



RACIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING:

ORGANIZATIONS HOLDING ELECTED OR COMMUNITY LEADERS OF COLOR ACCOUNTABLE

When organizations target leaders of color through organizing campaigns it is important to take the time to think and talk through strategies and tactics from an anti-racist perspective.

The dynamics of racism can create intense and often oppressive situations within our organizations when responding to the problems of holding leaders of color accountable. For example: white progressives and liberals can respond to problematic leaders of color by either failing to criticize them or failing to hold them accountable at all (perhaps for fear of being called racist) or to attacking and criticizing them in an over-the-top or in a needlessly tough manner. Additionally, people of color may have a perspective of misplaced loyalty or an intense sense of betrayal in these situations. We must be conscious of our own individual thought process as well as what is driving our organizational response so we don't reproduce racism in the moment.

This handout is a set of questions that can be helpful in making such a conversation happen. We do not offer answers to these questions because the complexity of individual campaigns and contexts means each situation will be different. But we do believe that organizations committed to racial justice organizing, through careful consideration, can and should be able to target elected or community leaders of color in a principled way.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you have the same expectations of the person of color in power compared to white people in similar positions that you deal with? How are these expectations the same or different? Asking this question and examining your response is a good start.
2. How are you talking about the leader of color? Be aware of racialized language or the use of stereotypes. Are people using the term "sell-out?" Is it appropriate for white people within your ranks to call a person of color a "sell-out," or does doing so hold that person to different standards? That critique is usually more appropriate and authentic coming from a person of color.
3. Check the facts. It is important that strategies, messages, and opinions regarding a person you are trying to hold accountable are based on facts, not on feelings, impressions, or hearsay. What do you know about the person's voting record or positions? Do you have tools that you use with all campaign targets in terms of developing a campaign, doing a power analysis, and campaign research? Is there consistency in the use of these tools?
4. If your organization is multi-racial with some white leadership, or primarily white, you must prepare for the possibility of people questioning or suggesting your approach is racist. This shouldn't prevent you from trying to hold someone

accountable, but it is something you should account for in your tactics. Here are some examples:

- In regard to messaging that critiques the legislator or leader: Are there ways to craft messages that suggest you hold that person accountable to similar values and in similar ways as others?
 - If your organization has had an intentional conversation about this, your spokespeople can be prepared to take the allegation of racism head on. They could do this, for example, with an acknowledgement that sometimes leaders of color are unfortunately treated with a different standard, which is something your membership has talked about. However, in this case it is simply about the issue of(fill in your key critiques).
5. There is also a question of who is your organizational face; who will be publicly voicing the criticism of the leader you are holding accountable? Is it tokenistic to intentionally want your spokesperson to be a person of color, in order to prevent suggestions that your organization's position is racially motivated? Does having a spokesperson of color realistically represent your constituency? At the same time, is there is undue pressure internally on a leader of color to play that role, even if they are uncomfortable with that role?
 6. As your campaign develops, are there opportunities to reflect on these questions again? Do you provide opportunities for your staff, members and leaders to debrief the racialized aspects of the campaign?