts, vulnerabilities, secrets, access, and networks replaces defensive mistrust.
- Assessing blame is replaced by cooperative risk-taking and problem solving. The two share joint ownership of the process of change and the outcomes.
- Foundation staff suspend disbelief that community people have needs, hopes, and promises different from their own. As a result, they work with the community to honestly apply approaches to problem solving, asset development, and human development used in their own lives. The CCI resources are invested as heavily in realizing community potential (human and organizational development) as in treating community ills.

In the enlightened relationship described above, foundation staff are also challenged toward heightened political awareness and advocacy. They become open to “hearing” an alternate set of political realities that severely impact the community’s well-being. There are usually two contrasting stories or interpretations of events and practices affecting these communities and, as funders, we are inclined to give

greater credibility to the version held by mainstream organizations. What might appear to be a predictable process of physical and economic decline due to persistent poverty could be revealed as a series of deliberate and racially motivated political decisions to disinvest, redistrict, reroute, integrate, privatize, or renovate aspects of the community—with disastrous effects. Reconciling the two contrast-

What might appear to be a predictable process of physical and economic decline due to persistent poverty could be revealed as a series of deliberate and racially motivated political decisions to disinvest, redistrict, reroute, integrate, privatize, or renovate aspects of the community—with disastrous effects.

ing “stories” of a community’s experiences over recent decades and taking a position that supports the community’s efforts to undo the damage caused by these decisions, without exposure that is harmful to the foundation or its public and private sector partners, is a real challenge.

Equally challenging for foundation CCI staffs and their community partners is recognizing and responding to the more contemporary and discreet forms of racial bias. Subtle assumptions (about a group’s capability, preferences, behavior, attitudes, wellness, etc.) based on stereotypes; aggressive inclinations toward harsh punishments in the justice system; exclusivity in urban housing developments; and redlining in real estate, banking, and insurance are common practices that speak to the current reality of racial bias in low-income communities that must be addressed if CCIs are to be successful. Our definition of comprehensive should be broad enough to encompass these tough issues.

In very real ways, the foundation program officer becomes a practitioner in the CCI setting—an integral partner in making community change happen and, like other practitioners, entirely capable of doing harm. Just as funders are committed to providing the resources and assistance to connect community practitioners to supports and opportunities, foundations must meet the challenge of creating an environment within the organization that provides the infrastructure, resources, and supports that program staff need to be successful in CCIs.

Both white and nonwhite program staff need access to information and skills development to equip them to meet the challenges of race and power issues that will surely surface. Foundations need to commit to lengthy periods of support for community capacity building, for the community process to unfold, and for extensive on-the-ground involvement in the process by program staff. Efficient facilitation of the grantmaking and technical

assistance processes send positive messages about the foundation's regard for communities of color. Foundation managers must be aggressive and consistent in their messages and actions to convince communities of color that their white program staff come to the work well informed and with openness, sophistication, and willingness to listen, and that, in addition to these, their program staff of color come to the community with authority and credibility. Even though CCIs have high visibility and centrality in the foundation's work, managers must resist the urge toward high visibility roles for themselves that could undermine program staff.

Finally, foundation staff should be prepared to take risks and advocate aggressively against racial bias and injustice, but always with full knowledge that community people have the most to win if the risks pay off, and the most to lose if they do not.

The Facts of Life: Residents Look at Power and Race



Introduction

Peel away the CCI rhetoric of strategic partnerships, embedded leadership, capacity, theories of change, legitimacy, engagement, bottom-up planning, community ownership, and revitalization and you find: residents. They are the heart of a community initiative, the individuals who transform a map into a “community.” They are what a participant in another group called the “deep stakeholders”—the people most likely to be affected by the success or failure of any community initiative. As such, the nature and extent of residents’ involvement in initiatives are often litmus tests for the “legitimacy” of an effort. In a CCI, success boils down to whether life for those who live in the community improves, and whether that improvement expands and deepens over time.

What we learned from residents in this project is that CCIs do not loom as large in the lives of residents as residents loom in the life of a CCI. Despite the public hype around some high-profile initiatives, for these residents, programs and other initiatives are just part of the fabric of modern life in poor, urban neighborhoods. Indeed, most of the residents we talked with had been involved with a variety of projects in their communities.

Understandably, when residents who have been so involved in their communities speak about the experience, they tend not to focus so much on the specifics of one or another initiative, but rather on the phenomenon of “initiatives” in general—whether they are sponsored by a foundation, the government, or one or two individuals. And what they told us was this: that what they want, as residents, is control over resources and over their community’s destiny. What they believe they get when they take private or public money that is linked to some kind of planned “initiative,” however, is a problematic bargain: the money to organize an effort usually involves strings that downgrade their role from “control” to “involvement.” And with that step of accepting a supporting role in *someone else’s* initiative, they suggested, comes an array of issues and tensions that revolve around power and race: issues of who is in control and how the involvement of residents is determined and mediated.

Because many, if not most, residents of a geographically-defined CCI neighborhood may never know about a CCI by name, for this project we wanted to speak with individuals who had not only heard about the initiative, but actively participated, usually on a volunteer (i.e., unpaid)

basis, in some aspect of it. Those “resident volunteers,” we assumed, would have an especially informed perspective both on their local environment and on any unique aspects of a CCI that attempted to improve local quality of life. Our group included three women and three men, with five African Americans and one Latino. They live in neighborhoods in Florida, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Illinois, and both southern and northern California. And, unlike some of the other project groups where members noted that the group was more racially diverse than in reality, this group accurately reflects the concentration of CCI efforts in communities of color, especially African American neighborhoods.

All these individuals had different reasons for being involved locally: one had devoted much of her life to participation and local advocacy; one found herself anointed as a community leader at the first community meeting she ever attended; another came back from drug addiction to dedicate himself to getting neighbors involved in making life better in the community. Their community work comes out of their life experience and helps form it, and they talked at length about life events that influenced their perspective on poverty, race, power, and change.

Most of these participants had had extensive exposure to foundations in the context of community initiatives or poverty research, and they were critical of foundations

. . . residents were clearly searching for the key to having foundations understand and respond to their desire for greater control.

and their representatives in the community. Indeed, funders and the research community were characterized by this group as having failed to learn from past initiatives, for considering themselves above the same kinds of critiques visited upon community residents and organizations (e.g.,

Who supports them? What does their leadership look like? How well do they collaborate? Do they follow through on promises? etc.), and for favoring community elites in initiative planning and implementation (vocal leaders, agency professionals, better-endowed services or churches) over residents without institutional standing.

On the other hand, a couple of foundations also received praise for listening to residents and responding by changing policies or behavior. One was credited with providing funding with “no strings” that allowed the kind of control these residents wanted. Some funders and the people they hired to guide initiatives had also clearly brought welcome new ideas into various communities, whether it was a focus on accountability, or the need to document what was happening. However, these stories were exceptions to what seemed to be the typical problems with foundation sponsorship, and residents were clearly searching for the key to having other foundations understand and respond to their desire for greater control.

Not all their critiques focused on the divisions and disagreements between perceived elites and community residents. A lot of what they had to say revolved around the struggles within communities, between and among people of color from different cultures, between “grassroots” actors and establishment groups, within racially homogeneous groups about gender and skin tone, and between ethnic or nationalist communities over cultural differences. All of these struggles, they said, had some impact on the ability of any community or subgroup in the community to organize effectively—whether in the context of a CCI or simply to advance a given cause.

In the end, these participants seemed to agree that the struggles in and about poor communities are mostly about power, but because powerlessness and victimization have been visited most consistently on people of color, it is difficult to separate issues of power and race. For example, in defending the capacity of residents to have a larger role in revitalization efforts, they talked both about the power of institutions vs. individuals and also about institutional leadership being pervasively white. They linked having grassroots legitimacy to competence and accountability

and also in part to physical appearance and cultural connection. They talked in a variety of different ways about the racism they perceived in the distribution of resources, in the creation of public policy regarding the urban poor, and in determining who would have control of those resources.

None of these participants saw CCIs as substantially different from initiatives in the past that bumped up against these issues. They were not hopeful that there had been major inroads made in solving their communities' intractable challenge of poverty and all that comes with it. According to these participants, because of the distance and distrust between powerful individuals or institutions and community residents, successful and sustainable change will only come when the main issue of resident control is supported explicitly and broadly. And while they noted some initiatives that have provided glimmers of hope in this regard, they did not believe anyone had figured out how to apply those lessons in the vast majority of cases.

Getting involved in community

Each of these participants had a different path to their involvement in community initiatives, but they shared either some early exposure to community organizing or to

Some of these people who talk about being our representatives don't have a clue as to what I'm talking about in terms of my neighborhood. I wondered if there was such a thing as power for my neighborhood.

individuals who held positions of respect in a community and got involved, or had some experience as adults that moved them to be involved. Some had all of those.

One participant could not remember a time she hadn't been involved, and had a list of participation and leadership that spanned local and national activism over several

decades. To her, everything about life in her community was consistent with a historical disregard for African Americans. "What we're seeing today is no different than the . . . power and racism that has been perpetrated on us since our first existence in America." For her, issues such as police brutality, poor schools, and rampant crime demanded local action. "I come out of a history of people doing for themselves, self-sufficiency," she said. "And that is what we're trying to promote in [my neighborhood]."

Another participant described his more recent community involvement as involving two key elements. One was realizing that

language I was hearing [from] persons who didn't live in our community—institutions like law enforcement and the municipality—wasn't the same thing I was hearing from my neighbors, on the street. And I [felt] something here isn't right. Some of these people who talk about being our representatives don't have a clue as to what I'm talking about in terms of my neighborhood. I wondered if there was such a thing as power for my neighborhood.

The second element was learning about accountability from some veterans of community politics. "[They] taught me how to have my neighbors hold me accountable for the kind of work I do, and helped me understand that's the best way for me not to become those same persons I was appalled by."

A third participant talked about volunteering at a family center in part because she remembered an uncle who had helped people, and also because she felt "good . . . [about] being able to get those families connected with the resources they needed." Then, after being a family advocate for some time, "a new project started," and she was swept into that larger initiative.

Yet another participant recalled a father who had "been a natural" in social work; although the participant lacked any formal training and said he "longed for an occupation where I could come in direct contact with peo-

ple, have a direct impact on what changes people's lives." Yet his job was bureaucratic, and he discovered community work "by accident because a friend of mine referred my name to the board of [an initiative] where I lived."

Other residents also talked about how getting something done felt good, helping people directly was rewarding, gaining power felt good. In one or two cases, their involvement gave them a kind of local celebrity that encouraged them to keep going. "I felt good getting a call from the mayor and the newspaper," said one participant. "And the first time I saw my name in the newspaper I bought every copy in that machine. I was like, 'oh, I like this.'"

Community is Not the Same as CCI

As they talked about their own involvement, residents distinguished between their own image of "community" and "community people" and the version they saw as implicit in initiatives like CCIs. In their eyes, "community" was about neighbors. "Community initiative" was about professionals. Likewise, they spoke of a healthy community as one where people take care of each other as a matter of course and "community people" are known for their depth of commitment to the neighborhood and its residents, rather than for a professional pedigree. Said one resident, "for community people, who you are is a sum total of your life's experience. It's not something that you can put on a piece of paper in a very succinct kind of way." The more professionalized environment created by a CCI, these participants suggested, sometimes made them feel uncomfortable or out of place. For example, one participant told us,

I know that the first day care center in our neighborhood started because of my grandmother. [Back then] one person I know had to do agricultural work and they took the kids with them and put them in cars. And [one day] my grandmother brought them some lunch and saw a [wild animal] too close to the car for her comfort. So she took the kids into her home. And the neighbors don't keep a secret—one neighbor told another, and another neighbor told another. And

that pretty much was how things were addressed. People saw a need, they didn't go looking for funding, they didn't write an RFP, they didn't do a needs survey. They just addressed that need.

CCIs and similar initiatives were not the only reason being involved with community had changed, said these participants. They also believed that people's natural connections to each other had been severed by the introduction of external sources of control and of funding, and by a declining sense of collective accountability. All these participants expressed both dismay and at times disbelief over the materialist attitudes of young people, in particular, and declining interest in work ("they don't want to work if it's inconvenient for them"). They attributed this to a general decline in morality as well as adults' failure to teach younger generations how to live with and for one another ("People of color—African Americans—don't tend to pass that history of struggle down: how we lived as poor people but didn't feel poor").

Two participants, in particular, talked about the decline of spiritual connection as well as "the pews [not] holding the pulpit accountable" for attending to community needs. They suggested that many churches had the resources to do much more. "In my church parking lot," one said, "we've got Beamers, Mercedes . . . we've got some money up in here. So [the church should] open up the doors after five when schools let out." The other participant agreed that "churches . . . are not opening up their doors to the unsupervised children; they're not ministering or doing outreach to the gangs, or the drug dealers, or the mentally ill."

Similarly, the group agreed that community change wasn't just about funding or funders, but about the people in the community. One participant said, "I have every intention of holding funders accountable for their side, but I'll hold the neighbors accountable for their side, too. 'Cause I think it's more important for neighbors to hold themselves accountable."

The creation of a "poverty industry" was also cited as corrupting some of the spirit within poor communities in a couple of ways. First, participants suggested there now exist-

ed a professional class of helpers from outside the neighborhood, typically staff of social service agencies, whose paid work replaced what had previously been thought of as

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neighborliness. Second, they said, this had the effect of diminishing the perception of how nonprofessional residents could contribute to the community. One commented,

We need to take the strength of the people, and give them the education and support they need and build up that way. You know, not all your executive directors should have master's [degrees]. I'll bet there's some folks in the 'hood that can do the work and do it well, but we get caught up in playing the game that's been dictated to us [by the foundations] and playing that game comes with these rules and regulations.

Another participant made a related point about CCI funders passing over good people because they don't have typical credentials. She said, "I think that any initiative that really wants to make a difference should reach out to community people who are not necessarily associated with an agency. That would show real inclusion. Now it's hard, because people would not necessarily understand organization dynamics, but you've got to build these incentives. Those are the folks who are long-standing."

Perspectives on power

Like the other participants in this project, residents explored many different aspects of power, from the power structure of the country or their municipality and the role of racism in securing that power structure, to how good it feels to be recognized for having influence, to the problems of local despots who can derail a community initiative. In the context of community initiatives, they were particularly critical of foundations for what they perceived as an unwillingness to take on controversial problems in the community and for wielding influence with a heavy hand, even while foundations talked about local control or "partnership." Overall, while they talked of gaining power as fundamental to change and had examples of local successes, they were not particularly optimistic that anything more substantial or generalized across their communities had taken place.

Foundations and "Elite" Institutions

Because all of these participants were involved with initiatives sponsored by foundations, much of their power critique focused on foundations and the nature of working with elite institutions in initiatives that sought to help. Foundation actions that received praise included when foundation staff changed course or relinquished a decision to challenges from the community residents for greater control, or when foundation staff themselves spent time in the neighborhood instead of using "intermediaries." But, for the most part, foundations were criticized for not being willing to grapple with the "real life" of depleted communities, for example refusing to work in any way with gang members, allowing resources to be diverted from community works into intermediary institutions, and excluding smaller institutions (such as storefront churches) from leadership coalitions. Residents expressed discomfort with the whole idea of taking money from "elite" institutions, but acknowledged that they saw few alternatives. Said one participant,

We have been so needy and so hungry, you know, and so willing to sell our soul for the fund-

ing dollar, and to change our goals, and change our aspirations, that we have not been able to say, “no, keep the money. I’ll seek a funder who is of like mind [with] mine.” That’s the thing that we have not been able to do.

In fact, most participants didn’t expect foundations to be “of like mind” with them. Foundations (along with other “elite” institutions such as universities and government) are widely distrusted, said participants, because of their historical role as understood in the community, their staff makeup, their typical behavior, and the perceived improbability of change. They had examples to illustrate each of these.

For example, as to the historical role of these elite institutions, two participants talked about the conventional wisdom regarding foundations and researchers (typically tarred by the same brush) and why they couldn’t be trusted. One told us,

When I was growing up trying to stay close to the [black power] movement, one of the things that was stated to me was about the original roles of foundations, one of which was to co-opt self-help black power movements. Like the Black Panther movement, it was going in a certain direction, then the Ford Foundation came and that’s how those things got co-opted. So my question is, do we still see foundations playing that role?

Another participant told this story,

In the ’60s [you had institutions like] the University of Chicago which funded the Blackstone Nation to legitimize the takeover of property by the university. I think the foundations are more subtle now . . . I do believe that there is some deviance that foundations are engaging in, but not to the level of overtness that they did in earlier years.

The behavior of foundations absorbed much of the

group’s time in the focus group and a considerable amount of time in interviews. For example, foundations were notorious among this group for sending “the wrong people” into communities, or simply not attending to the likelihood that they might not be welcome. An exchange in the focus group clarified how easy it is to make a bad first impression:

Participant 1: In my community, it’s half Latino and half African American. And my community perceives that if we have people that come in [wearing] ties and they’re Anglo, you know, they’re out there to get some information, make good use of it, and make a big profit out of it. So if they come in with ties and maybe \$300 Florsheim shoes, [the community] distrusts. [They think], “They’re going to take our information and make a profit out of it and we’re going to get . . .”

Participant 2: Nothing.

Participant 1: . . . nothing, like usual.

Participant 3: That’s a good point. That’s true in my neighborhood, too. And we hate being researched.

Participant 4: But you can be black and coming out with \$300 Florsheims, and they’re like, “ole home boy, he done sold out . . .”

