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**HOW CAN WE CREATE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GROUP'S STRATEGIES WHILE STILL BEING ACCOUNTABLE?**

One of the most important things evaluation can do is to help you lay out for others the amount of change you expect and how long it may take to accomplish. Once you have set these expectations, they can be reflected in your evaluation questions and in the materials you prepare to share evaluation results. They also should be understood by the members of the group committed to working toward long-term change, by those in the community whose support is needed, by those whose lives are directly affected by the issues being tackled, by your funders and by your critics. If you are working from a theory of change or logic model, these are good places to include your expectations about how much change you expect to accomplish, and the timing of that change.

You can use your own experience, your group's analysis of how power, privilege, oppression and racism work and the experiences of other communities and groups working on the same issues to help set these expectations. The goal is to set expectations that are not too high (given the difficulty of racial equity and inclusion work, the level of resistance to genuine change and your resources) or too low (to provide guidelines and motivation to keep pushing when the going is very tough)

Some tips for doing this include:

- Make sure the long-term community-wide changes you are seeking to affect can be connected to your strategies and activities.
  - Is there a path of change linking step by step from the group's activities to the long-term changes?
  - Is this path consistent with your experience, research and common sense?
- Consider the size and reach (scope and scale) of your activities or strategies.
  - How much difference can you reasonably expect among the people who are touched directly by your activities (who participate in training, who are mobilized in an organizing strategy, etc.)?
  - Do the group's activities affect enough of the right people, organizations or institutions to tip the general thinking or behavior toward the change you want (sometimes called reaching a "critical mass")?
  - Are the group's activities powerful enough to overcome resistance and strategies put in place by those working to preserve the status quo?
- Are the short-term changes (more often under your group's control) strong enough to influence the intermediate and longer-term outcomes you want (which are usually affected by many things – some of which are in your control and some of which are not)?
  - For example, suppose your long-term goal is to increase the number of high school graduates of color from your community who attend and succeed in college.

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- You can make sure (with difficulty) that many teachers are engaged in a process to reflect on the racial/ethnic biases built into their expectations of students of different racial/ethnic background, or you can organize the community to put pressure on the school district to put Advanced Placement (AP) classes in all of the district's high schools, opening up access to eligible students regardless of the school they attend.
- These activities could reasonably be expected to lead to the short-term outcome of increasing the number of achieving students of color who graduate from high school with the expectation that they can attend and succeed in college – a short-term outcome of your strategy to increase the number of students of color in your community who attend and succeed in college.
- However, many other factors come into play – the ability of your community or individual students or their families to finance a students' college education; the expectations of the family, the school and the community about whether or not the student is making a good choice to go to college rather than enter the military, take full-time employment or pursue other goals; whether or not the student is accepted into a college in which he or she is likely to succeed; national policy regarding college financing, military service and other policies that affect the opportunities and costs of options for young adults; home responsibilities; the health, motivation and resilience of the individual student; and the supports in the community to overcome barriers for individual students and many other things.
- So your expectations about the amount of change and timing of change to reach your goal should take into account which of these opportunities and challenges your strategies can control or influence, and which they cannot.
- It is very helpful to look at data over the past number of years to get a sense of the trends that might help or hurt your chances of seeing the change you want.
  - Have there been increases, albeit small, in the number of small businesses opened by Hispanic proprietors over the past several years?
  - What is the failure rate of these businesses and how has that changed?
- What tools or measures exist for measuring changes in the community?
  - How large, consistent or pervasive would a change have to be in order for it to show up in these data – given how long it takes for change to happen, given how current the data are, and given other factors that affect the data?
- How confident are you that a particular change is a trend, and likely to be sustained?
  - For example, if a school's ability to increase rates of graduation for Latino/a students increases the year after you implement your strategies to support that, are those strategies likely to remain in place? How many years would you want to see rates increase to feel confident that the change has really taken root?
  - Further, if there is more than one school serving high school age students, have you assessed changes in rates of graduation for Latino/a students in each school (not just for the whole district), especially if some schools have larger numbers of Latino/a students than others or the resources allocated to each school vary.

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- How do you expect the change to proceed?
  - For example, does your group expect that the number of Latino/a owned businesses will increase a little bit year by year, as your strategies reach more potential business owners?
  - Or will there be a lot of groundwork that leads to a major breakthrough, which might then cause a big one-time jump in outcomes? For example, is your group working on developing an anti-predatory lending bill that would increase access to capital for credit-worthy business owners?
  - If so, there may be no change for a considerable time, while support is being built for a specific decision or action. In the case of these types of changes, it will be especially important to come up with reasonable ways to measure intermediate results.
    - For example, a meaningful intermediate result might be the number of legislators who agree to co-sponsor the bill or the request by senior staff for support in developing draft legislation.
    - These would be much more meaningful outcomes than detailing the number of meetings held or people consulted – since they are likely a better predictor of a successful outcome in the long run.

All of your key stakeholders should be engaged in your thinking about the expectations for your work – at the beginning and as you review expectations in light of the findings from evaluation. The groups to include are the people who stand to benefit who will hold you accountable, the people implementing your strategies, your funders, your evaluators, your Board, allies, collaborating groups and your critics.

Discussions with these people can:

- Identify opportunities to leverage change more quickly or more broadly
- Show where new strategies need to be added to get you where you want to go
- Highlight challenges or barriers you need to do more work on as a group or with your allies
- Help you decide whether to alter your short term, intermediate or long-term outcomes – that is, change your expectations

And, a final tip:

- Make sure you keep everyone informed about your expectations – and help them set reasonable expectations for your work as well.
  - It is easy to over promise, especially to your constituencies, because so much needs to be done and the consequences of things as they are is so damaging.
  - In addition, funders who need to justify their support for your work may also push you to overpromise what you can do – directly or through their own anxiety.
  - But if everyone involved in racial equity and inclusion work – groups doing the work, evaluators, funders, constituencies – are willing to put out real and honest expectations about what can be accomplished, and by when, those expectations will eventually become the standard by which our work can be judged.