
III. A. CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PROCESS FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Groups working toward racial equity or social justice goals often form diverse coalitions and groups. They pay attention to making sure that multiple perspectives and life experiences are represented in their groups, in part by including people from a variety of racial/ethnic identities, genders, class, sexual orientation and other characteristics and identities. This is a first step toward an inclusive process, but it does not always result in an equitable process. Creating equity requires attention also to the norms and culture of a group, how resources are distributed, who makes decisions and on what basis, to whom the group holds itself accountable, and other issues of power and privilege.¹

The following tip sheet focuses on four of these issues: decision making, process issues, practices and accountability. These tips apply to a wide variety of group processes, including coalitions, collaborations, system interaction, dialogue processes, etc.

Decision-Making

It is helpful for a group to set its decision making norms up front. It is also helpful to establish how conflicts will be addressed and resolved or diverse perspectives will be incorporated. Some items to think about:

- How to make the decision-making process transparent.
- Consistently check to see whose voices are dominating decision-making processes, and make sure that the people most accustomed to controlling these processes (white people with respect to people of color; men with respect to women; wealthier people with respect to poorer people; advocates and system workers with respect to neighborhood residents)² are not dominating the processes.
- Ensure that everyone follows the rules that the group establishes for decision-making and strategy work (since people used to dominating these processes often work outside the rules if the rules require equitable voice, or give more weight to those most affected by the issue).
- Balance time spent on process with actions that move the work forward, because group members will have different levels of tolerance and need for each.³
- Be vigilant in identifying outside and internal forces that may be pushing an agenda, a timeline or deliverables.

¹ This tipsheet is based on material from, Chapter 10, Multiracial Partnerships and Coalitions by Maggie Potapchuk, from Potapchuk, Leiderman, Bivens, and Major, *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*, 2005.

² It is also important to ensure that youth are provided an opportunity to share their experiences, opinions and perspectives. Older people can dominate conversations and negate youth voices. Sometimes the reason stated is "because they lack real world experiences." Though it is important to understand that in several cultures the message is that youth should listen to their elders and not speak, the group needs to be aware of both ethnic cultural practices and dominant culture practices.

³ From www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org (accessed June, 2005).

Process Issues

Racism, white privilege and internalized racism (*If you are unfamiliar with these terms, its best to review Section I of the website and further your knowledge on these issues first*) influence group processes in obvious and subtle ways. Our responsibility is to work consistently at individual and organizational levels to reduce and eliminate white privilege and to shift power dynamics within a community, while holding up and honoring the assets of that community.

Discuss some of the process issues upfront. After the group does relationship-building work, it will be vital to make some process decisions and set group expectations:

- How are decisions made concerning who gets invited? How do people decide if an organization has the “legitimacy” to be part of the process?
- How will the group address the power differentials among organizations (size, staffing, funding, etc.) that are represented? How will the group determine each member’s contribution based on differences in size, staffing and funding?
- Does the group want to create a set of principles to which everyone must agree?
- How will groups that use different approaches (advocacy, training, service delivery, organizing, etc.) work interdependently to address an issue?
- How will information be shared? Who decides the level of information to be shared?
- How is competency on issues of racism and white privilege determined within the coalition’s learning process? What is the process to create a common analysis of racism and privilege issues?
- How is distribution of resources to particular community organizations determined? How can the process avoid creating a hierarchy of organizations (“anointed” organizations) based on the budget, resources and/or time?
- How will group members be allies for each other (e.g., agreeing to disagree, to not attack, to give feedback, to implement different approaches to community change, etc.)?

To understand more about white supremacy culture in groups, you can review the following document, [“White Supremacy Culture,” by Tema Okun, changeworkDR](#)

Practices

Some practices to consider adopting for your group:

- *Establish a set of ground rules and the expectation to name issues.* There are sure to be power dynamics, competition, and turf issues; the sooner the group can name these issues and discuss them, the sooner they can be addressed. Consider having a multi-racial team of facilitators manage meetings until norms and expectations can be established.
- *Make sure agenda are jointly created.* Though there may be an executive committee that officially creates an agenda, ensure that there are opportunities for all participants to have input (e.g., leaving time at the end of meetings to do a quick brainstorm, or having a small, diverse (race, gender, class, education, etc.) group meet before the next full meeting to help create the

agenda). Also, it is important to encourage people not to lobby for agreements outside the meeting process before things are even brought to the larger group.

- *Be attentive to cultural differences about discussing conflicts and making decisions.* It is obviously important to build trust and relationships so people feel comfortable letting others know if they are not being listened to or if a decision is being pushed too hard or how white privilege has manifested itself in the dynamics of the meeting. Take time to learn about different cultural practices, and consider incorporating them into the meeting. It is important to note – some cultural practices are intended to be shared and some are not – so allow each group to choose its own level of sharing as well as its own level of participation in other groups’ cultural practices.
- *Make sure supports for people who are not fluent in English are inclusive and not exclusive.* Make sure all materials are available in the languages needed. Rotate the dominant language. If there is translation at a meeting, make sure those using it are given full opportunity to participate and contribute.
- *Create time for same race/ethnicity caucus meetings within the context of the group.* For whites, this provides an opportunity to check in on our assumptions and behavior, or to ask for support in understanding an issue from a white privilege/anti-racism lens, to encourage action, and/or to deal with resistance from colleagues within organizations. Some whites may be concerned about this method, as they may see the goal of the coalition as meeting across racial lines and it may feel awkward to self-segregate. In reality in many meetings, self-segregation is the norm—though it is usually not labeled that way publicly. For people of color, meeting in caucus is an opportunity to create a space to discuss issues and to support leadership.
- *Consider including process observers at meeting to assess how racism and privilege issues are manifested in the group process.* The Observers can share observations before the end of the meeting. As awareness grows amongst the group, everyone can play a role in observing the meeting process. Some things to observe include:
 - What is the pattern of responses when an individual or group raises an issue regarding power, privilege, etc.? How do members respond?
 - How is information controlled within the group? What are the race/ethnic identities of individuals who control information?
 - What are the assumptions that people are making about what is “normal” or what is “best” – to what extent do these reflect cultural racism – e.g. white, European norms?
 - What role does privilege play in the formal decision-making process within the organization?
 - How are ideas and/or concerns legitimized within the group? What are the racial/ethnic identities of the individuals who legitimize an idea or concern?
 - Who speaks in the group? Who doesn’t? How does the group ensure space is made for all voices, including dissenting ones?⁴

⁴ Questions are modified from, “Concentric Circles: Unpacking Privilege and Power Diagnostic Tipsheet.” 7/07, Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates.

Accountability

Create an accountability system – that is, a way of reporting to and taking direction from people for whom your issue is most urgent – who feel its negative effects daily or stand to lose or gain the most from your actions. Your group should have this kind of accountability *as a group*. Doing so establishes your top priority, push come to shove. It also grounds your work, provides political cover for difficult decisions, provides a power base.

Accountability processes need not be formal, though they can be. Some of the principles adopted in these processes include:

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

[See [Accountability](#)]

Finally, create an ongoing learning process within the group. Project Change, a foundation/community partnership to eliminate racism, was funded by the Levi Strauss Foundation. One step of their five-step process is focusing on education about the institutional policies and practices that perpetuate racial disparities. Having a common analysis and language to discuss structural racism and white privilege within a multi-racial group, and one working on racial justice or equity, is important for determining interventions, strategies and outcomes, and in addressing intergroup and process issues. Training is one way to create this common analysis, but an ongoing learning process is critical in creating and implementing a plan to make progress in addressing racial inequities.