HOW CAN WE CHOOSE STRATEGIES FOR OUR ACTION PLAN?

When considering which strategies to use in your action plan, it is helpful first to lay out your group's various assumptions about how change happens in your place (See – How Can We Lay Out Our Assumptions Tipsheet). It is also helpful to learn as much as possible about strategies currently being used to work on this particular goal or issue. How are they working? What information is available to see how well they are working? What do different people and groups believe about the effectiveness of these strategies? What are you observing about the impact of their strategies? Why do you think the strategies are working or not working? Can you find out more about how people and groups are drawing those conclusions? The process of exploring these questions can help your group in at least two ways: it can help you build relationships with other groups doing similar work and show respect for their efforts, and it can help be strategic – that is, you don't have to reinvent the wheel where people have solved various parts of the problem, and it can show you where innovation will be needed to add value.

It is also useful to think about the different ways people approach their race relations and racial justice work – their theories of how change happens, and how their strategies are expected to contribute to the changes sought. Different entry points and approaches to racial equity work can be grouped under three very broad categories described below[1]. When implemented collectively in a high-quality manner, each of these approaches can be critical in addressing structural racism in a community change process.

1. *Transformative Individual and Group Development* – Working with individuals and organizations to build their awareness, knowledge and skills regarding the concepts of bias (including implicit bias), racism, privilege issues. Some organizations also develop skills to conduct a power analysis and address power dynamics, structural racism, internalized white superiority, and internalized racism. Part of this process can sometimes include healing processes to work toward collective liberation.

2. *Relationship-building and Reconciliation* – Working to build relationships across racial and ethnic groups to work effectively on issues and build collective action against racism. This also includes intra-group relationship building and collective action. Reconciliation work can include bringing about repair, both material and psychological, of historical and present-day harms and trauma.

3. *Transformative Institutional Policies, Practices and Culture* – Working to achieve racial justice goals, through changing laws and institutional policies and practices, challenging institutional practices and policies through community organizing, changing popular discourse, using the legal system to address racial disparities, hate crimes and injustices, and implementing equitable and transformative institutional and systemic changes

When choosing strategies, it is useful first to see if the information about that strategy is based on it having been implemented in a high quality manner. It is also helpful for groups to create some basic principles on how a strategy can be implemented. The Strategies section includes examples of principles and strategies from different organizations, evaluation reports and lessons learned documents, which may help groups create their own or offer replication ideas.

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

Second, it is helpful to be thoughtful on how to use these different approaches in the context of the community where the strategy will be applied, considering that community's history, progress on these or similar strategies (assess if they were implemented in a high quality manner before rendering a verdict), current needs and culture of the community. No one strategy is going to be the miraculous intervention to address structural racism – so what combination of strategies might have to be used? And in thinking about creating sustained change on a community level, what other organizations/groups, using different approaches, will need to be partners in order to increase the effectiveness of the work and to gain traction on moving the needle to address inequities?

Third, it is helpful to consider the following before collaborating with others:[2]:

1. If your approach achieved the "perfect outcome," what would that be? What would it look like?

2. What do you believe are the actual outcomes of your approach? What are the key barriers that can or do prevent your approach from achieving the intended outcomes?

3. What are the gaps (or potential gaps) in your approach? What has your approach not achieved that you believe is achievable?

4. What does your approach 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. 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? When, how and with whom is your approach most effective?

6. What does your approach 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.)

7. What does your approach assume about time and progress of change? (e.g., change is linear, cyclical, historically-oriented, present-oriented and/or future oriented?)

8. What assumptions does your approach make about people with significant power? People with little power?

9. What does your organization do to revolutionize your approach so that it responds to current and future realities?

10. Who and what inform your organization's thinking about future goals, priorities and intended outcomes?

Understanding the approach (es) your group is using becomes an opportunity to discuss with other community groups how different strategies 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 the community's goals and meet its needs.

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[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 approaches 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.

The framework of these three approaches working interdependently can help in planning how organizations, in a given community or region, can work together on community issues. Will working more interdependently, and thoughtfully and strategically using different approaches result in a more significant level of change in your community? Some additional questions to think about regarding a community change process:

- Do we need to change the way we assess a community issue so we can learn when and how to phase in different strategies?

- 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 of thinking through a comprehensive community change process.