This set of perspectives suggested that representing an elite institution brings with it skepticism—even hostility—that needs to be attended to. This perception at the community level, said participants, was further hurt by foundations that had no local presence at all, wouldn’t respond to residents’ ideas if they were uncomfortable, or held meetings at times or in places that prevented community participation. These perceptions also shed light on how hard it is for foundations to make the new idea of “partnership” with a community a reality. Said one participant,

Funders are partners as long as they get to define the rules and conditions. I think real change will be when there is equal responsibility for us. It doesn't seem to me that if I'm a partner and we're in business together that I can make the decision "I don't like where this is going." If I leave, it's going to cost me. A funder feels [that way], they leave and there's no consequences. There's no covenant there. It should cost you if you get out.

Another resident said that the community governing board in his initiative had been promised control that they never got because of the heavy influence of the foundation. We were told,

[Our community council] really doesn't have the control, doesn't have the power. It relies on the foundation for acceptance; even though all the changes are supposed to be on the residential level, you see some of the politics that comes out of the foundation that has a direct impact on what the initiative can or can't do.

One of the participants who had worked closely with a funder on a new initiative said it became clear that residents had a voice only if they said things the foundation was comfortable with. She told us,

These three major initiatives that I'm involved in, I've been raising the point that there needs to be some intervention in gangs. People who come into the community feel real good working with the women and children, but very few want to work with men. So even though we've identified these issues, no one has addressed it. We were at a meeting with [one funder], and the people sitting around the table were mostly white people, and the comment was, "we don't want to get involved with gangs—we don't want to burn ourselves with gangs." This from a high ranking

[agency] person. I brought it back to the community, and they said, "well they don't want to get involved with us." That was one symbol to me of the inability of power to be exercised in a community. We don't have the luxury to say "I can't get involved in gangs."

Residents did have positive stories to tell about individual program officers who had been helpful, or resource people with an initiative who had brought wisdom and skills. Two participants said, in their experience, that small, local foundations were more likely than national funders to make concessions to resident control. They talked about instances where "a family foundation actually came into the community, asking what [we] want." And, one noted, although "the numbers are minimal—putting out some \$40,000 across forty organizations—it's a process that feels good."

Despite a couple of positive experiences, however, the pervasive sense was of a relatively inflexible foundation culture. A few participants speculated about why larger foundations, in particular, might have trouble removing conditions on the money they provided. Said one,

I think the other piece is those who give their money to support the foundations. Many of those folks are in favor of the welfare reform that's going on. And they're saying through the foundation, "tell them lazy folk that we're tired of supporting them." That's a part that makes me really uncomfortable. So I look at the history of a foundation. Who motivates them to do what they do? And that's [also] the biggest issue for me in working in local government. [Even] if you get a black mayor, a black police chief, a black city manager. Who pulls their strings? The community guy comes before the city council or makes an appointment, but there are other folks who can get on the telephone and say, "look, I need to have you here in 15 minutes." That's power. That's real power. So who makes the foundation president jump?

What Happens When Youth Reach the Boiling Point?

One of the unique aspects of the residents' focus group was the extent to which these six strangers from very different cities and neighborhoods could finish each other's sentences. This rhythm to their discussion gave the impression of a high degree of shared experience and consensus. One discussion near the end of the day exemplified this, and gave voice to two issues that had not been explored by other groups: the extent to which involved adults in poor communities of color became "gatekeepers" for the status quo when they agreed to be partners in initiatives, and the consequences of a growing impatience among youth with that status quo. The following speaks for itself:

Participant 1: Hey, I remember growing up and all we had was onion soup. And that's how poor we were. And there's no shame in that. There's no shame in being poor. But I think that in all these programs there's something that's missing, and I think that missing linkage to these programs is the spiritual, the mentoring. I think that if we can find a mechanism to get all this into one program, then we can help these kids. And until then we're like up against a wall.

Participant 2: I don't think it's the young folk or the new generation's issue, I think it's the elders' issue. It's really important to say that if we survive, we all survive together. People cannot live the way they're living now, life has no meaning. And any time you find folk just shooting each other 'cause someone stepped on their toe, it will take nothing . . . I see it steadily going in that direction, frustration equals aggression. It's going to be ugly. And I don't think the folks are going to burn their own neighborhoods this time, I really don't think that.

Participant 3: They actually hurt so many individuals on the street . . .

Participant 4: . . . and I've seen the powers that be, how they've addressed it. In my neighborhood, the beach is in a [wealthy] area. And—back to power—an ordinance came up because the corridor from an affluent part of our community had to go right through the middle of the 'hood to get to the beach. And the number of African Americans standing on the streets made folk uncomfortable who had to pass through. Forget the fact that these people who live there are uncomfortable all the time. So what they did was put no . . .

Participant 5: . . . No loitering.

Participant 4: . . . no loitering and no parking signs on the street. So about 50 young men said, well, if we can't loiter over here, let's go loiter on the beach, and stumbled across something. So when they got there a few hours later you had the media. So the rest of their friends saw them and the attention they got. And they asked them, when would you do it again? They said, next Sunday. Well, the next Sunday there was a thousand of them out there. And there were politicians. And every person that they thought could influence those young folk was gathered up and brought together.

Now, what happened was—that's one of the first times I saw how externals can utilize their influence and make gatekeepers fall over each other to try to harness something. 'Cause what the gate-

(continued)

What Happens When Youth Reach the Boiling Point? (continued)

keepers recognize also—'cause those boys had some power—those young folks had some power that was causing—it was disruptive, but they had some power. What [was suggested to the gatekeepers was that] they had \$40 million worth of new contracts of development on the table, and [it was] getting a little shaky because “can't you handle your population? We don't know if we want to do business in an area that has social unrest.”

And it was ugly the way preachers, politicians—it was ugly. To see two powers . . . Those young folk—back to you was talking about it won't be pretty—well, they didn't decide to burn down nothing, thank God. But that is a big fear. And persons who understand power recognize that kind of power, and will utilize a whole lot of stuff to diminish that.

The second thing that taught me was that those young men and women needed—they really wanted to be a part of the community, but I know they felt, in terms of conversations they've had with me, sold out. And the language that they're having with me now—as you were talking about teaching them—it's going to be difficult, 'cause I don't think they want to mimic who and what we are. I think they see us as having sold out in terms of our values, that we don't represent—it's not about understanding where they are, 'cause I think they know we know how to be persons of color, but they don't want what we want. They don't want to make excuses, they don't want to beg. And I suspect you're right, that they don't have a lot of concern about taking life. And if that unleashes . . .

Participant 3: No, you're absolutely right, I mean they are continuing to talk amongst themselves. And, like you said, they're really not going to look to us for . . .

Participant 4: That's right.

Participant 3: And people who are in [power], they can't do what they used to do and call us 'cause I think if it has to happen, it has to happen.

Participant 2: The police would call and say, “look, we've got a problem.” And sometimes I'd say, “yeah, I'll see what I can do.” But like you just said, I'm not getting in the middle no more. If the shit hits the fan—I don't want to see no one get hurt, that's not my issue—but the point is if you don't do things in the right fashion . . . 'Cause [my town's] not exploded when other cities around it have exploded, because a lot of folk like myself hit the street real quick. I think we've been part of the problem. Because we can't do what we were doing, try to keep [things] down, we just made the pressure cooker—when it explodes it's going to explode ugly and a lot of innocent folk are going to be hurt.

Participant 6: I mean it could be what exactly is right or wrong, but this is another volcano. And that's what we're talking about in our community—these kids are going to just explode. And what's going to cause it and the reason for exploding is maybe something that I can't relate to. It's part of the business that has generated these slaves-master kind of mentality. And our kids are just not going to put up with that.

Legitimacy and Accountability

As much time as they spent discussing the promise and failings of philanthropy, residents didn't give the impression that foundations were their only concern. Rather, they seemed keenly aware of the power structure that affected the physical and economic environment in which they lived. Said one participant,

. . . as much as you hear me beat up on the funders, my community isn't defined by funders. There are realtors who'll blockbust in our neighborhood in a minute. The insurance companies got a redline so entrenched and ingrained into a map that it's unreal. Banks and what they do. I rode the El train [in Chicago], and I don't expect the neighbors came up with the system that took funding away from that inner city. And I don't think it's those neighbors who are keeping it out. I mean, the role that government has in creating conditions and policies—not only the politicians, but the planner who developed out here and the way it's going to look and the persons who set up the interstate infrastructure . . . None of the people in my neighborhood say, "hey, let's bring an interstate right down the middle of where our school used to be and tear it all down."

To these residents, power meant being in a position to affect decisions like those above, attributed to politicians, planners, and insurance companies. The puzzle was how to reach that level of influence. In their consideration of the challenge, residents talked about the legitimacy of local action vs. the voice of "establishment" groups, and they discussed who gets anointed locally as a leader and the problem of keeping others (and themselves) accountable to the neighbors.

Throughout their interviews and conversation, legitimacy was a recurring theme. Participants came back repeatedly to the theme of co-optation and the distance between individual residents and the institutions that had power in the community. In this way, institutions that claimed to

"represent" residents such as some social service agencies, or national advocacy groups, belonged to the same sphere of criticism as foundations. The question for residents was twofold: 1) are the grassroots being represented or sup-

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planted by these institutions? and 2) are the institutions accountable to residents? The answer seemed to be that if the institutions were accountable to residents, then they were legitimate representatives. Without that clear a line of accountability, most institutions were suspect.

One participant talked about social service agencies in this way. She said:

People want to be able to have some kind of control. I don't know if you'd say power, but they want some way of inputting to community-based social service agencies about the programs that they provide, and they want to be able to tell them what kinds of things are needed—not for them just to go run after whatever the funders have decided they want to fund.

Another resident said she resented the difference between the kind of attention she and other residents got and the attention given to institutional representatives in the community. She said, "Even though we're asked questions, it seems the key power brokers are the big [agency] people, the Catholic Church. And that's really who the funders listen to. The funders don't believe they're doing that. But it really is happening."

One participant talked about what he perceived as widespread distrust of national black advocacy groups because their “big picture” agenda did not address what he and his neighbors saw as their immediate problems. He said,

Those people who were representing my neighbors were coming from “the bigger picture.” In the big picture, they were saying that, for example, the young men who were selling drugs in our neighborhood didn’t have airplanes to bring drugs in, and didn’t have boats to bring it in. But they didn’t talk about that young man who was sitting under the tree in front of my house. I didn’t give a damn about that boat, and I didn’t care too much about that airplane. We could talk about that after we get this person from in front of my house.

As community leaders themselves, they were all interested in the process by which people lost touch with “neighbors” (whom they also referred to as “the grass-roots”) and, therefore, lost their legitimacy as a voice for a neighborhood. Many of them spoke at length about how

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they tried to ensure that didn’t happen to them. Gaining too much power, they suggested, typically diminished one’s sense of accountability to the neighbors. One participant, for example, talked about the director of an agency chosen by a CCI funder to lead the initiative in her neighborhood. The choice turned out to be catastrophic:

When this person was empowered, the whole project just fell through the cracks. It was like an ego trip he was on: it was his way or no way. It just saddened me because I really thought that he was there because he wanted all these families to become self-sufficient. But then I found out he was just there for his own benefit, because of the money he made, because of the power he was offered. If you have a person that’s supported [by a funder] and then uses it in the wrong way, you’re setting up to be unsuccessful.

Another participant had just the opposite experience, describing an initiative director who—in her view—went to great lengths to let community residents speak for themselves. She said,

The director would not go to meetings without community reps. with him. He believed in us talking for ourselves so strongly. [If I had a question], he would always say to me, “ask it.” If he’d been hung up on his power, that would never have happened.

But the group tended to agree that the ambition to have broader impact inevitably takes individuals away from the kind of contact with neighbors that reinforces accountability, and that this tendency for “power to corrupt” the connection to individuals had to be fought against. Said one,

As you move up the ladder, you start spending more time in the office and only so much time on the street. You need to call yourself into check about that. But it’s like, to set policy, you can’t be on the street. So you make certain decisions. But more important, how do you hold yourself accountable?

Community and race

Everyone in this group spoke about the experience of growing up with disadvantage, whether that disadvantage was poverty, or exclusion from the mainstream because of

racism, or both. Many of the African American participants spoke at length about the importance of their experience of both structural and interpersonal racism to how they viewed the situation of poor communities of color as well as how they perceived the efforts of “well-meaning” powerful elites to help. They also related ways in which their personal experience and perspective carried over into their work in the community. One participant put it this way:

I cannot overemphasize the degree to which other people dismiss input that we give. My daughter says to me, “Mommy, it’s like we’re invisible.” That first reaction to us; they don’t realize the effect that has. On a daily basis how often you come into contact with that. And the “experts” have a way of coming in—“what *we’re* going to do for *you*.” I don’t know if they mean to, but so often they patronize you. If you’re dark skinned, that is just so much more acute.

Much of their discussion of race, however, focused on their perception of community dynamics, in particular some interpersonal tensions within racially or ethnically homogeneous situations and other tensions that arise when diverse communities of color work together. A few of the participants talked about clashes between African Americans and Latino populations, and about occasional tensions between African Americans and more recent black African or Caribbean immigrants.

One said that neighbors in a multiethnic community viewed the early initiative as “a Latino effort because the lead agency was [Latino]” and that neighbors had questioned “why you’re associating with those Spanish people?” And, while the initiative managed to bring different groups together around common issues of concern, they still struggle with the cultural dividing lines that persist in the community. For example, said this participant, “what happens when one [cultural] community has an issue that’s a little bit more prevalent than another? How do you address everybody’s concerns without playing favorites [among different ethnic groups]?”

A few participants emphasized that racial or cultural community tensions were not the most important obstacles to getting things done. Many talked about how many of the issues facing their communities cut across racial and ethnic lines, and that although race was never absent, it wasn’t the primary concern. They also talked about how

. . . the person coming out [should be] culturally competent. They should have researched the community, done a historical work-up, and be sensitive to the fact that they don’t know it all.

being of the same race or nationality doesn’t guarantee anything in the way of agreement or trust. Said one participant, “I learned folk who look like me didn’t always believe the same things I did, and will sell you out and then do their thing . . . faster than . . .” and another participant chimed in “. . . a New York minute.”

Race and Cultural Competence

When the issue turned to the race or ethnicity of “outsiders” involved in their community initiatives, residents talked about the relationship of race to cultural competence. In their view, both race and cultural sensitivity or competence contribute in different ways to the impression of distance between residents and others who work in the community. On the one hand, residents agreed that “it’s unrealistic to think that funders are going to do matching, cause they’ve not prepared enough Latinos and African Americans to meet that demand.” On the other hand, they all emphasized that “the person coming out [should be] culturally competent. They should have researched the community, done a historical work-up, and be sensitive to the fact that they don’t know it all.” All the better, they said, when that person “looks like [me].” In their experience, they said, out-

siders do not typically meet either standard. White outsiders engender the lowest expectations in this regard.

Participants had a lively exchange around this set of issues. The following dialogue exemplifies the ways in which these topics were discussed:

Participant 1: Sometimes they come saying the wrong thing. Miss Bay's 100 years old, he called her by her first name. Now, you just violated the community norm.

Participant 2: And they're going to tell you. They may not say it to you, but you done lost them and they're like, "oh, Lord . . . you done called Mother Oliver, 'Della'."

Participant 1: You called her "Miss Della" and you just dissed her. Use some common sense. Sometimes folk just miss that. If you don't know what the landscape is, be mindful. 'Cause one thing for sure, we get up in your business. Who have you funded? We've got to identify who's on your board. We've done our homework. If they did that then it'd be a better . . .

Participant 2: See, the homework sometimes is just "I've got the dollars."

Participant 3: Yeah, well, one of the issues that we always run into [in my neighborhood initiative] is talking about doing your homework. You don't know how many times somebody comes in there with this [narrow] frame of thinking, and they can't understand what we're saying or why we're saying it, or why we do the things we do. And, like you said, the arrogance is a key thing. You know, that self-important, "I've got it all. . . ."

Participant 4: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. "Oh, I worked for this here. . . ."

Participant 3: Yeah, I mean that is so important. You want to find people who are just regular people, who are just sincere. You can tell if someone's sincere. You can just tell.

Participant 2: (overlapping) . . . one of the best places to find out if a person's going to be successful with the rest of the neighbors—'cause we've got a diverse group of members—is to have them meet with our group. If they reject them, you ain't getting too far in the neighborhood, you know?

Participant 3: Mm hm, it's true.

Participant 2: Now is that gatekeeping? Yeah. But if you can't sell the neighbor sitting over here at the table, I don't care how many resources the person brings . . . And the difference is the difference between the concept and the program. Because the concept could be a very, very wonderful concept, but the program is attached to the personalities implementing it.

While I like to think my neighbors are above that, all those things you just said have always come up. Who they are, they critique them, they look at their hair style, what they're wearing. My neighbors do an assessment. So yes, they would much rather see a person that's competent first to do the work, and can identify with you. Secondly, if that person looks like them the better it is.

The one person that they don't like coming in, I'm going to tell you, are Anglo. They don't like that. In my neighborhood. And is it about race? Yeah, but it's more around power. 'Cause they're so used to [Anglos] coming in to tell us what we need . . . they just resist it from the very beginning.

Participant 3: We have a new dynamic now—it's very quiet but it's starting to grow. Where now they're looking at, even within people of

color, what shade you are. You know, because they're noticing that a lot of the darker skin Spanish don't get access either. So when someone of Latino or African descent comes to the table, and if they're really, really light, they get looked at very similar to an Anglo.

Participant 2: You rally to the people who look like you. I want to see another person that looks like me get a chance. I mean we know the history—persons of color have been denied opportunity, and we rally to see a competent person that looks like us get that opportunity.

