
II. D. UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIES: THREE PATHWAYS OF RACE RELATIONS AND RACIAL JUSTICE WORK

Race relations and racial justice organizations tend to use different approaches to achieve their goals. The approaches can be grouped under three very broad pathways described below¹. When implemented collectively in a high-quality manner, *each of these paths is critical in addressing structural racism in a community change process.*

1. *Racial and Ethnic Competency and Development* – Working with individuals and institutions to build their competencies around the concepts of race and ethnic differences (including knowledge and awareness), and in some cases, develop skills to address power dynamics, racism, internalized white supremacy, and internalized racism.
2. *Race Relations and Reconciliation* – Working to build relationships across racial and ethnic groups to work effectively on community issues and build collective action against racism.
3. *Racial Justice and Equity* – Working to achieve social justice goals, particularly those that involve racial/ethnic equity, through changing laws and institutional policies and practices.

To collaborate with others effectively, you can ask yourself the following questions:

Which of the above pathways is the primary one your organization or your coalition uses? One way to determine that is to ask yourself, if your budget was cut in half tomorrow, and you could only invest in one of the pathways, which one would you choose if your goal is to maximize your impact on community change?

What are the strengths and limitations of your pathway? Through that understanding there is more clarity on what your organization can actually accomplish if you implement your pathway with the needed intensity, duration, and quality. And in thinking about creating sustained change on a community level, what other organizations/groups, using different paths, do you need to partner with to increase your effectiveness and the sustainability of change in your community?

Here are a few questions to think about regarding your primary pathway²:

1. If your pathway achieved the “perfect outcome,” what would that be? What would it look like?
2. What do you believe are the actual outcomes of your pathway? What are the key barriers that can or do prevent your pathway from achieving the intended outcomes?

¹ *Building Capacity and Cultivating Interdependence among Racial Relations and Racial Equity Organizations*, unpublished document, 11/2008 – Potapchuk, Gulati-Partee, and Wright.

² In 2001, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies’ NABRE program sponsored a national How-To Forum to explore how race relations and racial justice organization using different pathways can collaborate to address community issues. These questions were used during the forum. M. Potapchuk, *Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations*. (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004) p. 3.

3. What are the gaps in your pathway? What has your pathway not achieved that you believe is achievable?
4. What does your pathway assume about human nature that informs the types of programs and activities you do? (e.g., People are changeable; people are unchangeable; it's more important to change attitudes; it's more important to change behaviors.)
5. Do your programs and activities focus on a) individuals, b) groups, c) institutions/systems, or d) culture? If your pathway addresses all four levels, can you approximate the percentage of time your programs focus on each of the four levels?
6. Who are the primary constituencies your programs and activities are designed to reach? (e.g., youth, civic leaders, elected officials, neighborhood residents, grassroots organizers, etc.) What assumptions or beliefs lead you to emphasize these constituencies?
7. When, how and with whom is your approach most effective?
8. What does your pathway assume about the process of change? (e.g., we must change attitudes before we change behaviors; we must change behaviors and attitudes will follow; we change when it hurts too much not to change; we change because we choose to change; we must experience emotional or psychological pain in order to change, etc.)
9. What does your pathway assume about time and progress in learning? (e.g., is learning linear, cyclical, historically-oriented, present-oriented and/or future oriented?)
10. What does your pathway assume about human learning and activity? Do your programs and activities emphasize "being," "doing," or "becoming?"
11. What assumptions does your pathway make about people with significant power? People with little power?
12. What is the ultimate outcome your programs and activities are designed to achieve?
13. How does this outcome contribute to an overall movement toward justice and equity for all people? How does your pathway fall short of contributing to an overall movement toward justice and equity?
14. What is your definition of oppression? Do you view oppression hierarchically? Are all oppressions equal?
15. What does your organization do to revolutionize your approach so that it responds to current and future realities?
16. Who and what informs your organization's thinking about future goals, priorities and intended outcomes?

Organizations find themselves sometimes working in all three pathways at different points in time, but it can be very difficult and challenging for one organization to implement the three pathways at the same time. Understanding this work as three different pathways is an opportunity to see how organizations fit together in the bigger picture of community change. It also provides an opening to discuss how to leverage each other's work in ways that benefit all of our goals and meet the needs of the community in which we work.

The framework of these three pathways working interdependently can help in planning how organizations, in a given community or region, can work together on community issues. Some additional questions to think about regarding a community change process:

- If each of these pathways of work is present in a community and working collaboratively, will a more significant level of change occur in that community?
- Do we need to change the way we assess a community issue so we can learn when and how to phase in different pathways?
- How do you bring together different groups to work on an issue when the groups have different standings in society and different perceptions about racism? When you bring such people together to talk, how far do you get, and is it sustained?
- To what extent do we hold ourselves accountable to the communities of color and those most impacted by the issue we are working on? How do we know we do?
- What level of support or influence do we need to provide to sustain a change in attitudes? Sustain institutional changes? Sustain relationships?
- Who is defining success?

Candidly sharing perceptions of our work, learning the impact of our work on the community (real and perceived), and sharing feedback on strategies among organizations can lead to an accountability structure and a more effective way in thinking through a comprehensive community change process.