

# BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST



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The National  
**RESOURCE CENTER**  
for REACHING VICTIMS  
*Helping those who help others*



Latinos  
United for  
Peace and  
Equity

# BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST

A common mistake organization's make is to embark on the development of an equity framework or to attempt to discuss difficult issues related to culture and oppression in the absence of trust and in the presence of fear around being vulnerable. Tough conversations cannot happen in the absence of trust. In this context, trust is not about being able to predict other's behaviors. Instead, it is about having confidence that one does not have to be protective or careful with a person or group because they practice mutual respect for differences, recognize that oppression creates and sustains privileges for some while disadvantaging others, focus on the impact (not the intent) of their actions, and can hold themselves and each other accountable in just ways.

Discussion on issues such as racism, ageism, heteronormativity, etc. can be difficult even in circumstances where people have strong relationships and can assume goodwill. When individuals do not have strong connections, communicate or experience micro-aggressions, or remain concentrated in homogenous sets, organizations fail to generate the learning and positive influence that can come from interactions where differences arise. Most people want to work in a culture where it's okay to make mistakes, but they also want protection from the impact of mistakes on themselves and others. This can make it difficult to create a learning environment around culture, equity, and oppression. To move in this direction, organizations may need to utilize a host of strategies. They may for example develop a plan to build connections that can foster

trust; engage in relationship building and development of a strong leadership team; and promote development opportunities between and among staff. Though not comprehensive, these suggestions are detailed further below.

## DEVELOP A PLAN TO BUILD CONNECTIONS THAT CAN FOSTER TRUST

- Develop a subcommittee of willing individuals that includes individuals that staff select and believe represent all levels and areas of the organization.
- Charge the subcommittee with developing a plan that includes strategies and a timeline of activities that will foster trust between staff. This may include activities such as:
  - Identifying barriers to trust,
  - Facilitating get-to-know-you ice-breaker's and discussions at staff meetings,
  - Promoting play and appreciation activities,
  - Taking and sharing personality and behavioral preference inventories (i.e. Meyers-Briggs),
  - Participating in identity date interviews, &
  - Hosting and attending after hours get-togethers.
- Implement activities and have the committee monitor if and how trust is impacted.
- Assess how to maintain and continue to build trust and suggest ways that staff and leadership can institutionalize it.

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Once trust is fostered and as it continues to evolve, this group, or a variation of the group, can take on the broader challenge of initiating the development of a strategic plan to enhance the organization's ability to address culture and oppression internally and in its programs. This can then include activities such as:

- Assessing the level of cultural capacity;
- Identifying and committing the leadership and resources needed;
- Developing goals, implementation steps and deadlines to achieve them, etc. and
- Examining how to have an open environment for these discussions while not tolerating discrimination.

Keep in mind, that until trust is fostered, efforts such as these may lead to more harm than good.

## ENGAGE IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONG LEADERSHIP TEAM

In *The Leadership Challenge*, by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, they write that "people are willing to follow someone...into battle or into the boardroom...they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust." It will be difficult for a leadership team to promote cohesion and clarify expectations around equity for the larger team if it does not address individual issues contributing to the absence of trust and to the presence of artificial harmony within the leadership team itself. Going through, and subsequently sharing, their

own internal process will increase a leadership team's ability to engage in such a process with staff and to use this learning to demonstrate vulnerability, encourage productive ideological conflict, minimize ambiguity, facilitate peer accountability, and promote collective success. Some ways to do this can include:

- Ensure the inclusion or addition of members to the leadership team from marginalized groups that would supervise and ensure the integration and success of underserved communities.
- Engage in a facilitated process that includes activities to name past harms, examine the roles of those involved, and identify what is needed to move forward for the leadership team itself. This can include using the *Taking Risk/Building Trust: A Moving Forward Exercise* and *Giving Acknowledgement/Building Up: A Checking Progress Exercise* developed as part of this Tip Sheet pages 5 and 6 of this document.
- Set time aside, at least bi-weekly, dedicated to discussion and maintenance.
- Read and discuss books such as: *How to Be Less Stupid About Race*, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, *Crucial Conversations*, and *How to Be an Anti-Racist*.
- Ensure people expected to lead a team are in a position to advocate for and elevate the interests of the team and do not conflict with responsibilities to represent the organization.