Participant 4: And it's so rewarding when you run across someone who has the sensibilities, and has the competencies, you know, I mean it's just so rewarding to see someone that looks like you, you know? And that's why this really bothers me when the consultant base that they send to you is all European, the trainers for the philanthropy, fundraising workshops, it's all European. Don't these people know that we get tired of this? Yeah, they're competent, but don't we want to see someone that looks like us?

Bringing about change

These residents clearly struggled with the various conflicts described above: wanting to secure resources to organize for change, but wondering at what cost funds are accepted. Wanting to build leadership and act as leaders themselves, but worried about the nature of accountability to other neighbors. Wanting to work beyond divisions of power, or class, or race, but keenly aware of how their own attitudes and those of their neighbors were wrapped up in those issues.

Key among the conflicting emotions over working within something like a CCI was the tension between the perceived intentions and behavior of foundations and their representatives and the obvious appeal of attracting those resources to a local community. Most of these residents

accepted these tensions as part of the process. One participant even conceded that “even if there's co-optation, if they bring resources that really help, then that's positive.” But they remained critical of the structure of initiatives that reinforced a sense of distance between a funder and the residents. Said one participant,

I believe the individuals sitting at the table are sincere in their dialogue. I think they really want to do some of that partnership that [they're] talking about. But one flaw is the staff is accountable to the funders in terms of who their employer is. They're too busy covering their behinds as opposed to being creative and thinking outside the box. So we're saying to [funders], “we would rather you trust that we can develop the skills to hire a staff that's going to complement where we want this process to go.” And that's not being heard. The other thing I'm not clear on is how they'll recognize when they've heard the community voice? I mean, they've heard the community voice. We say the same things, and they still say, “we want to hear the community voice.”

Another participant was able to give examples of the kind of community/funder relationship that worked well, and talked about the nature of give and take that other res-

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idents said they wanted. For example, she said, the funder answers “all kinds of questions that come up” and

offers not only advice but concrete help on issues from taxes to diversifying a funding base. Other participants seemed to agree that such a relationship was very rare.

CCIs as Vehicles for Change

While these residents acknowledged that some funders were sincerely looking for new ways of working with communities, they reported that the work with which they'd

These residents saw themselves and their neighbors—not CCIs or other externally conceived plans—as being at the heart of the solution to these problems.

been associated had not changed substantially enough for them to place special meaning on the direction suggested by CCIs. Part of that, they said, was that foundations were not changing their behavior to match the rhetoric. But part was also because residents had not figured out how to make themselves heard. Said one participant,

It's sad because a lot of money has been spent, and a lot of money could be used, but somehow we're stuck in doing things that were done 40-50 years ago. We need to say, "hey, listen, this is what works, here's a kind of floor plan to go by." Don't get caught up in doing things that don't work anymore.

Another perspective offered was that powerful white people were unlikely to come up with plans that really gave over power to communities of color. Said one participant,

All of these initiatives that are directed by Europeans have not been successful in dealing with the power of the community. All of them come in with pre-conceived ideas of what the

community needs. Even though they give the image of wanting to involve the community, they've already set up the goals and objectives of the initiative and they don't intend to change, even though they may get community input.

But mostly, residents were pessimistic because they didn't see things getting better in a systematic way. What they referred to as "real power"—control over major decisions and resources—had not shifted significantly to them or their neighbors. One resident whose initiative has been credited with creating real resident control still worried about the sustainability of that control in the face of a new, not necessarily friendly, city administration. Another participant put it this way,

I think that these projects that we've all been working in, they're sort of—it comes to the same thing. The people are still poor, uneducated, lacking social services, lacking health services, lacking housing. I mean, it's like the big five, you know, and it goes around and around. A lot of projects have been funded—huge amounts of money have gone to the same things for I guess about 50-60 years, and people are still poor. People are still poor. And it's really sad.

Ultimately, these residents saw themselves and their neighbors—not CCIs or other externally conceived plans—as being at the heart of the solution to these problems. During the focus group, there had been some light-hearted, but still serious, references to their own responsibility for breaking out of a "victim mentality." And so much of their efforts revolved around trying to awaken in their neighbors a sense of purpose and the same feeling of power or effectiveness that each of them had felt in important ways when they got involved. In that regard, most of them felt they had had some success, and they wanted to keep building on that. Said one,

You can see the growth in the neighbors, when

they know that not one service is brought in unless they affirm it, or deny it, and do everything they need to do to get comfortable with it. Not one contractor, nothing gets said. And the benefit for me is I'm watching some other neighbors who are going through the same kind of struggle that I'm going through, but we don't feel like we can't do something. We do feel like we can make something happen.

RESPONSE:

Exploring Power and Race Means Naming White Supremacy

Margaret Davis, RN, MSN
Margaret Davis is a registered nurse practicing in Chicago.

To talk about power and race in community initiatives, we have to recognize that the fundamental issue we are addressing is the issue of white supremacy. God gives each individual life, power, and health. However, for most African Americans there is this force which is designed to undermine our survival, to keep the world in a status quo situation. It is passed down from generation to generation, and therefore we often refer to it as “business as usual.” But “business as usual” is really the business of white privilege.

The outcomes of white supremacy are embedded in every aspect of American life: the courts, the media, the political system, school systems, jails, the medical establishments, and the communities in which people live. But you have to let yourself see it, and that is not something most Americans do. Consider where I see it:

- The release of twelve death row inmates in Illinois because of new evidence clearing them of prior charges. Most were African American men.

- The proliferation of new prisons in rural America, an industry on which many of these rural (mostly white) towns' economic development depends.
- The refusal of current politicians—the vast majority of whom are white—to set term limits or establish a mechanism to assure the same level of racial diversity in government as is reflected in the population census.
- School systems' inequitable funding for urban poor children (black and Latino) and affluent suburban children (white).
- Medical systems that deny African Americans quality care even when they have adequate insurance. (I am a practicing nurse; I see this first hand).
- The environment of drugs, alcohol, and crime which law enforcement officers often contribute to, rather than offering protection.
- Black, Latin, and Asian workers who are paid less than white workers, while corporate profits in the U.S. total more than \$240 billion a year. This is the dividend that capitalism collects from racism.

I believe that African Americans must strengthen themselves to turn this situation around. The elite (some call them capitalists or just “the man”) grow richer based on the status quo. They cannot be counted on to set it on its head. An egalitarian society is not in their best interest. But everything must change. African Americans are debilitated in mind, body, spirit, and emotional balance. We need the spiritual strength that comes with prayer. We need a lifestyle change to prevent the seven diseases ravaging our people: cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, stroke, and kidney failure); diabetes; cancer; HIV/AIDS; substance abuse; violence; and infant mortality. And we need to hold the elite accountable to the Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal with certain inalienable rights. As we

restore spirituality to African Americans, then we will have a force of powerful citizens who will contribute to society.

True change at the community level will be when African Americans demonstrate and exercise their power

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as citizens by voting, advocating and fighting for their interests and rights. Too often, we fall for the carrots of the elite. These carrots seem to recognize the need for change and support growing power, and sometimes they are offered by people of good will who bring real resources and good intentions to our communities. But others, and there have been many, engage us through these promises in efforts that stem only from their greed and wants. Those of selfish intent have historically outnumbered those of good will. How are we to tell the difference?

I believe in prayer, in spirituality, and in marriage. It is through these unions of spiritual strength that we form strong communities, launch businesses, and build schools, clinics, churches, homes, and government. But in the words of Frederick Douglas “power concedes nothing without demand, it never has and it never will.” African Americans have to find the strength in union (in marriage, in community, in work, in faith) to demand what is right for us and for our children. The elite works to break those unions in countless ways. We must work to build back our strengths. We did it in the '60s, and we can do it again.

RESPONSE:

Getting to the Basics of Power and Race

Ché Madyun

Ché Madyun is the theater manager of the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts at the Strand Theatre in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

In my experience, income coupled with race are the keys used by others to presume the degree of power an individual or community has. What my neighbors and I have experienced is the following: people assume that 1) we are of low-income because we are black; 2) we live in a low-income area; 3) because we are of low-income or live in a low-income area, we are powerless and need to be led. The sum total of these assumptions is that we are poor and powerless, and that we need to be taken care of by others.

The aforementioned assumptions also seem to guide the approach philanthropists and social service-type organizations bring to their work on behalf of “the underprivileged.” With a missionary frame of mind, they dictate what ability level can be expected from the people and the communities they are trying to serve. In this condescending way, these well-intentioned groups forge ahead creating their ways to make change.

Similarly, foundation professionals most often approach communities with the same power issues that these initiatives are trying to change. Professionals always want others to change; they talk about making power changes, but rarely see they will need to change also. They see power as something to make my neighborhood more like theirs, but not to make the “underprivileged” actually be in control. In the eyes of those in power, change and empowerment are fine and good as long as the ruling power base is not upset. It’s really all about letting us have a little without their losing the control.

But control is exactly the point. It’s the objective of empowerment. Do these initiatives have what it takes to

let that change? To help it change? For example, when you have an economy that operates on the basis of a percentage of people being unemployed, there will never be a time when there is not a group of poor people, living in low-income areas, and being viewed as having little or no power. In what ways are these initiatives trying to change the economic system this country operates under?

I've been involved with an initiative that is famous for its "successes" in a lot of these areas. But even with what we've achieved, we've only taken baby steps toward where we need to go. Here are what I see as a few of the basic issues that my neighborhood initiative is still trying to figure out:

1. How to sustain the training and growth of residents as leaders. Simply giving residents power is not enough. How does any human being give another power? People already have power. It's really more of how do we awaken it or feed it so that its potential can be realized. Residents start at different levels requiring simultaneous learning opportunities. Funders always want folks who are ready-made, or are close to being made. They have to realize that there are different *levels*, different *kinds* of leadership. They need to find the "raw" talent, the uncut, the undeveloped potential and support organizations that are committed to furthering this. They also have to be careful when building resident leadership that lessons are passed down so that new ideas and new leaders *continue to emerge*.
2. How to set a structure so that community leaders who move up the power ladder stay in touch with and listen to the grassroots voice. For initiatives to work, we need to find leaders who are skilled (or become skilled) at doing what's best for the good of the community and not what's good only for their personal gain. How do we know when a person has these skills or the potential to develop and nurture these qualities? That's a discussion that needs to happen.

3. How to encourage and support black men, in particular, to become "empowered," to be able to have the degree of power and control that the majority of white men seem to have. This issue alone upsets the power base of America, and I believe for that reason the possibility of funders financially supporting efforts that will allow large numbers of black men to be in charge is a long way off if it ever comes at all. In this country, racial tension is still largely viewed as only being a black and white issue, but many immigrants who come here from non-European countries experience similar racist attitudes. But even with immigrants, what I've seen is the darker complexioned a person is, the less amount of power this country allows that individual to have. This is an example of the continuing effects of slavery and how—although often subtle—slave mentality thinking is still prevalent. It also shows how, as a society, America is still very much hung up on race and has a long way yet to go before it is healed.

Finally, it's important—and not just in initiatives, but in general—to pay more attention to what's happening with our youth. Many of them don't believe in the old saying that "it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game." As I see it, one element of the simmering

The existing power structure works overtime and has the resources to counteract small gains, creating a situation where starting all over again becomes a ritual every so many years. Our youth don't buy this ritual.

youth rebellion has to do with them seeing that the older generation has played the game without winning, and then played the role of gatekeeper without having gained or

achieved enough. In the few instances where there is some degree of power and control, maintaining it beyond a generation or two has been an impossible feat. The existing power structure works overtime and has the resources to counteract small gains, creating a situation where starting all over again becomes a ritual every so many years. Our youth don't buy this ritual. Winning to them means money and power that is passed on and grows from generation to generation. And they are ready and willing to play any and every game available to get it. If following the rules of the establishment doesn't work, they will be there ready to do what needs to be done with a vengeance.

Sometimes I think maybe they've got it right.

RESPONSE:

Thoughts on Power and Race

Chuck Ridley

Chuck Ridley is chief executive officer of MAD DADS of Greater Delray Beach, Florida.

I have to say that since participating in this project, I have talked with many people and repeatedly told them that this was a real highlight of my involvement in community. I say that not because we solved anything, but because it sparked in my mind so many things that I have talked with neighbors and friends about, that we have argued about. I think I understand some things differently now.

A major piece is the impact of what I'll call "the liberal philosophy" and how that thinking maintains the status quo for people of color, especially African Americans. My biggest battles in my community are with people who have embraced what another person in my focus group talked about, which is the mindset of the leadership of the black community since the sixties. The liberal belief is that the answer lies in government. In the sixties, we depended on the government to help us bridge the gap between rich

and poor, black and white, and we reaped some benefits from that strategy. I don't deny that. But now I differ about

In order for this system to be maintained, people of color have to participate. We've got to dance. And we dance. So we have to stop participating in that.

the role the legislature can play, and whether what we need are new laws to correct the inequity that still exists. I don't think we can get there just with new laws.

The barriers to power are more than the economic base. There are class issues. People of color who are affluent—their kids reap the benefits of affirmative action. But it's hard to get into Yale if you don't finish high school. So although I challenge the folks who want to go back to legislation, I also challenge the elite in the black community because I see discrimination there, too.

I also think a lot of the roots of racism are in basic economics. I look at history this way: the slave trade was based in economics and camouflaged in race. Because of the huge economic gains from slavery, a whole system of racism developed—painting us as savages, as less than human. Also, the slave mindset developed on our side—it was like breaking a horse. The black spirit was broken down just as systematically. Part of what isn't discussed for me is what that was, and how to change it around. My belief is that economics starts to change that mindset. With economic gains, people will move past that mindset.

But here's the really rough part. Originally, I thought Clinton was right about putting the burden on whites to end racism. But that's changed for me. In order for this system to be maintained, people of color have to participate. We've got to dance. And we dance. So we have to stop participat-

ing in that. Black persons have to transcend race. We can't get caught up in voting in blocks for black people because they're black. We have to get over the horror stories that have happened—not to forget, but to get over it. Some of the community doesn't want to have this conversation—and I mean people of color. People who want to see immediate results, and so don't value the process, the philosophy.

When I got back from the focus group, I was talking to some persons who plan to run for political office. They wanted me to help support a candidate who's African American. And my response was, "I'm tired of having people who understand being black. Why don't we find someone who understands power, who has access to it now and get *them* to champion our cause?" It wasn't a popular response.

Finally, just from our focus group, I got some real insights into power. For one thing, the leadership in the room shifted many times. I paid particular attention to one woman who started facilitating the group a little. She was focused on making sure that people spoke. There were

others who were dominant in the conversation—and I include myself as one of the three people who spoke a lot. The group allowed that; they didn't challenge our "leadership." And the silence from the Latina woman. I wondered if there had been someone else Hispanic, maybe she would have been more vocal. It was just so interesting how what happened in the group is what happens in communities. You see these things: people who have learned how to use phrases, how to engage audiences, they take the vocal leadership roles. Another person knows organizing, they use a common enemy. Another needs more attention to be drawn into the conversation because when they do speak, there's something real there. It all adds up to people competing, trying to get points across. Arguing about whose way is the best way.

I wish we had more opportunities like this. A place to have the conversations that folks might not want to have most of the time. What's going on in communities would be better for it.

Initiative Managers Consider Power and Race



Once the framework for a CCI is conceived and the initiative “launched,” someone has to manage the show. The initiative manager is that person. Sometimes a program officer in the sponsoring foundation, but almost always hired by the initiative’s sponsor,¹ the initiative manager has both considerable responsibility and influence within a CCI.

The job of initiative manager overlaps with two other roles distinguished in this project—site directors and funders—but is different in important ways. In single-site initiatives, the roles of site director and initiative manager are typically merged into one “director” position. A substantial number of CCIs, however, have multiple sites either within a city or across the country. In those cases, there is typically a director at each site as well as an initiative manager who has cross-site responsibilities, including acting as the chief liaison between different sites that make up the initiative, and being the chief public information officer for the initiative as a whole. He or she is the stage manager and chief cheerleader for the initiative.

The initiative manager is sometimes also the funder, i.e., a foundation program officer who has the initiative as part of his or her portfolio of grants. During the course of the initiative, the manager may make decisions about funding and may enforce agreements, convene meetings, and attempt to

clear up misunderstandings between the myriad other stakeholders and participants. He or she is the go-between for the sponsor and the CCI’s sites. A funder can play all those roles. Even when a manager is not the funder, he or she is the CCI staff member considered closest to the funder, assumed to speak for the funder, and to have influence with them.

To avoid confusion with the funders group in this project, we invited participation from managers who were *not* also program officers of the sponsoring foundations. Thus, all of the managers interviewed for this project were hired to manage a multisite CCI as a full-time job. The group included three men and three women, with one Native American, two African Americans and three Caucasians. They represented national multisite initiatives as well as multisite initiatives concentrated in a single city. Some of them thought of themselves as an extension of “the funder”; others viewed the job more as an intermediary role between funder and community process with responsibility to and within both. Our participants said the actual job description is some combination of diplomat, financial guru, community organizer, politician, parent, and therapist. But even with such a heady position, said our participants, a successful initiative manager never takes credit for anything.

Both in interviews and in their focus group, these participants were eager for the opportunity to explore power and race in CCIs, and what they characterized as the personal and professional challenges of managing initiatives in which these issues were both central and largely unexamined. In their interviews, many talked about how their own race or ethnicity had been an important factor in their hire, and how it continued to play a role. They talked about race both as a dividing line and as a potential connector among people, about the particular experience and influence of the African American experience in our understanding of race, and about the ways in which CCIs have dealt naively with race and diversity issues.

