
HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PLANNING PROCESS?

Groups working toward racial equity or social justice goals often form diverse coalitions. 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 issues: process issues, practices, decision-making, and accountability. These tips apply to a wide variety of group formations and processes, including coalitions, collaborations, system interaction, dialogue processes, etc.

Process Issues

[Racism](#), [white privilege](#) and [internalized racism](#) influence group processes in obvious and subtle ways. One of the basic lessons learned in groups working toward racial equity is the importance of taking time to create a common language and analysis regarding these concepts. It is also critical to discuss some of the process issues upfront. After the group creates a common language and analysis and begins the process of building relationships between individuals and groups, 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 a legitimate place in the process?
- How will the group address power differentials among organizations (size, staffing, funding, etc.) sharing the process? 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 the distribution of resources to particular community organizations determined? How can the process avoid creating a hierarchy of organizations based on their relative wealth in terms of dollars, other resources, access to funders, 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.)?

See [“White Supremacy Culture,” article by Tema Okun, changeworkDR](#), for more information about how white culture influences group processes and assumptions.

Practices

Some practices to consider adopting for your group:

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.

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- *Set an expectation to name issues as they come up.* 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 instead of fermenting. Consider having a multi-racial team of facilitators manage meetings until group norms and expectations can be established.
- *Ensure agenda setting is an inclusive and equitable process.* A leadership team may have a responsibility to create meeting agendas. Consider including different opportunities for all participants to help shape what gets covered in a meeting, for example, by 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, or if that is the process, it needs to be acknowledged and managed equitably.
- *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 that it is often a mistake for someone outside of a particular cultural group to decide whether or not a particular cultural practice from that group should be used— some cultural practices are intended to be shared and others 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 there are supports for people who are not fluent in the primary language used by the rest of the group.* 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 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 meetings to assess how racism and privilege issues are manifested in the group process.* Process observers can share observations before the end of the meeting. As awareness grows among 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 have white privilege embedded – e.g. to what extent are they white, dominant culture norms? (See [White Culture worksheet](#))

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- 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?²

Decision-Making

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

- Decide 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)³ are not dominating the processes.
- Create group norms that everyone agrees to follow. Some things to consider include creating an equitable voice (ensuring diverse voices and diverse points of view are heard and understood) and giving more weight to those directly affected by an issue. Ensure that everyone is held accountable to following these group norms since people used to dominating these processes often work outside the rules. Sometimes those individuals who are marginalized or most impacted by a particular issue may not be represented in the same numbers as those who are typically privileged and impacted to a lesser degree by the issue. Consider giving more weight to the recommendations of those who are typically marginalized and/or most impacted by the particular 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 process and action.⁴
- Be vigilant in identifying and discussing outside and internal forces that may be pushing an agenda, a timeline or deliverables.

Accountability

Create an accountability process – 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

² Questions are modified from, “Concentric Circles: Unpacking Privilege and Power Diagnostic Tipsheet.” 7/07, Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates.

³ 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.

⁴ From www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org (accessed June, 2005).

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from your actions. Your group should have this kind of accountability *as a group*. Doing so establishes your top priority, push comes to shove. It also grounds your work, provides political cover for difficult decisions and connects your work to 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 culture and 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.
- 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 section on [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 was to focus 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.