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## PROMOTE COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN AND AMONG STAFF

One cultural issue that most organizations would benefit from immediately is paying more attention to the complexity of conflicting cultures internally; including but not limited to personal axes of identification. While elevating racial equity, these intersections could include generational differences between baby boomers, generation x, millennials, and centennials; national vs. local projects; urban vs. rural issues; academia vs. "real" world, etc.

Some possible ways to do this include:

- Identify and bring in an expert that provides TA nationally on the issues at hand to provide training or webinars to staff.
- Generate dialogue on university culture/Academia or facilitate staff discussions on research or opinion pieces such as  
<https://ssw.umich.edu/sites/default/files/documents/events/colc/from-safe-spaces-to-brave-spaces.pdf>
- Identify and implement cross training opportunities and create cross-functional teams.
- Ensure that regular staff meetings are not scheduled on a date and time that consistently favor schedules or attendance of certain staff.
- Offset resource imbalances with unrestricted resources whenever possible.
- Create opportunities where staff work with others outside of their program area, issue, region.
- Use the templates on the following pages to engage in trust building.



Often when organizations attempt to tackle privilege and oppression, there are unresolved issues that have caused substantial grief. People often share histories with others that can make it difficult to move forward. In many cases, this pain can sabotage current and future efforts to achieve equity and to build trust in relationships.

This handout provides a template to name past harms, examine the roles of those involved, and identify what is needed to move forward. It can be used to reflect individually in private, however it is most useful through a facilitated process with an experienced consultant if a team is ready to take this risk to build trust with each other.

To complete the exercise, identify the single most significant harm that each of your peers (coworkers, team, etc.) has committed against you. Jot down your responses, focusing on one team member at a time, with enough information to organize your thoughts so you can share them with each other.

The event/situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What hurt me was: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How I was hurt by it is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I've realized since then: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My role was in it was: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I need from you to move forward: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Participants should receive feedback on themselves from each peer without questioning or responding, and then move on to another person. If there is a leader, they should receive this feedback first. People may express support for their peers and feedback on the process only after everyone has provided and received their feedback.



Often when organizations attempt to tackle privilege and oppression, there are unresolved issues that have caused substantial grief. People often share histories with others that can make it difficult to move forward. In many cases, this pain can sabotage current and future efforts to achieve equity and to build trust in relationships. This handout, that can also be used as a follow-up to *Taking Risk/Building Trust*, provides a template to move past harms, acknowledge efforts made, and identify how to continue to move forward.

It can be used to reflect individually in private, however it is most useful through a facilitated process with an experienced consultant once a team has taken this risk to build trust with each other. To complete the exercise, identify the single most significant value that you benefit/have benefitted from, from each of your peers (coworkers, team, etc.). Jot down your responses, focusing on one team member at a time, with enough information to organize your thoughts so you can share them with each other.

The event/situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What encouraged me since then: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The ways I was restored by it are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What has changed since then: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My role in it is to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How I hope we continue to move forward: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Participants should receive feedback on themselves from each peer without questioning or responding, and express support for their peers and feedback on the process only after they have received their feedback from each peer.



Latinos United for Peace and Equity is the National arm of Caminar Latino. Latinos United for Peace and Equity and Caminar Latino create opportunities for Latino families to transform their lives and communities and works to change the social conditions that give rise to violence.

Funded by the federal Office for Victims of Crime, the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims (NRC) is a one-stop shop for victim service providers, culturally specific organizations, justice system professionals, and policymakers to get information and expert guidance to enhance their capacity to identify, reach, and serve all victims, especially those from communities that are underrepresented in healing services and avenues to justice. The NRC is working to increase the number of victims who receive healing supports by understanding who is underrepresented and why some people access services while others don't; designing and implementing best practices for connecting people to the services they need; and empowering and equipping organizations to provide the most useful and effective services possible to crime victims. The NRC is a collaboration among Caminar Latino, Casa de Esperanza, Common Justice, FORGE, the National Children's Advocacy Center, the National Center for Victims of Crime, the National Clearinghouse on Abuse Later in Life, Women of Color Network, Inc., and the Vera Institute of Justice. The NRC's vision is that victim services are accessible, culturally appropriate and relevant, and trauma-informed, and that the overwhelming majority of victims access and benefit from these services.

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