In particular, these participants talked at length about racial and ethnic diversity and its impact on racial dialogue and community action. We heard about the persistent focus on the “black-white” divide in the South, its contrast with the increasingly broad and complex diversity issues in California, and the inexplicable political “invisibility” of other ethnic groups whose numbers are rising dramatically in some areas. They talked about the nature of political empowerment, and how both homogeneity and diversity can serve important purposes in community action. In discussing most CCIs’ commitment to be inclusive, however, managers seemed to agree that dividing lines other than race can be as important: culture, age, and class were all put forth as potent and divisive issues in some communities. In others, the dividing lines between owners and renters in a community presented the biggest challenges to collaboration and unity of understanding or action.

On the subject of power, these participants were eloquent about the nature of empowerment and the irony of “leading” an empowerment initiative. They spent considerable time as a group talking about the role of the initiative manager, about “leading from behind,” being a “broker,” and “intermediary,” and in one enduring analogy, an “electrician” who enables power to flow where it is needed. Interestingly, while individual interviews suggested that race was a key factor in the hiring *and* success of initiative managers, the group consensus was that race was uniformly important mostly within the context

of hiring. For getting the job done well, they concluded, personal style mattered more than race—in particular how overtly a manager wields the power they have, but also including, of course, the skill and sensitivity with which

CCIs have an “architecture of race and power” that reflects the dominant culture in the U.S. And yet that architecture remains unexamined . . .

they handle issues regarding race or ethnicity. According to their own accounts, these participants shared certain elements of personal style. Most described themselves as nonconfrontational, inclusive, willing to let others take credit, accessible, and attentive to fairness.

Managers further suggested that CCIs have an “architecture of race and power” that reflects the dominant culture in the U.S. And yet that architecture remains unexamined, they said, even while myriad stakeholders within CCIs try to increase their level of awareness and sensitivity to racial issues. CCIs were seen as vehicles for *action* on power and race, not necessarily just vehicles for *dialogue*. Indeed, many of these participants were wary of dialogue on race and power without a purposeful goal. Rather, managers suggested ways in which power and race issues could be acknowledged and addressed implicitly within CCIs without trying to change personal beliefs which they viewed as more intractable. In this regard, some pointed out that CCIs are opportunities to gather and disseminate data in new ways, and they discussed the power of information to illustrate the impact of racism and discrimination in poor communities.

Brokering power

More than anything else, initiative managers say they feel and act as intermediaries, brokering power within an initiative as well as between community members or staff and the funder of a CCI. “[Intermediary] is a term we use

a lot in community building,” said one participant, but the intermediary’s role and responsibility means something more specific to many managers. For one participant, the role is about brokering “inclusion and exclusion.” For another participant, it’s about being “an outsider with resources,” one who stays “keenly aware that [I am in] a position of power over what happens to other people.” A third participant likened the role to a “chameleon . . . You have to be an outsider and an insider to everyone.”

Because of their position as intermediaries and because the funder or sponsor typically hires them, these managers felt that their role came with an association with and access to certain sources of power outside the neighborhood, especially that embodied by foundations. Each of these participants had different ways of interacting with the initiative funder—acting as one of them, acting as their emissary, or acting as an educator for funders around community interests and realities depending on circumstances.

Managers also mediate between community members and government entities, so understanding the power dynamics within a local government is also critical. Explained one manager,

There are two governments in a city. There’s the government of mayors, housing, zoning, development, taxes, police, sanitation, infrastructure, business, and real estate. The second government is the one concerned with child welfare and social services. Meetings within the first government are all among people with power. Meetings of the second government are among people with less power, and folks from the neighborhoods. There’s a constant struggle [within the initiative] to be aware of power because we know that token concessions don’t change that power dynamic.

Community power dynamics, they said, are equally complicated. Managers explained that, in some cases, initiative funding ascribes power unevenly in a community and can create new problems rather than collective solutions. Said one manager,

The first [lead agency] to get the grant literally went around and bullied other groups. They would say, “we’ve got [these funders] on our side, so even though you’ve never wanted to collaborate with us, you’ve got to do it now.”

But local “bullies” are not all created by new money, such as that from CCIs, they said. Another participant talked about the intractability of existing strong-arm power in communities and the impotence of government, much less an initiative, to work around those influences. This manager said,

The initiative has not been a threat to local, corrupt, community demagogues who are very often the source for sabotaging genuine communication or problem-solving between the government and a neighborhood. Somebody who has a long history of being viewed as a local oppressor or patronage source, maybe they’re in and out of electoral politics. There aren’t a lot of them, but there are too many. And when there’s fear of physical violence or official corruption . . . Even the legitimate sources of government have not figured out how to avoid these players.

Mediation, Duplicity, and Stake

Many of the participants worried considerably about how they conducted themselves when mediating between a community (or set of community interests) and these other sources of power. They acknowledged that sometimes funders and communities had different agendas, that stakeholders within communities had different agendas, and that it was unproductive to be closely identified with one side or another. “I feel very alone all the time,” said one participant. “And I feel duplicitous” because the job requires having an “insider’s” role in what often feels like competing or unfriendly camps. Another participant said it was like being “a double agent.” But, he added, “the difference between duplicitousness and mediation is purpose and integrity.” The role of manager, participants

agreed, has that purpose and integrity. “Somebody has to play this role of connecting us together,” one said. “We can

I say I’m an electrician. . . . I make connections within the neighborhood, and I connect the neighborhood to some of these other folks [with political/economic power].

be that connector. That’s our job. What we have to do is find a way to make sure it’s legitimate.”

The image of manager as connector struck a chord with all the participants. One of them characterized it as a “way out” of the “insider vs. outsider” division that so many people in CCIs refer to. “These themes—insider-outsider, inclusion-exclusion, close to politicians vs. close to the neighborhood . . . [are full of] hypocrisy, duplicity, and denial,” said one participant. “So I say I’m an electrician. I want to get down to the mechanics of it, to a professional role. I make connections within the neighborhood, and I connect the neighborhood to some of these other folks [with political/economic power].”

Leading from behind

Understanding the nuances of power and having access, however, doesn’t guarantee anything, said managers. Successfully making connections relies a lot on personal factors. And while race was a consideration in these kinds of interactions, managers’ comments suggested that personal style was much more important.

In individual interviews, most of these participants said it was important that a manager be a person of color because of the likelihood that CCI community residents would be people of color, and because of the need to develop relationships of trust within the community. One participant underscored this comment by saying that in her initiative the specific race or ethnicity of the manager mattered less than

his or her not being white. And all of the participants acknowledged that race was a factor in their being hired, whether it was because of an affirmative choice for someone of color, or because they were hired *despite* being white.

But race doesn’t really get you very far in the work, they noted. Being a successful connector, said managers, depended in large part upon their personal style. “I’m real diplomatic,” said one participant. “There’s probably some influence I have because . . . I’m the person people engage in conversations, so I’m able to get things done that otherwise might not get done.” Another manager described himself as “nonconfrontational.” All of these managers, even those who described themselves as “very direct,” suggested that an important lesson of the job had been about what one participant referred to as “leading from behind”—the ability to help make things happen without dictating how it is done.

A key component of leading from behind, they agreed with considerable vigor, was letting others take credit for developments. Everyone wants to grab credit in this “slick brochure mentality” of today, said one manager. Funders, in particular, were criticized by these managers for being more concerned about credit than actual success. One participant talked about foundations that “spend more time fighting over whose initiative it is than doing the work.”

Taking credit away from the community, said one participant to general agreement, also “gets in the way of sustainability. It gets in the way of leaving something behind that can stay behind.” Many funders, these managers agreed, have not learned this lesson. One participant said,

An enlightened foundation will want their credit to be because the people they funded did good stuff. You take the credit because folks you gave money to did something good. [The folks who did it] get to take credit for it because their work fuels more good work, more resources, and more attention. If you want to put it in crass foundation terms, it’s an exit strategy. You can leave at the end and people won’t hate you.

This was echoed by another participant, who suggested that if outsiders such as funders or managers get all the credit for successes in a community, it defeats the objective of building local capacity. In one case, a community collaborative board made this point to a potential funder:

The community said, “we want more than dollars. The dollars are nice, but [this initiative] could end. We want something that’s going to be more permanent, so we want to look at capacity building in our community, we want to have that relationship with people that we [can] work with on a day-to-day basis.”

Some funders, we were told, have learned how to back away from a directive role to support local control, but managers agreed it is rare. In one of these rare cases, a participant described how the manager’s brokering role can be important in helping a funder make that shift:

In the beginning, the foundation wanted to focus on child development. But then the community made it clear that, while child development is an okay issue, “[there are other] things we’re interested in, and this is how we choose to look at a community.” And that was part of [my] communication: to let [the funder] know I trust the community, and that [the funder’s] concern about child development will be addressed through this process. And the funder’s [insistence] was removed. So I think that’s very critical, to show that support for the community.

The importance of race

The interviews and focus group with managers left no question about the importance of race in CCIs, but this group in particular struggled with their own responsibility for raising the issues of race and power, the opportunities for doing so in CCIs, the various influences of race in community building, and the likelihood that something good could come of dialogue. As one participant said in a follow-up interview,

The farther away I get from the focus group, the guiltier I feel about being the [manager] of a project like this and not having taken the initiative to talk, internally with staff or with residents, about race and power. Maybe if it were an internal dialogue on a regular basis, maybe we could introduce that into the initiative. I really feel I [haven’t done] that. And I think to myself, “how could you have been doing this work for [so many] years and not talked about race?”

A number of participants told stories about diversity trainings or special sessions on race that had gone badly. One manager said their training “almost collapsed our entire environment.” Others suggested that the racial contrast between funders and community residents was sym-

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bolic of the racial tensions across CCIs. One participant said, “If you lined up the program officers from the foundations, the heads of the lead organizations, and me, you got mostly white. That did not go unnoticed. It wasn’t addressed, but it was noticed.” Another commented that

a lot of community organizing has been fairly adversarial: using issues of race and poverty framed in terms of oppression with the objective of throwing off that oppression. And the funders know that they’re identified with the oppressors. So I think there’s a real tentativeness that comes into the partnership building [between funders and community representatives]. It’s not conflict. A lot of times, it’s this incredibly careful,

diplomatic, polite dancing [because everyone] fears really meaningful communication.

Moving Beyond Dialogue

Other managers agreed that it was very hard to promote dialogue and understanding, but they also seemed to agree that dialogue alone missed the point. For example, one manager told us,

We thought we were working on the race issues by bringing people together. We thought, all right, most of the people who live in these neighborhoods are black, and most of the people who will come from the academic institutions and from the [sponsoring] institutions will be white. So we're bringing black and white folks together. And when we bring them together, they will find out that they're all human beings and they will like each other. But what happened was, the community people said, "we told you that's what they were like." And the economic people said, "we told you that's what they were like." So something else needs to be done in addition to just bringing folks together.

Managers had numerous stories about failed dialogue. They also agreed that there were lots of other reasons race isn't "on the table." Said one participant, "The field has not established that the work is not good work unless it addresses race. We have mandates on collaboration. On resident involvement. Those are mandates. We don't have a mandate on race." One manager suggested that "ultimately, for me, it's about picking winnable battles. Framing solvable problems. And what I run into with race is that, for me, I haven't figured out how to frame the problem right. I don't know how to win this battle." Another participant added that "defining winning" was also problematic. A white participant worried about "the legitimacy of being the one to put it on the table."

But these participants also agreed that—however open or constrained—dialogue on race did not really further

the "social justice" agenda that, for many of them, was at the heart of CCIs. Working toward greater social justice by attacking systematic inequalities, they agreed, lies at the core of their work. If you just focus on dialogue, said one participant, "the media is the message." Whereas, he pointed out, "it's what we do that is about race. Not what we say about what we do, or what we say to each other as we do it." In fact, much of what these managers talked about suggested that—despite feeling that they had not adequately tackled race and power—many initiatives are addressing the issues in instrumental ways.

One participant, for example, talked about focusing on political capacity building after attempts to form community coalitions across racial or ethnic lines foundered. He said,

We did not have a lot of luck in bringing together different ethnic groups in the neighborhoods. And we're looking at it as a capacity question. Our evaluators and organizers all said that the African American community and the Latino community had very different levels of organization. They said, "you've got generations of activism in the African American community. You'll find there's more skill at working the system and much more skepticism of large initiatives. On the other hand, a lot of Latino communities are new immigrants who aren't used to thinking about having input into a policy process or affecting government service delivery." And that's what we're working with: the block clubs that have been there for two generations, they're all set to go. But you put them in the room with some [less organized] Latinos, and they [don't] get along. So we literally have two different organizing tracks going on simultaneously in the same neighborhoods. There needs to be a leveling of the playing field. And I think capacity building does that. As an initiative manager what I can do is keep those separate capacity building tracks going at the same time until there can be a merging.

The Value and Difficulty of Dialogue

In the focus group, initiative managers seemed quickly to reach a comfort level that allowed very free-flowing and productive conversation. For the most part, this group recognized and tended to reinforce as valid the experiences and perspectives raised in the discussion, even when those experiences were quite different from one another.

This group's interaction also gave rise to some notable clashes of perspective that speak to the difficulty of interracial and interethnic discussions of power and race.

In one instance, an African American participant tried to explain why "we look at white people and think, 'look what you did to me. You. What you did to me.' We keep looking at white people as those who have enslaved us, and white people look at their great-grandfathers as those who enslaved us, so we can't even talk." Unwittingly proving the point, a white participant in the group expressed surprise at this, saying "That doesn't make sense to me. Because you're an incredibly thoughtful person, and I have a hard time believing that you would look at one of us and be mad because of something that . . ."

The other moment of note occurred when one member of the group was talking about common threads through diversity, the issues or feelings that unite everyone. The comment made was, "I think we have in common a vision of a land of opportunity, whether we were here on a reservation first, or brought here, or came here because of oppression . . ." And the response that interrupted this comment was that, in the beginning, "there was no 'reservation'. . . remember?"

Both these moments galvanized the group within a broader reflection on the value of dialogue around power and race. As reflected in this essay, the consensus was that dialogue was necessary (if insufficient), but extremely difficult. Many people referred to the fear many individuals have of "saying the wrong thing," that either results in homogenized, "politically correct" conversations or reticence that leads nowhere. This group managed to accommodate these potentially very awkward moments. They were moments that gave teeth to the opinion often expressed that these are sensitive subjects. But each time, the group also felt that a lesson had been learned, and used it as an opportunity to point out both how difficult and how valuable such exchanges can be.

Another participant talked about the structure of a community steering committee for the initiative, and how they had consciously had equal numbers of seats for each ethnic group in the neighborhoods regardless of the actual proportions of groups in the population. One manager told a story about the funders of the initiative and a concerted effort to diversify at that level. Still another participant talked about the power of data to move an agenda on race. He said,

My job is to put on the table every day information that reveals racial disaggregation of impact and racial inequities on funding distribution. It's

on the table not as a discussion, or to further a dialogue about race, but to look at that information and do something about it. Our theory is we get some facts on the table before we get stopped, and all of a sudden the facts speak for themselves. Out of that, change comes. And the difference for me is the difference between wasting my time and having a shot at something meaningful.

A story from a different initiative also emphasized the idea that "information is power." We were told,

The city has tons of codes. A car cannot sit out on the street ten days without being moved, or a house is not supposed to sit there over six months without windows getting boarded up. An empty lot is supposed to be cut every week. And you go in our neighborhoods and what do you have? Cars that have been there for three years, lots grown up to here, empty houses that have become cocaine houses, with windows open. So the [community collaborative] decided to “make the city enforce their codes.” And they brought to the first meeting with the city the location of every car, every unboarded house, every vacant lot. They came to the table with ammunition, and it was very embarrassing to the city. The city didn’t even have that [stuff]—they just had no sense of it.

Challenges to Inclusivity

In their discussions about race, managers talked about two different kinds of problems often characterized as racial divisions. The first is the power imbalance between the largely white, monied elite and the minority poor concentrated in depleted neighborhoods. Taking action to solve problems associated with that imbalance is what participants meant when they talked about “social justice”—actions that capture resources, services, or political attention and action for those typically passed over. In that context, managers agreed, race tends to be characterized by the “black/white” issues, at times despite the reality of changing demographics. “It’s very embarrassing,” said one participant (whose point was then echoed by another), “but [in my area] we’re rude in overlooking people of other racial or ethnic groups. We don’t talk about them, we don’t include them. It’s black-white, and it’s a culture that believes that the black and white thing must be resolved [first].”

The second kind of problem associated with race has more to do with community power struggles, particularly those involving different racial or ethnic groups who may, as suggested above, have different orientations

toward collective action, or who have historic rivalries, or who are vying for the scarce attention and resources focused on poor populations. CCIs tend to emphasize “inclusivity” and “equal representation” in planning documents and descriptions, however, and that means that finding ways to bridge these divisions can become a central focus of managers’ efforts. One participant said,

[Initiatives] are not nearly prepared for this [change in demographics]. We haven’t figured out how to make it comfortable for certain groups to participate, and that is because the conversation understands it as black-white. You think about it in terms of representation, so you get one or two people from different populations. But some people don’t operate like that, at meetings month after month. And so what does that mean in terms of how you operate? How you think about representation?

As suggested above, how one assesses the diversity of a neighborhood and takes it into account can have important implications for a CCI. Said another participant,

Inter-group fighting or conflict is a problem. We’re concerned about deployment of resources, capacity for strategic planning within a neighborhood, a new kind of power and connections to economic development. But let’s keep an eye on what else is going on here. What if these neighborhoods are being reinvigorated economically by an influx of new immigrants? What else should we be aware of? How do the needs change? It’s a constant power game and it leaves the primary goal of attaining more power for powerless communities untouched if we don’t keep our eye on the potential for changing dynamics within the neighborhoods.

One manager was frustrated by what he saw as a contradiction between the CCI goal of “strengthening rela-

tionships among different cultural groups in communities” and “building on the strong social networks that exist” in rapidly changing communities when the networks that exist “are basically segregated” by race and often by class. Initiatives in California, particularly, said participants, “are dealing with a complexity that no one really gets. And we look for points of intersection, but they’re loose-knit. It’s not sustainable.”

Another participant argued that

we chose changing neighborhoods on purpose, and one of the [biggest] changes is diversity. So you acknowledge that change of any sort can destabilize a neighborhood. It’s just a fact. And so we encouraged people to think about community development strategies that will encourage conversation, build bridges, and acknowledge the changing diversity in the neighborhood.

One example of a community group taking on that challenge was given by another participant. She said,

In [the neighborhood] there are five categories for voices at the table, and in the beginning it did look more black and white, until the committee took it upon themselves to talk about “how do we bring those other voices to the table, and how do we keep those voices at the table?” The neighborhood had changed, and it was the responsibility of the committee and staff to go out and recruit, and encourage, and work with individuals to determine their level of comfort. A lot of people may not want to come to monthly meetings, but the committee tried to anticipate that and meetings are held later in the evening, and they make sure there’s food. They ask people, “Do you want to bring food? Who should we buy food from?” The people get involved in that process. And one of the first lessons learned—even though they did the process, and grant-making, and all this organizational stuff—the

thing that wasn’t anticipated was the cultural experience. You know, “what I really found out was this about the Hmong culture, or this about the Ethiopian culture, or that this was going on

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in the African American community.” And understanding from the Hmong experience why preserving language was important to Native Americans, because it’s how people relate to their culture. I would say it can work, but it takes a lot of effort and commitment from the people that sit at the table to make that work.

Even within neighborhoods that are not changing and are ethnically homogeneous, said managers, other forms of internal divisions surface that frustrate attempts at inclusivity and complicate the process of building bridges for collaboration. “In those communities, the issues are not really about race, but about class,” said one participant. “Then you get things like home ownership vs. renting, working vs. not working, that whole variety of things that are race [neutral], but are critical in the neighborhood.”

Another manager agreed, saying:

We can think about this in terms of race, but we pretty quickly have to start talking about power in order to understand it and deal with it. Usually, inclusivity comes out in terms of racial and ethnic inclusion, but in homogeneous neighborhoods the challenges are how are the young people getting in, or something about dealing with people

who are poor, or the owners vs. renters. For me that's been much tougher than the ethnic/ racial stuff. It's at least as big a challenge as race. And there are people who see themselves as gatekeepers—traditional, older people, who feel like they've done it—acting “on behalf” of all these other people: the renters, who tend to be “newer comers,” younger, more dependent on public assistance and so forth. And we can't detect that by way of a race lens, because when the people come to the table, they look like the right color. But when you start trying to say, “well, we would like to be able to talk about folks who will be [affected] by this change in welfare, are they represented here?” and they say, “well, they don't need to come.”

The promise and limitations of CCIs

While these managers were deeply invested in the work and principles of CCIs, each of them also carried a degree of skepticism about the ability of CCIs to forge substantial changes in the dynamics of power and race that they identified in these conversations.

Part of their skepticism revolved around the nature of CCI sponsorship, and the difficulties of mixing either a foundation or corporate ethos with the idea of community control and autonomy or “partnership.” For example, when told that funders in this project had specifically said they preferred to work with community grantees that “stood up to” them and “pushed them” to rethink decisions, managers were dismissive. “They don't mean it,” said one participant. Another commented that “it depends on who's in the room. The funders that are in the room may not necessarily have [a lot of] influence in their own organization. That's what we find—this community building stuff . . . tends not to carry the foundation on these questions. It's somewhat marginalized in the foundation.”

Another source of skepticism had to do with the limited scope of CCIs. Said one participant who worked on a national initiative,

I'm sorry, but the whole race issue is not going to be better or worse based on [this initiative's] little investment. I don't mean to diminish the importance of the work to those people who live in those communities. But the intervention has to equal the scope of the issue . . . Our [initiative] is not going to change the face of race issues in America.

As did some other groups in this project, managers also spoke of CCIs as opportunities to demonstrate ideas and alternative practices in the absence of resources. Said one,

I think we envision that if we're able to demonstrate in one place in our cities that this [CCI approach] can make a difference, it can have a ripple effect that ultimately has real positive implications . . . it takes on this bigger proportion. And the race situation is the same way. Like this one neighborhood, they're creating the space to celebrate diversity. And creating the space where kids come up with a very different understanding about how to interact with each other. They think they actually make a contribution to the greater city by just lifting up the fact that they're not parochial . . . And I think they're on target. We can't get enough money put on the table to experiment with this like it needs. So we've got to go at it neighborhood by neighborhood.

Ultimately, if a consensus was reached within the managers group, it was that CCIs are working on all these issues neighborhood by neighborhood, and that each has contributed to local change. Though they could not agree that the sum of the efforts would ever push beyond the formidable obstacles to progress, managers did find significant value in each contribution. “On the community side,” concluded one participant, “we have strong legacies in the community from the [initiative]. And we have strong organizational efforts now around some of its projects. And we have new partnerships that are not based on funders. Because we were there.”

Endnotes

- 1 Sponsor and funder are not always the same thing in CCIs. For example, the Atlanta Project was sponsored by the Carter Center in Atlanta but funded largely with corporate dollars. Other initiatives have been sponsored by a funding consortium, not by one dominant foundation.

RESPONSE:

Race and Power in Community Building: “Starting with Self”

Eric B. Brettschneider

Eric Brettschneider is project director for the Agenda for Children Tomorrow in New York City.

On a car ride with my family at the age of 10, I blurted a question to my dad in the front seat, “Why did the Nazis hate the Jews?” My dad, in a voice filled with frustration and anger, responded “That’s a stupid question.” And though my mom quickly came to my defense and insisted that my question was not stupid, I wondered if I had asked a good question. For most of my childhood the question was strategically avoided. But without that question answered, the ground beneath me sometimes felt like sinking sand.

The sinking sand phenomenon has followed me throughout my life. In particular, it has influenced the framing and texture of my conversation within the field of community building, a field whose name implies that the foundation is firmly set on solid ground. Yet, day after day, I find the conversations in which I engage lacking in honesty on the matters of race and power (two fundamental elements of building community). Harvard Law Professor David Wilkins has warned, “Not only are we as a nation destined to fail to solve the problem of color-line in this century, but we are in danger of losing our ability to even talk about the subject intelligently.”¹ Now at the Agenda for Children Tomorrow Project, I worry that the concrete mix from which we start our conversa-

tion is too wet and lacking in grit to make the friction of power and race instructive to our work.

My loving but sometimes dysfunctional family also gave me my first experience as a mediator. Dad and brother (age 18) fought over my older brother’s ability to pay for his first apartment. Dad stormed out after announcing “I’ll never speak to you again.” They did not talk for a year. I couldn’t stand it. What to do?

When my bother came to pick up clothing one day at the apartment. I told him that dad said he’s sorry and he hopes you’ll forgive him. Running upstairs, I told my dad that my brother is crying downstairs, says he made a mistake and apologizes for calling you a name. What happened next was the beginning of a new relationship: an hour later, before leaving on a long trip, my brother walked into dad’s bedroom and said “goodbye.” My dad said “bye.” The silence was broken. Until today, I never told dad or brother about what I did.

My diplomatic style has matured since then, yet my struggle to find ways to lead a conversation on the fundamental tenets for empowering communities continues. Stuart Math’s recent documentary *Shaker Heights, the*

... by knowing politicians and community leaders I could be a connector that linked them, and by being one octave more in tune with the oppressed than the establishment (and yet part of the establishment) I could similarly mediate between those two groups.

Struggle for Integration vividly documents the value of a genuine struggle. The documentary portrays a community marketing its integration efforts: a school paper publishes a news article that threatens its successes and kids

schooled in encounter and mentoring techniques begin to heal a community through honest discussion on what's keeping the community apart. Building on each other's strengths helped Shaker Heights become a place for all children to live, but most of all, a place where struggle was welcome and inevitable.

One question that I've had to ask myself as I attempt to do this work concerns my own capacity to lead or facilitate collaborative work where race and power are critical matters. How sensitive to these experiences and forces am I? How will I be perceived? Ron Register, a colleague I admire, said to me, "if your motive is healing, peace-making, and not mere self-promotion, your intervention has value." My answers continue to evolve, but I've reached some preliminary judgments:

1. I've passed first grade on the course "know that you will never understand the unique experience of those who are the victims of racial discrimination, and why that is so."
2. I learned from a Colgate University sit-in in 1968 how to lead from behind. African Americans appropriately led a movement against the fraternity black-ball system and I sat with them.
3. I've learned from a riot in 1969 how the death of an African American child (Clifford Glover) from the gun shot of a policeman in Jamaica, Queens, could lead to a police containment policy designed to protect another more powerful community. Years later I learned how a similar tactic in 1989 could offend the Jewish segment of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and contribute to the ouster of New York City's first African American mayor.
4. I learned that by knowing politicians and community leaders I could be a connector that linked them, and how by being one octave more in tune with the oppressed than the establishment (and yet part of the establishment) I could similarly mediate between those two groups.
5. I've learned that collaboration is "an unnatural act between two or more nonconsenting parties" and I've learned to be the facilitator of collaboration.
6. I believe that diplomacy and the ability to translate the passion of hurt people to the jargon of bureaucrats can be the skills that relieve tension and enable progress.
7. I've discovered that betrayals, bogs in problem solving, and predictable "to hell with you" moments can be overcome by warning others early in the conversation about the possibility of such events.
8. I'm reminded frequently of an old lesson from my childhood: that building a relationship on loyalty and then running away to new friends earns you the hateful label "flat leaver."
9. It was dad who said, "If you don't lie you don't have to have a good memory"—yet forgetfulness can serve one well too. For example, when dad's Alzheimer's was worsening, Uncle Lou called from L.A. (they had not spoken for years). "Who's that?" asked dad. "Lou, my brother? Give me that phone—hey kid how ya doin'?" He forgot he had been angry at him.
10. Local demagogues are less likely to challenge community building efforts if those efforts are steeped in substantive planning rather than political maneuvering and if they have connections to larger political forces based on substance.
11. If African Americans and Latinos are included in hiring, building a representative work force is not hard.

The Agenda for Children Tomorrow is 10 years old this year, 1999. It too is groping with issues of power and race and duplicity and integrity. In some ways, I am also 10 again, too frightened to speak the truth, too nervous to volunteer and yet anxious enough to find opportunities to join a dialogue about race and power . . . not so anxious though as to create the dialogue and assume all parts. The lessons I talk about here are mine. I am convinced that self examination is a critical ingredient to my own desire to become an ever more honest participant. I may be justifying and rationalizing, but I hope that I am empowering myself by finding the deference I need to work in this community building field.

Endnotes

- 1 Appiah, K. A. and Gutman, A. (1996). *Color conscious*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 33.

RESPONSE:

Racial Power and Community Building: An Internal Contradiction?

Elwood M. Hopkins

Elwood Hopkins is the project director of the Los Angeles Urban Funders.

Most comprehensive community-building initiatives aim to strengthen the social networks of low-income neighborhoods, and stabilize multicultural relations at the same time. In principle, these laudable goals appear to reinforce one another. In practice, however, they embody an internal contradiction: Natural social networks are often ethnically identified, and strengthening them may inadvertently fuel ethnic power struggles.

The literature on social capital and civil society, drawing empirically from history, states that communities with strong voluntary associations, extended family structures, and natural helping networks will be healthier and more

prosperous than those without. Put simply, the goal of CCI is to help modern minority groups maneuver the urban economy, just as Irish and Italians overtook fire and police departments in the early 1900s, or, more recently, Koreans dominated grocer associations.

What is often overlooked is that most social groups get ahead economically because of loyalty, exclusivity, and ethnic identification. Romanticized accounts of “community building” among the Irish, Italians, Jews, Koreans, or Chinese often ignore the fiercely competitive environment that existed among these factions. Today’s minority groups can only be expected to do the same. In Los Angeles, where neighborhoods regularly undergo seismic demographic transitions (and social geography is hotly contested), the situation is especially tender.

In Pacoima, for example, the Los Angeles Urban Funders are working through vast parent associations in a network of school-based parent centers. The strength of these associations is derived from common experiences the members share: most are young Mexican-American mothers (ages 20–40) whose conversation topics range from child-rearing, to classroom volunteerism, to who makes the best tamales. But the community is at least 15 percent black. For the dwindling number of African Americans in the area, these centers are a club where they are not members.

Conversely, in Hyde Park, a neatly boundaried enclave of South Central, the predominant social networks

Our ultimate intention is to pull the different groups together in productive ways, but only after they have each established an internal sense of strength, and understand the specific benefits of collaboration with their neighbors.

are the more than forty neighborhood watch clubs, which are led by a staunch cadre of elderly African American homeowners. A majority of residents share similar child-

hood experiences from the deep South, and their style of organizing is rooted in long traditions of civil rights activism and community mobilization. For the rapidly growing number of Latino apartment dwellers, these groups seem closed and forbidding.

As initiative managers, then, we are faced with a dilemma: how to lead from the strength of existing social capital, but not fuel ethnic strife by reinforcing exclusionary practices. In Los Angeles, our solution has been one of delicate compromise: pursuing dual organizing tracks within the separate ethnic groups and forever seeking points of intersection between the two. Our ultimate intention is to pull the different groups together in productive ways, but only after they have each established an internal sense of strength, and understand the specific benefits of collaboration with their neighbors.

How does this play out? In the case of the first neighborhood, the Latino parent groups were determined to launch a massive workforce development strategy. At the same time, African Americans, organized through their churches, articulated their own vision: improved youth services. By comparing both sets of interest, we immediately saw a point of collaboration to be nurtured: a common desire to help local youth find jobs.

In Hyde Park, we are still attempting to identify Latino social networks. Spanish speaking residents, enlisted expressly for the purpose, interview their neighbors with questions like, “Where do you go when you need help?” and “What do you do on the weekends?” Thus far, we have uncovered only small pockets of activity: a few home-based prayer groups, a school-based parent association, a soccer league. In this case, the initiative may have to take responsibility for cultivating networks that do not yet exist.

In the long run, of course, the desired outcome is a neighborhood where diverse peoples can form a community bond that transcends culture, race, or ethnicity. But without first helping groups to have strong internal identity, collaboration with others is destined to be little more than a superficial exercise that glosses over collective insecurities, and fails to produce real communities, or meaningful social change.

RESPONSE:

Too Limited to Tackle Race

Kathryn E. Merchant

Kathryn Merchant is president/CEO of The Greater Cincinnati Foundation and former director (1993–97) of The Pew Charitable Trust’s Neighborhood Preservation Initiative (NPI).

NPI chose ten neighborhoods in nine cities to participate in a national CCI that differed from others in its focus on transitional neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were changing rapidly—economically, physically, demographically, and socially. They had many assets, but were clearly threatened by the same negative forces already quite evident in more distressed communities.

Most significantly, all of the neighborhoods were changing racially or ethnically, and found their shifting diversity most challenging. Racial issues were a major factor. For example, East Boston experienced a significant influx of Asian and South American immigrants into a predominantly Italian-American community. Many people would be surprised to learn that San Francisco’s Chinatown was beginning to diversify as other Asians groups, Russian Jews, and some Hispanic families moved into Chinatown’s affordable public housing. Several Midwestern cities were dealing with racial tensions in predominantly white communities as increasing numbers of black families moved into their neighborhoods.

As the Chapin Hall report so correctly states, the issue of race is central to CCIs, and thus it was so for NPI. But NPI’s approach to addressing the issue of race was considered to be too little and too passive by the consultants who managed the final days of the initiative in 1997. I am sure they would agree with Chapin Hall’s general assertion that the issue of race has been largely unexamined by CCIs.

In retrospect, I see their point. It is tempting to look back upon the experience of managing NPI and say: “Well, despite the criticisms, we did not entirely ignore this complex and weighty issue. We did the best we could with

the knowledge, time (of a two person intermediary staff) and resources we had available to us. Influencing the quality of race relations in our neighborhoods was not an explicit goal of this short-term initiative.”

But I can't just leave it at that and move on. Forwarding to today, The Greater Cincinnati Foundation is sponsoring an up-close-and-personal local multisite initiative with three other local funders patterned largely after NPI. We can see the issue of racial tension more clearly, more often, and with a greater sense of urgency because we live and work in this community every single day. In fact,

I do not think that a national intermediary—especially a small one created for the duration of a time-limited project—can have a significant influence on issues of race in local communities.

one of our three grants supports and encourages a fragile alliance between two bordering neighborhoods whose issues of race and class divide them. We chose this fledgling partnership in hopes of learning something about how two divided neighborhoods might find a way to cross sharp boundaries and discover their common interests. I drive through these two communities every day on my way home from work. I am friends and colleagues with people who live in both of those communities. This isn't just about an initiative, not for any of us.

In the remainder of this short essay I would like to explore the question of what a national intermediary can do to be more helpful to communities struggling with the issue of race. I believe the role of a national intermediary is quite different from that of a local initiative manager, so in this small space I am purposely sticking with the national perspective I brought to the Chapin Hall discussion of CCIs.

First, a recap of what NPI did to address the issue of race. NPI:

- deliberately chose neighborhoods experiencing racial and other types of change, and talked about the issue explicitly in its grantmaking strategy, RFP, selection criteria, and orientation materials;
- encouraged neighborhood leaders to select strategies designed to bring people together across boundaries to see, discuss, and celebrate their differences and similarities, and provided funding for those experiments;
- focused on diversity as the central theme for one of the initiative's five conferences, and asked one of the neighborhoods with the most explicit focus on racial and cultural diversity to plan and host the assembly; and
- made technical assistance funds available for a broad range of nonprogram activities (although the only related use of funds was to encourage broad participation in community-wide planning), and, during site visits, discussed the influence of racial issues on project success.

So what could NPI have done differently? What should national intermediaries do to address the issue of race more intentionally?

In retrospect, I believe that the NPI activities listed above were good and necessary, but perhaps not sufficient. They weren't wrong or bad approaches, they just didn't go far enough. So what would? I have thought long and hard about what a national CCI intermediary might do about this issue. In the end, I recommend strongly that they do very little else. I do not think that a national intermediary—especially a small one created for the duration of a time-limited project—can have a significant influence on issues of race in local communities. More importantly, I'm not sure they should try unless the main objec-

tive of the initiative is to tackle race relations and the funder/sponsor has both the conviction and the purse to stick with one of our country's most complicated issues for a very long period of time. Twentieth century reforms in race relations have come from government (mostly federal) and the deep pockets of private foundations. The architecture of a CCI, by its very design, doesn't have the grit, power, authority, or resources necessary to make a significant difference. My advice: don't promise what you can't deliver. And don't expect what isn't possible.

To me, the issue of race is driven by personal relationships (or the lack thereof). Addressing race issues effectively requires an intimate and sustained conversation. A national CCI intermediary is inherently remote. It is also driven by relationships, but the relationships are episodic, not sustained. It feels unreasonable to expect that a national multisite initiative can do much to address the issue of race in local communities in any meaningful and lasting way.

Surely there is more we can do, but I am not convinced that a national CCI is the most effective medium.

Conclusion



We've heard in this volume about a number of issues common to academic and policy discourse on social and community change: about the corrupting nature of power, the "iron law of oligarchy," the seemingly untouchable influence of global economic actors and structures on local economies, and about more parochial power issues such as the struggle for accountability to the grassroots. We've heard about competing perceptions of racism, enduring prejudices engendered by past injustice, whites' reluctance to deal with the "truth" of white privilege, and evidence of structural racism that reinforces white privilege. We also heard about how all these other issues have been affected by the cultural and political unpredictability of new demographic trends. As modern immigration brings new cultural norms, the patterns of life, commerce, and politics in many communities are changing.

Participants in these discussions also revisited some common themes from CCI research. These include the tensions stemming from the changing roles of philanthropists and community researchers, the ambiguity of an initiative's "legitimacy" in any community, the need for more nuanced understanding of, and attention to, local context, and ambivalence over whether "new," comprehensive theories of community development will bring

more lasting change to communities than the theories and practices that preceded them.¹

It should surprise no one that community initiatives focused on reversing trends of disinvestment and neglect in poor communities of color give rise to all of these issues and tensions. Two questions remain: What do we know now that we didn't know at the beginning of the project? What has a specific focus on power and race in community initiatives yielded?

The first thing we know is that community change initiatives, exemplified in this project by CCIs,² embody a paradox: high levels of consciousness about power inequities in the domestic and international socioeconomic landscape, and the relationship of those inequities to racism appear to coexist with little direct action in initiatives addressing those same inequities and prejudices, and the behavior and structures they engender or reinforce.

Drawing from a range of practitioners³ across the country involved with community revitalization, we found, on the one hand, a high level of consciousness and concern about the strength of power elites in the U.S. and globally, and about the perpetuation of racist attitudes and the ways in which those individual attitudes translate into actions at the community, institutional, and political lev-

els. On the other hand, community initiatives that are typically concentrated in metropolitan communities of color are with rare exception described as very quiet on these topics. The community revitalization efforts described to us by participants rarely reference race or power dynamics in their conceptual structure or formal objectives, unless it is to talk about local “ownership” and other components of an ambiguous empowerment agenda, or to acknowledge the “demographics of disinvestment,” which means to acknowledge that poverty concentrates in communities of color. Instead, most initiatives appear to rely on increasing community cohesion (community building) to produce power and some mixture of cultural consciousness-raising and diversity in staffing to address lingering tensions around race.

What is also clear from this series of conversations with practitioners is that despite a general consciousness, there persists a lack of consensus around the pervasiveness or severity of structural racism (i.e., racism embedded in social policies and patterns of behavior that reinforces white privilege and/or racially skewed socioeconomic

There is a reluctance in initiatives to explicitly identify and attack the underlying structures and practices of power and racism that most practitioners in this project believe contribute to community disinvestment and poverty.

inequity) and its effects on empowerment and revitalization efforts. That lack of consensus, along with nervousness and uncertainty about how and whether structural racism can be defined, identified, and usefully discussed and addressed, in turn fuels a widespread lack of *will*—particularly among initiative sponsors—to make these issues a strategic priority in community initiatives.

In sum, there is a reluctance in initiatives to explicitly identify and attack the underlying structures and practices of power and racism that most practitioners in this project believe contribute to community disinvestment and poverty. That reluctance appears to be comprised partly of uncertainty around what these structures and practices are, partly of fear of upheaval, partly of widespread discomfort with the topic of race, and largely of a general helplessness regarding what should or could be done, especially at the local community level. The problems and the forces in play, we heard from many practitioners, are just “too big” for local initiatives to take on. Others felt that the issues were not so much too big as their individual voices too small to press fruitfully for more explicit action on these issues. Still others, particularly funders who participated in this project, indicated that issues of racism, in particular, were known at all levels of their organizations but in most cases were not dealt with directly, nor were individuals encouraged to do so. The low level of attention to these issues that results, however, feeds a pervasive skepticism about the potential of new community revitalization initiatives to move beyond what one funder called “boutique” efforts, and have a lasting impact on the socioeconomic conditions they seek to address.

Is there a key to unlocking the paradox? This project suggests the answer depends on whether community initiatives can do the following: 1) have sponsors, in particular, take risks within their own institutions and in initiative design regarding how resources are governed and the activities they will support in local initiatives (e.g., talk about community-relevant power and race issues at the foundation board level, build race and power objectives into initiatives, address the distracting nature of foundation power in any foundation-community partnership, and fund community organizing and political activism); 2) have every role and stakeholder in an initiative focus greater attention on community context, particularly as it relates to race and power (e.g., embed initiatives in the social/political/economic history of the neighborhood and its institutions, determine dominant cultural dynamics and new demographic trends, document areas where racism is embedded in social

policy, patterns of behavior, or institutional practice, and attend to these both in plans and in interpersonal dealings); and 3) clearly establish in any initiative the definition of “local control” (i.e., to what extent is it specifically about

Taking the risk of pushing these topics can invite being stereotyped, ostracized, or dismissed as too narrowly or idealistically concerned.

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.

It is not at all clear from this research that these are achievable objectives. In this essay, we’ll explore why.

Why are race and power risky topics?

Conventional wisdom has it that power and race are risky topics, and certainly this project’s participants did not disagree with that assessment. But here we suggest that the risks must be faced to effect change and spur progress. What’s really at risk? This research suggests that risk is calculated at both the personal and the institutional level. And, at both these levels, some popular notions about community building may also be called into question by a careful consideration of power and race dynamics.

Speaking Truth to Power

At a personal level, taking the risk of pushing these topics can invite being stereotyped, ostracized, or dismissed as too narrowly or idealistically concerned. People of color and whites participating in the project described similar sensitivities to the issue of race, in particular. We heard about “eye-roll” incidents such as when whites make blunders in word or deed in a community of color. But when

a person of color “plays the race card” in a meeting, the same sort of reaction may occur among whites. Wishing to avoid a blunder in the first instance, and implicit censure in the latter, individuals censor themselves on these topics to a tremendous degree. Participants in the project who had tried to run meetings with a diverse set of stakeholders (both in terms of race or culture and relative power) spoke of the reticence engendered by this fear of saying or doing the wrong thing.

Raising the topic of race or challenging the assumed authority of someone in the elite also risks being in unpleasant and difficult conversations for uncertain gain, and being blamed for creating that unpleasantness. Many of the participants in this project referred to “cultural norms” of politeness (particularly, though not exclusively, in the south) that inhibit discussion of controversial topics such as power and class or race and racism because it’s rude to introduce that kind of unpleasantness into what is supposed to be a friendly, consensus-building dialogue. And though everyone may be sensitive to this dynamic and wish to avoid it, for people of color within predominantly white institutions such as foundations, universities, or research centers, the risk of being stereotyped in this way is higher because there is some expectation that they will be the ones who raise or “take care of” the issues.

Funders, especially, spoke about these tensions in the context of “selling” a new initiative internally. In particular, they talked about how boards of directors are presented with new work, and the difficulty of making a comparatively large initiative sound like a good investment. To make the case, program staff may exaggerate what will be accomplished, while remaining vague about basic assumptions or mechanisms for change. This helps create a hopeful and ambitious aura around CCIs within the foundation that may garner it support at the board level, but it also works against deep discussion of serious obstacles facing this sort of initiative. Many of the foundation representatives we spoke with for this project felt that they had to curtail their references to racial justice and structural inequities when discussing the ideas behind CCIs. This was especially true when they presented ideas at the board level, in

part because many members of the boards of foundations, due to their influential roles in the corporate world, may embody the entrenched nature of power in white (and specifically white male) hands. On paper, too, serious references to these issues may serve as red flags that bog down a proposal in contentious discussion, and so they are often omitted.

The comfort of program officers within a foundation to publicly characterize community work as about “structural racism” or “economic justice” did expose some differences between the internal dynamics of national foundations and community or family foundations. The more locally-focused the foundation, it appeared, the more comfortable program officers felt about pursuing controversial issues among the staff and, importantly, at the board level. Other comments from practitioners who interact with these funders supported the notion that local foundations had greater flexibility to make changes in the way they interacted with community grantees, and were therefore seen as more responsive to local concerns. With such a small and select sample of foundations and initiatives in this project, it’s impossible to know whether this distinction would bear out across the philanthropic field, or what the relative weight of size, staff experience, local embeddedness, board composition, or foundation leadership might be in establishing internal flexibility for addressing such issues. These questions are certainly worth pursuing.

Thus, both the personal and institutional risks work against the likelihood that issues like redistributive economic justice or structural racism will find their way into the formal objectives of an initiative. Furthermore, foundations and government sponsors have historically shied away from financing political activism (some foundations, for example, will not finance community organizing, and nonprofit groups are closely regulated by federal law to minimize their use of funds for direct lobbying), and so have been slow to respond to entreaties from practitioners in community work for funding that could be devoted to these basic tools of social and political change. The message that is sent to practitioners, then, is that foundations are not serious about their own change initiatives, or

that—while the rhetoric is lofty—they have in fact set their sights very low in terms of what they actually expect to accomplish. For some funders, too, this is an ongoing source of frustration. To others, it was one of the signs that foundations weren’t well positioned (i.e., could not devote sufficient resources or the right sorts of resources, or were too much a part of the power elite) to do this sort of work at all.

To be sure, not everyone is reluctant to raise issues of race or power. Over the course of this project, we heard many references to individuals and groups who “played the race card,” often quite effectively. It is notable, however, that typically these were stories of residents challenging “outsiders” in initiatives, or local leaders attempting to establish legitimacy or credibility by the suggestion of common cause or common understanding with the people of color in a community. In this context, raising race is a play for power and not necessarily an attempt to invoke open dialogue. Such power plays were also noted as being a double-edged sword for many of the reasons noted earlier: on the one hand, they were sometimes effective in muting a previously “controlling” voice coming from predominantly white institutions such as foundations or corporations. On the other hand, claiming race as a dividing line between those who understand and can speak for “community” and those who don’t can sour the attitude of some whites (and others excluded by the tactic) who continue to play important roles in these initiatives. Practitioners across this research were aware of these trade-offs, and thus portrayed using or raising race as both a potential source of power and as a move that could isolate or diminish an individual’s or group’s influence. Each individual, they suggested, has his or her own unique calculus for weighing the risks or benefits of such a strategy.

Wanting to Believe We Can All Get Along

Another risk of putting race, in particular, formally in the mix of an initiative’s objectives is the popular belief that political harmony can coexist with vast cultural diversity. After the L.A. riots of 1992, the country’s racial angst was galvanized by Rodney King’s entreaty, “can’t we all

just get along?” In CCIs, both the effort and the concern about power and race revolves around this question. A lot of effort goes into finding common ground across ethnic, cultural, language, or racial divides because common purpose has historically helped transcend intergroup conflict. Similarly, a lot of concern revolves around the friction between groups or individuals who are *not* getting along due to longstanding conflicts or brand new tensions from perceived preferential treatment or slights.

Community building (a set of principles and objectives guiding many CCIs) also focuses on working through conflict, “putting stuff on the table,” and finding the common ground that will allow everyone to get along and, therefore, work together. CCIs put a premium on diversity and on collaboration—premised on the idea that coalitions of diverse interests, expertise, and background will have the most productive synergies for comprehensive work in a community. But this commitment to work through conflict within diverse groups also engenders the expectation that people will “get past” their differences, or “get over” enduring tensions that are seen as obstacles to collaboration. That expectation, or sometimes just the perception of it, can be its own problem.

“Getting past” lingering tensions brings with it pressure to conform, and to suppress anger or resentment before it may actually be gone. Discussions of elite power

Participants reflected a general sense that initiatives can get “bogged down” by discussions of race or power and so avoid them in order to “do what they need to do.”

or racism tend, on the other hand, to unleash all of that. A moment in the initiative managers’ focus group exemplified this, as a white participant voiced surprise (“you’re a thoughtful person, I wouldn’t expect you to think that...”) when an African American spoke heatedly about how his-

torical oppression of blacks worked as a current source of anger. We also heard from numerous people of color in this project that it’s not just the history of treatment that needs to be acknowledged and “gotten past.” It’s current conditions, current discrimination, and current offenses that are the obstacles to this sort of progress. Why, they asked, are people of color expected to get past something that’s still happening? In this way, participants reflected a general sense that initiatives can get “bogged down” by discussions of race or power and so avoid them in order to “do what they need to do.” Only residents suggested that they were getting tired of being the ones at the local level who were called upon to contain this sort of anger, particularly among youth, and that maybe having that anger expressed, however it comes out, is necessary for progress.

Strength and Weakness in Diversity

Discord is not the only risk of raising power or race. Exploring these issues fully may also challenge other key assumptions behind CCI agendas, such as the vision of a well-functioning, culturally diverse neighborhood. While CCIs and their proponents tend to see diversity in urban communities as inevitable and ultimately good, what is really meant by that varies in important ways. Most CCIs interpret attention to diversity as requiring collaborative work that draws from and represents the various cultures combining in a neighborhood. Yet a number of participants talked about this mandate to get everyone working together as potentially counterproductive.

For example, one participant noted that immigrant communities historically found strength and financial security in keeping to themselves, and that—depending on both timing and context—it might not be in their best interests to form diverse coalitions for certain kinds of change, especially wealth creation. At another level, research on residential segregation suggests that some residential groupings are in part driven by individuals’ preferences for living with “people like them.”⁴ In other words, a CCI’s vision of vibrant diversity may fight an uphill battle against some cultural groups’ instincts on how to build power, to conventional wisdom about how “sense of

community” forms, or even to the personal preferences of neighborhood residents.⁵

One related point repeated by many participants in this and other projects looking at CCI dynamics is that initiative rhetoric often implies that a “healthy community” (i.e., the objective of change) is one that reflects the values of initiative sponsors. Thus, it represents a vision of community held not necessarily by residents who will live there, but by those who may be reaching for a political ideal. If that ideal conflicts with residents’ own preferences, who will risk publicly saying so? Some residents in some initiatives have done so. But desire to attract needed resources, fear of appearing racist or xenophobic or simply narrow-minded, and popular optimism that democracy can thrive within extraordinarily diverse and changing environments all work against open debate of these issues.

As a result, one would expect to find exactly what most participants described: initiatives striving to find common ground within diverse communities that are frequently factionalized according to cultural identities. That factionalization can take different forms. For example, in one initiative community, while there had been some successes on issues supported by the entire community, one cultural group remained upset that specialized social services had not been developed for them. In another community, black and Latino-led institutions vied with each other for control of an initiative, each believing they had a claim—based on community demographics and history—to be the lead agency. In a third instance, a TA provider described an African American audience’s reaction to a description of an initiative as “not about us” because a large proportion of blacks in the initiative community were more recent African immigrants. Finally, one manager went so far as to distinguish the divisive effects of professional standing, commenting that African Americans in “suits” often ignored the ties of “black culture” and acted according to an elitist “corporate culture.”

A further consequence of CCIs’ focus on diversity and collaboration has been the marginalization of conversations among more homogeneous groups about issues that may legitimately be specific to them. A number of

comments made in the course of this research raised the question of whether “politically correct” conceptions of honoring diversity is forcing out of favor discussions (and related efforts) by or on behalf of homogeneous groups (e.g., African Americans or Hmong or Native Americans) because they are seen as too narrowly conceived.

In this project, the need for such “private conversations” appeared most acute around the unique situation and treatment of blacks in urban America. We noted

The question for initiatives is how to build upon the strength of identity, how to recognize and respond to the way identity forms expectations of community and what it means to feel supported “by the community.”

numerous times that African Americans spoke specifically about the black experience in the United States, the challenge to black power of the new diversity in many urban centers, and in particular about the behavior and responsibility of other blacks for seeking change. It’s certainly possible, even likely, that similar conversations within other culturally homogeneous groups need to be given the space to happen as well, free of well-meaning calls for inclusion and multiculturalism. A private conversation among one group does not deny the need for other, more diverse conversations about power and the disenfranchised, people of color, and oppression. But it may behoove initiatives to acknowledge and support these private conversations, unencumbered by the interference of people of good will who cannot partake by dint of being of a different race or culture, or challenges from those who seek to shut down the conversation by labeling it “reverse racism.”

In other words, being able to find common ground and work across ethnic/cultural/racial lines does not nec-

essarily diminish the sense of identity with primary cultural groups, and it may not eliminate the desire of those groups to have their specific ways of life reflected in institutions and political processes. Indeed, this project and others have surfaced tensions within initiatives that stem from a growing diversity of approaches and reactions to basic initiative forms such as public meetings or proportional representation. The question for initiatives is how to build upon the strength of identity, how to recognize and respond to the way identity forms expectations of community and what it means to feel supported “by the community.” As one resident participant put it, “how do you not play favorites?” when setting agendas, especially if you’re trying to counteract the impression that a community agenda is more responsive to one cultural community than others. The answer may still be elusive, but it must involve being able to talk honestly about differences among groups, not just their common ground, and allowing more homogeneous groupings and discussions to occur formally, as part of an initiative’s process and not just as “the meeting after the meeting” that was so often referenced in these interviews and discussions.

The challenges of context

Whether it was researchers talking about needing to reflect more on the specific cultural and historical context of a neighborhood, residents talking about how funders and TA providers need to “do their homework” before designing an initiative or approaching a community for the first time, managers telling stories of initiatives that insisted on development strategies totally at odds with the dominant local culture (or a changing demographic), or directors describing Hatfield and McCoy-like interagency conflict that confounded local efforts at collaboration, this project left no question that understanding the community context in terms of both power and race was an essential ingredient in community initiatives. Unfortunately, this lesson appears to have been widely learned, but rarely operationalized. Why?

Time, Training, and Inclination

Speaking about the need for this kind of contextual under-

standing, a participant in the TA provider group likened appreciating community diversity and power dynamics to doing “magic eyes,” the game in malls and magazines where one has to stare at a psychedelic, scrambled picture and let the eyes “adjust” to see the real picture. She said, “You have to train your eye to really see what’s in that community. If you just assume it’s a meaningless mosaic of colors, then you’ve just destroyed a bridge to understanding what’s there.”

But, as anyone who has ever tried a “magic eyes” puzzle knows, sometimes it takes an awfully long time to see the picture. Likewise, taking in the range of power and race issues that arise in a community takes a particular kind of patience, time, and the knowledge that the work will not go forward well until the picture is reasonably clear. Those elements tend to be missing in CCIs.

Practitioners in this project had a number of role-related explanations for how time, training, and inclination work against unpacking the context of power and race. Researchers cited low levels of funding for their work, the late date at which they are often brought into a project, as well as a lack of training in methods relevant to analyzing power and race issues, all of which mitigate against a deep consideration of some difficult contextual issues. They also suggested that funders, in particular, put pressure on researchers and others to write short, uncomplicated reports and that context is mostly about complex realities. Thus, even if researchers are focusing more on context issues, important insights may get relegated to a footnote or left out of records and reports entirely.

Funders offered a different insight into why race and power are not factored into the basic understanding of community, mostly having to do with the selection of sites for CCIs. One funder noted that CCI sites are geographically determined based on the demographics of need, rather than on some underlying thread of community (e.g., culture) that can be built upon. Another talked about sites being selected that met “partnership” criteria, such as having established institutions that could manage large grants, or incorporating organizations with which a foundation already has a relationship. This suggests that when com-

munities are being suggested or tested as potential “sites” for an initiative, it is mostly poverty and a certain level of institutional readiness, rather than a more nuanced understanding of particular community dynamics, that determine which communities are chosen.

After sites are established, the focus is on having an early impact in order to keep local interest alive and potentially also to satisfy investors in the initiative. Funders, directors, managers, and others mentioned that this pressure to get things done, especially early in an initiative, can further shortchange certain kinds of planning, consideration of local history, and grappling with the roots of con-

... pressure to get things done, especially early in an initiative, can further shortchange certain kinds of planning, consideration of local history, and grappling with the roots of contentious relationships and issues.

tentious relationships and issues, especially if racial discord or power rivalries (or the combination of the two) are suspected to be at the heart of the tensions. Indeed, one participant told us that only now, some ten years after the beginning of an initiative, is the local staff reluctantly suggesting that they need to deal with power and race tensions before they’ll be able to move forward.

Many participants who talked about the importance of understanding context in terms of power and race also expressed a sense of responsibility for helping others grapple with these nuances of community context. But with the exception of one of our participants who runs an organization whose mission is to help agencies and initiatives understand and address diversity in their work with communities, most of the other participants felt stymied personally or professionally when it came to raising race and power issues effectively. We heard that sometimes there

was a conscious decision not to raise race as an issue when organizing across racially different communities. But, as one manager put it, “The field has not established that the work is not good work unless it addresses race. We have mandates on collaboration. On resident involvement. Those are mandates. We don’t have a mandate on race.”

So while it seemed relatively easy for participants in this project to identify power and race as necessary areas of community context to get right, the same personal and institutional concerns about raising, documenting, or discussing power relations and racism appeared to limit practitioner’s actions in this regard.

What Has Been Done?

Although this project did not systematically collect examples of how the context of power and race had been defined or the issues addressed, we did pursue this question both in interviews and to some extent in focus groups. And even though the vast majority of participants felt that power and race were inadequately discussed and addressed, they also did not believe the issues had been ignored.

Most of the actions described by participants as positive examples of “addressing power or race” tended to focus on process issues, such as barriers to diverse participation, rather than on how the community process itself might address or attack structural inequities. Actions in this vein, many of them with important consequences, include diminishing tensions in diverse neighborhoods with cultural celebrations, using translation at meetings to encourage participation of non-English speakers, planning meetings in different venues or at times that would allow working parents, for example, and other hard-to-engage residents to participate in an initiative, or tackling representation issues on a community or collaborative board through innovative election guidelines.⁶ Some researchers and TA providers have also altered their own processes, emphasizing practices such as using diverse teams and “matching” professionals with a dominant culture or ethnicity in a community.⁷ Finally, a number of funders and managers described attempts to host a cross-site meeting or a retreat to focus specifically on race, but

no one had a positive story to tell of this sort of approach to airing the issue. What seems to hold true across these actions is that, at least in part because they are themselves

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fraught with tension and difficulty, they are often seen as ends in themselves and not necessarily as steps that lay a foundation upon which more ambitious agendas regarding power or race can then be built. Indeed, initiative references to the larger policy issues of structural racism or inequality are rare.

Two exceptions to this rule raised in this project were the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative’s strategy of gaining eminent domain over a large parcel of land, and the Agenda for Children Tomorrow’s use of racially disaggregated statistics to show asymmetries in need and service delivery. In the former example, gaining eminent domain transferred the power to prevent illegal dumping and determine some development priorities from the city of Boston to the initiative (as a proxy for the community). In the latter case, the data irrefutably showed how service need and resource allocation were tied to race. In general, other participants concurred that where data could be collected and presented in disaggregated forms, it was a powerful tool for “raising” issues of racism and inequity without necessarily naming them or framing the issues in an accusatory way.⁸

A particularly thorny issue for practitioners is how to raise questions that *are* inherently accusatory and can’t be taken care of with data, such as when the initiative or some component of it in some way imitates the inequities

it ostensibly seeks to address. Examples from CCI implementation were various. The most often cited source of frustration voiced by participants was the hypocrisy of some CCI funders who, while insisting that initiative subcontractors (e.g., TA providers or researchers) be people of color, often themselves had staffs that were not as diverse as those they required in other institutions. Other difficult situations included one described by a resident in which the fiscal agent for an initiative held onto interest from large investments in the initiative rather than reinvesting it in the community. In another initiative a site director described how a sponsor had silenced residents who wanted to speak out against a city decision, saying that the city was an important “partner” in the initiative and might withdraw its cooperation if publicly attacked. A third example given by a resident was about a technical assistance group that appeared to cater only to well-heeled churches in a neighborhood organizing effort, while ignoring smaller churches and affiliated resident groups. Of these cases, only one resulted in action—the legal incorporation of a community collaborative body in order to receive investments directly. The other two led simply to frustration and distrust between the “powerful” or monied partners in the initiative and their resident or community organization counterparts.

Finding and Facing Structural Racism

In describing context, participants in the project were most at ease with the idea of documenting demographic characteristics and shifts in communities, and everyone recognized where failure to do so had created a variety of problems. Demographics, however, are also among the easiest data to collect. Class distinctions, owner vs. renter issues, leadership competitions, institutional rivalries or bad blood between an institution and a particular group, and perceptions of inequitable treatment or discrimination are equally important context issues that can be stickier to identify, hard to quantify, and intractable. In particular, while many actions, policy decisions, institutional practices, and interpersonal interactions may be attributed by individuals to racism, the ways in which racism is truly at

work in a community are difficult to determine without extremely careful analysis. It is that level of analysis that is almost entirely absent from CCI practice and other community change efforts, in part because identifying and addressing structural racism is absent from initiatives' formal objectives and in part because very few professionals involved with CCIs are trained or given a strong directive to look for or to recognize these sorts of problems.

Funders' attention to diversity in CCIs tends to reflect a more superficial moral imperative: funders address concerns regarding race by insisting on researchers of color, race-matching in TA provision and elsewhere, or representation on community collaborative boards that reflects

Every initiative does need to establish to what extent structural racism is at work in a neighborhood, and to what extent breaking down these structures is a focus in the set of overarching goals.

the diversity of the community. What funders tend not to address is whether or not they believe sustainability of community gains relies upon structural change in the operation of policy and politics. It would appear not: the issues of oppression and privilege referenced so often in this project's discussions do not seem to be in CCI plans or rhetoric at all, or if they appear, they are historical explanations for existing conditions. But to the extent that existing practices and patterns of behavior continue to keep change from happening, their absence from the overall agenda of an initiative seems conspicuous and possibly self-defeating.

Because what is expected of an initiative leads to different anticipated outcomes, and consequently different assessments regarding what constitutes failure or success, understanding where structures of power and racism fall

in those expectations is important. Indeed, certain initiatives, such as CCIs, are put forward by the foundations that sponsor them as tests of new theories of social change. It follows that some attention should probably be paid to whether they are structured to have that kind of impact.

If the social and political structures controlling resources are identified as causes of poverty, then they should appear in some form in the strategy. Admittedly, it's possible that some "initiative" communities face greater structural obstacles (such as active bank redlining) than others. Perhaps, therefore, not every initiative needs to target the same structures or issues. But every initiative does need to establish to what extent structural racism is at work in a neighborhood, and to what extent breaking down these structures is a focus in the set of overarching goals. Unfortunately, to be so explicit about this intersection of power and race in initiative planning, conversations at the foundation, community, research, and often municipal levels (and among those stakeholders) would also have to be explicit. Those are the conversations, project participants told us, that simply don't happen.

Local control of what and by whom?

Of all the principles and objectives that typically tie CCIs together, the objective of local empowerment—through leadership development, local "capacity" building,⁹ and often the creation of local governance boards—is among the strongest. Yet this objective is pursued despite persistent ambiguity about its long-term consequences or related objectives. In our interviews, we heard widely different understandings about this component of CCIs, and a number of interpretations of why such a basic question for initiatives (i.e., who should control what?) is so hard to answer.

Individuals and Institutions

Practitioners seemed to approach community empowerment work from two distinct, although often complementary, directions. Academic or policy descriptions of CCIs (typically, though not exclusively from researchers and funders) tended to emphasize comprehensiveness,

merging grassroots and institutional or governmental movements for reform, and building on the tradition of high profile movements for neighborhood revitalization or improved services for the poor such as the Gray Areas project, the Community Action Program and Model Cities, development of CDCs, moves toward services integration, etc. Practitioners involved “on the ground” in initiatives (typically, though not exclusively, directors, managers, TA providers, and residents) tended to describe these initiatives as deriving from more of an individual rights agenda: the civil rights movement, the Black Panther movement, ACORN, and the Alinsky tradition of community organizing. The first perspective tends to emphasize strengthening institutions within communities. The second perspective is more activist in nature, more clearly focused on individuals and addressing social inequity.

Of course, the practical distinctions between these two orientations are not nearly as stark as presented here, and the thrust of most CCIs is to treat them both as necessary components of a “community capacity-building” exercise. In fact, most initiatives tend to work through and with institutions, either creating new collaborative structures within a community or having a “lead agency” in a community spearhead an initiative. And involvement of residents is a priority in almost every CCI, however problematic that may be in initiatives that are typically situated in communities with tens of thousands of residents. Initiatives, in their plans, typically focus on individuals through some aspect of job creation, training, or readiness; school-to-work transitions; local economic bolstering and business development; family and community strengthening through improved services; attention to basic support needs; and activities to build ties among residents. Most also refer to some point in the future when a community will “take ownership” of the change process, either through the success of a new governing collaborative that collects and allocates resources from elsewhere or through the increased capacity and legitimacy of local institutions to garner and distribute resources within the community.

But while complementary in theory, the empowerment of institutions and the empowerment of individuals

can also be the source of confusion and conflict in initiatives, depending in part upon the perspective of the practitioner. Because there seem to be no uniform assumptions among initiative stakeholders about which, if either, should take precedence, practitioners can be confused by the statements or actions of those whose assumptions are different from their own. And that confusion can turn quite easily into disappointment or disillusionment, such as when residents perceive a foundation or technical assistance provider attending more closely to institutional representatives and leaders than to one or more of them.

Other work in the field has surfaced these tensions between resident voice and “community” voice, the extent to which resident approval is necessary for local institutional legitimacy, whether community building can be spearheaded by people—such as agency leaders—who do not reside in the community, and whether institutions can speak for residents.¹⁰ This project does not resolve any of these tensions, but it does underscore the tension between

While the “black-white” paradigm still serves as an important reference point for consideration of race, this research suggests that in practice, those who insist on the continued relevance of that paradigm miss crucial aspects of local power dynamics.

individuals (in particular, residents) and institutions in initiatives, and suggests that greater clarity and consensus about the path of empowerment would be very helpful.

Diversity and Claims to Power

The rapidly changing demographics in many—if not most—urban settings present a key challenge to consensus about who is to be empowered by any given initiative. In this research, practitioners made numerous refer-

ences to how local politics has become challenging in many settings: changing ethnic majorities (e.g., from African American to Hispanic), and divisions among Hispanic groups, among Asian nationalities, and among recent African immigrants and African Americans all contributed to uncertainty around these basic questions of whom to look to for leadership, the legitimacy of representation, and what happens when the “wrong” person or group is given the lead on an initiative that is supposed to work across diverse neighborhoods.

Practitioners also noted that one challenge is the degree to which the old “black-white” paradigm is still assumed to be the standard for addressing issues of race. It appears that in the south and the midwest, there has been no paradigm shift despite demographics that demand it. In other parts of the country, particularly California, those who work in communities have not been able to avoid grappling with these changes, albeit to varying degrees of satisfaction. And while the “black-white” paradigm still serves as an important reference point for consideration of race, this research suggests that in practice, those who insist on the continued relevance of that paradigm miss crucial aspects of local power dynamics.

Foundation Behavior Sets the Tone

Foundations receive the most consistent critique of any of the stakeholders in community initiatives because it is typically their actions that get a CCI started, and it is typically their power position that other practitioners reference in talking about power dynamics. Indeed, foundations’ investment in initiatives can so capture the attention of community actors that it obscures the bigger picture of public or other private funding that the community needs to attract and wants to direct. Initiatives have their own lifespan (typically 2-5 years), during which time “control” or “local voice” refers most often to involvement in allocating *initiative* funding. But if the idea of initiatives is to create conditions that will allow local voice to thrive in the “real time” lifespan of the community, the power struggles between foundation and community and subsequently within the community over initiative funds must

not be allowed to obscure or overwhelm the larger objective. Foundation behavior can help or hinder that process, depending on to what extent the funder takes responsibility 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 out 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. Some funders themselves acknowledge that “partnership” is a vague term suggesting perhaps too much

Because foundations are consistently described as part of the “power elite,” their actions, attitudes, and presumptions are suspect among those that are not.

equality among players, and that “investor” might be a more accurate description of what is intended from their side, given the level of their financial commitment relative to other stakeholders and their intention to play an active role in helping the investment to bear fruit.

But because foundations are consistently described as part of the “power elite,” their actions, attitudes, and presumptions are suspect among those that are not. Community residents, in particular, may see the relationship and behavior of funders as a proxy for how other elite power sources (i.e., government and the corporate sector) are likely to treat and respond to them. Following the “once burned, twice shy” adage, many residents remain suspi-

cious of the empowerment agenda in initiatives, especially when those offering paths to empowerment are themselves in the socioeconomic or political elite.

For example, residents and others in this project noted that foundations maintained a preference for working with credentialed professionals, even while talking about discovering new indigenous leadership. The residents' critique is that many "qualified" individuals get passed over in the course of an initiative because foundations rarely take the risk of seeking out or working with individuals who aren't known, or whose potential can't be evaluated in traditional ways. This also deepens the cynicism toward CCIs of those who believe they should be developing grassroots power because the actions are seen as favoring or strengthening individuals or institutions that "focus on the needs and well-being of establishment interests and institutions"¹¹ rather than finding and focusing on the needs of those who are left out of that establishment.

Many of these "empowerment" issues revolve around the same issues that have surfaced in studies of local governance and capacity building.¹² But in this analysis, race is important to fleshing out the perception of what's at issue and what's at stake. To the extent that establishment entities are perceived as limiting development of power at the local level, or limiting grassroots voice, it is also interpreted by some as structurally racist because "the grassroots" are almost uniformly people of color. At a personal level, to the extent that individuals are patronizing or dismissive of grassroots or uncredentialed actors involved in community initiatives, or unwilling to consider them as viable in leadership positions, it is frequently interpreted as interpersonally racist. In terms of changing demographics, an initiative that grants leadership to one cultural or racial group over another appears to "approve" the power of one over another as well. Thus, adding race to the power analysis points to potentially important aspects of resident orientation and openness to initiatives like CCIs that could improve resident engagement strategies, relationships between sponsors and grassroots practitioners, and local investment of time and energy in new initiatives.

When Power Corrupts

While focusing much of their attention on the controlling behavior of philanthropists and other initiative-specific power dynamics, practitioners also grappled with local obstacles to building power, especially the twin challenges of developing legitimacy among new leadership and then sustaining that legitimacy over time as new leadership becomes the status quo. The obstacles to the first objective of developing legitimate new leadership were characterized as residing mostly with funders and other initiative power sources. The sustainability of legitimacy, however, evoked much soul-searching about how good personal power felt, and how difficult it was to know how to stay truly accountable to the grassroots after growing used to the attentions and respect of the establishment.

Residents and site directors were particularly critical of themselves and their peers in this regard, but most of the other participants reflected on the topic of accountability at some length, particularly the question of how one puts into action a sense of accountability to residents of a community. What does it mean to be accountable to residents? How does accountability translate into action, particularly as an individual or institution gains power and new responsibility to other individuals and entities? Many participants had a story to tell about an individual "forgetting where he or she came from." And some initiatives have themselves become "institutionalized," widely recognized by funding sources for their successful actions, and now must struggle with their own grassroots legitimacy as other community groups complain that they unfairly siphon off funds that are needed for "real" grassroots efforts.

These issues of how success can translate into losing local legitimacy and how one stays accountable to the grassroots stood out for two reasons. First, the concerns about accountability and co-optation were uniform across the groups, though emphasized somewhat differently in each. Second, this central concern about how empowerment can backfire in a local context was one of the only power issues that received attention and discussion independent of race. As such, it may stand out as a key issue

to focus on when looking for ways to transcend tensions related to race in community initiatives.

What's to be done?

This research begs the conclusion that a central problem in the implementation of community initiatives is a lack of guidance from CCI sponsors, leadership, and written frameworks around how and how much to focus on issues of embedded racism or the bias of existing power structures in the conduct of an initiative. Considerations of

Initiative practice and related research that follow from CCI frameworks don't have the direction, guidance, or associated funding to pursue these questions and issues effectively.

structural racism and related systems of political power in the creation and perpetuation of poverty and socioeconomic isolation are mostly absent from CCI frameworks, despite CCI objectives of empowerment and system reform, and despite high levels of consciousness about the persistent challenges that elite power and racism present to this sort of effort. Initiative practice and related research that follow from those frameworks, therefore, don't have the direction, guidance, or associated funding to pursue these questions and issues effectively.

The priority in CCIs, therefore, is consistently on getting other things in the initiative accomplished. And yet, when these frameworks are handed to, and interpreted by, a community implementation team, the question that is frequently raised is to what extent "basic" issues of racism and power imbalances or inequities have been or will be addressed. With no guidance from the framework, however, there is a built-in timidity among practitioners about raising these issues for myriad personal and institutional reasons. The net result is that they are addressed piecemeal, frequently leaving community members and some pro-

fessionals who have tried to raise the issues dissatisfied or actually alienated, and leaving both initiative staff and other intermediaries (including some funders) feeling uncomfortable, unnerved, or impotent in the face of obvious concerns.

It appears that, to be successfully addressed in the context of a CCI, power and race issues have to be embedded in the concepts and objectives that will guide the initiative; in other words, made explicit in the documents that explain what a CCI is going to do and the mechanisms through which community change is expected to happen. Doing so would require discussions within foundations and at board levels that are not happening now. It would require research institutions and other sources of analysis involved with community revitalization strategies to question whether their training and methodologies are sufficient for bringing out and assessing the impact of structural racism. It would require the field to assess whether system inequities based on prejudice are the intended objects of change, and if so how relatively small community initiatives can contribute to a larger agenda of identifying those inequities, determining where and how they are unfairly biased, and breaking them down.

Along with other reviews of the CCI field and its work, this project also suggests that these are not small tasks. On the one hand, the focus on community building inherent in CCIs presents a tantalizing opportunity for progress at the grassroots level regarding interpersonal honesty and institutional attention to power, race, and racism. On the other hand, the question remains whether this sort of grassroots effort can reach into the regional, national, and global institutions and practices that set the tone (and affect the day-to-day life) for communities. In particular, this sort of change requires a level of clarity in planning, purpose, and conversation that is notably absent from most CCIs, especially when the topic is power or race.

We suggested at the outset of this essay that doing what's necessary to address power and race in CCIs may not be possible given all the obstacles. But it would be wrong not to try. Participants in this project were uniformly enthusiastic about the experience of having a

chance to talk through these issues in a focused, organized, and nonjudgmental way. Though as individuals they may have felt they lacked the status or skill to tack-

Doing what's necessary to address power and race in CCIs may not be possible given all the obstacles. But it would be wrong not to try.

le these issues, in focus groups we found abundant energy and desire to work differently, to face contradictions inherent in initiative practice, to provide a counterpoint to the attitude that “you don’t want to go there” on these issues, and to be challenged personally and professionally to make a difference in this regard. The field should recognize and try to capture that collective energy.

Perhaps this book, along with other important work beginning to explain how power and race are at work in communities and community initiatives, will help spur that effort. We hope its format of analysis and discussion will provoke more of the same. At the very least, we hope it will provide a doorway into the many, many discussions that need to happen to begin the process.

Endnotes

- 1 The best review of tensions in CCIs is from Kubisch, A., Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Hirota, J., Joseph, M., Richman, H., & Roberts, M. (1997). *Voices from the field: Learning from the early work of comprehensive community initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families. See also Stone, R. (Ed.). (1996). *Core issues in comprehensive community-building initiatives*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- 2 See the introduction to this volume for a discussion of why we chose CCIs as the focus for this inquiry

- 3 As noted earlier, we include residents who participate actively in community initiatives as “practitioners,” even though they are not necessarily community development professionals.
- 4 Russell Sage Foundation. (1999). *Multi-city study of urban inequality*. (Preliminary Findings). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 5 As Richard Taub points out, the exercise of preference in residential choice is limited to those who have choice, usually by virtue of having financial means. Thus, this last factor may be minimal in many CCI communities. See Taub, R. P., Taylor, D. G., & Dunham, J. D. (1982). *Safe and secure neighborhoods: Territoriality, solidarity and the reduction of crime*. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center.
- 6 See, for example, the essay in this volume by May Louie, describing the decisions of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative regarding the makeup of the DSNI board.
- 7 A number of the participant essays in the chapters on research and technical assistance make note of the benefits and limitations of these practices.
- 8 It should be noted that, while The Agenda for Children Tomorrow’s use of disaggregated statistics as a political tactic was the only initiative practice of such an approach noted in this project, the use of disaggregated statistics is strongly urged by California Tomorrow in its tools for TA providers and is more commonly found in CCI research and evaluations to illuminate descriptions of community dynamics and trends.
- 9 See Chaskin, R., (1999). *Defining community capacity: A framework and implications from a comprehensive community initiative*. Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; and Chaskin, R., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S., and Vidal, A. (2000). *Building community capacity*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- 10 See Chaskin, R. J. & Garg, S. (1997). The issue of governance in neighborhood-based initiatives. *Urban Affairs Review*, 32 (5), 631-661; Chaskin, R. &

Abunimah, A. (1999). A view from the city: Local government perspectives on neighborhood-based governance in community-building initiatives. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 21 (1), 57-78; Kubisch, A., Brown, P., Chaskin, R., Hirota, J., Joseph, M., Richman, H., & Roberts, M. (1997). *Voices from the field: Learning from the early work of comprehensive community initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families; Brown, P. & Garg, S. (1997). *Foundations and comprehensive community*

initiatives: The challenges of partnership. Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; and Stone, R., (Ed.). (1996). *Core issues in comprehensive community-building initiatives*. Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

- 11 Chaskin, R. & Garg, S. (1997). The issue of governance in neighborhood-based initiatives. *Urban Affairs Review*, 32 (5), 631-661.
- 12 See notes 9 and 11, above.

About the Authors



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Ms. Chang is the principal author of *Affirming Children's Roots: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Care and Education* and co-author of *Looking in, Looking Out: Redefining Child Care and Early Education in a Diverse Society*. Her work exploring the implications of diversity for comprehensive community initiatives led to the publication of *Drawing Strength From Diversity: Effective Services to Children, Youth and Families* and *Community Building and Diversity: Principles for Action*.

Margaret Davis is a registered nurse practicing in Chicago and has been widely involved as a volunteer in various initiatives in her community of North Lawndale. She has served as board president of the North Lawndale Family Network (a part of the Chicago Community Trust's Children, Youth, and Families Initiative) and as a member of a small grants group to target grants from the Steans Family Foundation to the community. Ms. Davis was also appointed by the Governor to the African American Family Commission which looked at issues for African Americans in the TANF legislation. She's involved with the NAACP, the Chicago Chapter of the National Black

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Ralph Hamilton currently serves as a Fellow at the Collins Center for Public Policy in Miami, Florida, and at Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago focusing on a range of public policy and research issues. His work bridges the fields of children's policy, poverty and the environment, and the ways that community-based activities, public policies and private market forces can be harnessed to support lasting change. Most recently, Mr. Hamilton was Director of Florida Philanthropy for the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, addressing issues of child and youth development, community and economic development, the arts, the environment, and civil society.

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Keith Holt is managing director of Eyeneye Concepts, Inc., a community planning and development consulting group in Washington, DC, and founder of The Council of the Obsidian, a not-for-profit social research organization concerned with holistic approaches to family and community building. He works through a wide range of organizations including new and emerging community development corporations, local and national funders,

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Patricia Jenny is the director of the Neighborhood Strategies Project, a special community-building initiative at The New York Community Trust, New York City's community foundation. The Neighborhood Strategies Project is a six-year effort to expand economic opportunities for residents of Washington Heights, Mott Haven in the Bronx, and Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Ms. Jenny served as a senior program officer at The Trust from 1983 to 1992, responsible for the community development and environment programs. Prior to that she worked as a consultant in community development public policy.

Sandra Brock Jibrell is a director with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a national philanthropic organization that seeks to improve environments and life outcomes for disadvantaged children and their families. Ms. Jibrell is responsible for community initiatives, the foundation's work in support of comprehensive initiatives that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion innovative responses to the needs of children and families whose opportunities are limited by the effects of poverty. Prior to join-

ing the staff at the Casey Foundation in 1991, she was a senior program officer at the Academy for Educational Development in Washington, D.C., where she directed the Urban Schools Science and Math Program and worked as a technical consultant and evaluator on several other national youth development demonstration programs.

May Louie joined the staff of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1994 as the Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) project director. RCI has been a place within DSNI for learning, innovation, and the development of new tools and resources for this resident-led community planning and organizing effort. Ms. Louie has convened diverse teams of residents and partners to design and conduct an urban village visioning process, a community economic power contingency planning process (using systems thinking techniques), and to establish a resident-led community capacity-building grants process. Before her tenure at DSNI, Ms. Louie was the Chief of Staff for the National Rainbow Coalition, supervising a national staff organizing around civil rights, labor rights, and other fairness issues.

Morgan Lyons is president of Lodestar Management/Research, Inc., a Los Angeles firm specializing in research and management services to nonprofit and public agencies and private foundations in the fields of human service, education, and health. Mr. Lyons has over 20 years of experience conducting applied research and advising program development projects, including recent work with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the James Irvine Foundation, the University of Southern California and the City of Los Angeles.

Ché Madyun is the theater manager of the M. Harriet McCormack Center for the Arts at the Strand Theatre in Dorchester, Massachusetts. She was a founding board member of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and was the first neighborhood resident to be president of that board. She is a longtime resident of the Dudley Street neighborhood.

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Beverly Perkins is the executive director of the Orange Mound Collaborative, a community development organization in Memphis, Tennessee, that is one of four communities participating in the Ford Foundation's Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI). Ms. Perkins previously worked for a local foundation where, in addition to

NFI, she worked on community-building initiatives sponsored by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trust. In another position at the Center for Neighborhoods, she served as a technical assistance provider to over 350 neighborhood organizations in the city of Memphis. She is also the host of a community-radio talk show entitled "In the Neighborhood" that focuses on neighborhood organizations.

Chuck Ridley is the chief executive officer of MAD DADS of Greater Delray Beach, Florida, and a longtime resident of Delray Beach.

Rebecca Stone is a senior research associate at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago where she developed and directs the Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives project. Over the past 20 years, Ms. Stone has been a policy analyst, researcher, and writer in the areas of human rights, government accountability, and child and family support. Prior to joining Chapin Hall, her work included research and writing for Ralph Nader's *Public Citizen*, legislative work in foreign policy and human rights in the U.S. House of Representatives, directing the policy office of the Center for Population Options in Washington, D.C., and directing communications at the Ounce of Prevention Fund in Chicago, Illinois. Now living in Boston, Massachusetts, Ms. Stone continues to work within Chapin Hall's community research area on issues pertaining to CCIs and the intersection of community revitalization and family support.

Glossary



For the purposes of reading this volume, the following clarifications of terminology may be useful.

Agency—a public agency, typically (but not exclusively) one that delivers services within a community or to a large proportion of a community’s residents.

CCI—“comprehensive community initiative.” Typically sited in metropolitan neighborhoods noted for high levels of (for example) poverty, crime, teenage childbearing, child abuse and neglect, and physical deterioration, CCIs employ a “community-building” approach to build local capacities (institutional and individual) for effective collective action aimed at improving some combination of local economy and infrastructure, social supports and networks within communities, and services to children and families.

Community—a geographic locale whose borders define the physical boundaries of an initiative. Also often used to refer broadly to residents of that area and the institutions located within it. Interchangeable with “neighborhood.”

Community Building—efforts focused on establishing (or re-establishing) instrumental ties and reciprocal accountability between and among neighbors, local leaders, and community institutions.

Community Insider/Outsider—refers to the two poles of a spectrum of affiliation with a local community. For example, a resident who has lived many years in the neighbor-

hood, knows and is known by local institutions, may have been raised there or raised a family there, is racially or ethnically of the majority population, and intends to live there is the ultimate insider. A businessperson, government or foundation official who grew up and received his or her education in a different city or even state, lives in a wealthy part of town, is a different race or ethnicity from the majority in the neighborhood, and whose life options are not constrained in any way by the boundaries of the neighborhood is the ultimate outsider. Everyone who has a connection, professional or personal, with a community initiative falls within this spectrum, and it is commonly assumed that the closer to an “insider” one is, the greater one’s stake in the initiative. Similarly, the closer one is to the “outsiders,” the less one’s stake in the fate of the initiative and community. Anyone who falls in this spectrum, however, is a “stakeholder” in the initiative. [See also “Stakeholder.”]

Collaborative—a formal structure established by an initiative that brings together various institutions and individuals for collective work on behalf of the community. A “collaborative board,” which is similar to a board of directors for an initiative, is typically made up of a combination of political stakeholders, funders, service providers, and community residents.

Culture—collectively held practices, principles or beliefs, and traditions with which certain individuals and families identify, and by which individuals within that group recognize each other.

Funder—a source of financing for a community initiative. Typically used to refer to a private foundation, but also applicable to government or individuals. [See also, “Sponsor.”]

Initiative—in this context, a formal, planned, and funded effort to effect change in the quality of life (or a contributing factor to quality of life) of a given neighborhood.

Interpersonal Racism—acts (especially those that are hostile, dismissive, or patronizing) of individuals that suggest a perception of lower status for a person or persons based on their race or ethnicity.

Participant—unless otherwise specified, refers to a participant in this project.

Practitioner—someone actively involved in the implementation of a community initiative, on a professional or volunteer basis.

Resident—someone who makes his or her home in a community that is the site of a CCI. [In this project, we distinguished “resident volunteers” as those residents who actively participated as volunteers in the implementation of an initiative.]

RFP/RFQ—Request for Proposals/Request for Qualifications. Issued by foundations or other funding organizations (e.g.,

government) to solicit applications to do work in a specified area.

Sponsor—typically also a funder, sponsorship carries with it significant involvement in the substantive design of an initiative.

Stakeholder—an individual or institution with a vested interest in the outcome of a community initiative, especially those who have invested time or money in an initiative or those whose professional or personal lives will be altered by the outcome. [See also “Community Insider/Outsider.”]

Structural Racism—discriminatory practices embedded in social policy (e.g., resource distribution, taxation, zoning, transportation policy, lending practices), in institutional behavior (e.g., placement or design of services, hiring or admission practices, pay or promotion), or in patterns of behavior (e.g., real estate “steering” of buyers to one or another neighborhood based on race) that create or reinforce inequities for people of color.

Theories of Change—Formal or informal beliefs about how change typically occurs at the individual, family, or community level. When used in reference to evaluation of community initiatives, Theories of Change refer to the specific set of beliefs about how a given community will change, and how the structure of the initiative reflects that theory.

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