

TRANSFORMATIONAL COLLABORATION



CONSIDERATIONS TO APPLY A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

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



Latinos
United for
Peace and
Equity



Collaboration is a mutually beneficial, well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. It includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources and rewards.ⁱ While these are important, the concepts fail to critically examine how power is conceptualized, activated, centralized, and institutionalized in the United States. Power includes the ability to decide what a problem is, to decide what needs to be done about it, to decide who will be included to solve it, in what capacity, and with what resources.ⁱⁱ Often, these decisions are made before collaborative partners, especially those representing culturally specific communities are approached. Instead, power is maintained by the dominant cultureⁱⁱⁱ, who create the norms against which all other sub-groups and potential partners are compared and judged.

Power includes not having to recognize this culture as the norm or to acknowledge one's access to resources, connections, and

status. To complicate matters, factors used to examine influences of successful collaborations, such as competence and respect, operate from dominant culture values and elevate compromise, consensus, and compatibility, rather than challenge unexamined systems of power that create and reproduce inequalities both within the collaboration and in the impact of its programs. Structural racism in the U.S. is a system of hierarchy and inequity that normalizes and legitimizes an array of historical, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional dynamics that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color^{iv}. It is a feature of the social, economic and political systems; where public policies, research, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various and reinforcing ways, by design and unconsciously, to perpetuate inequality.

The Transformational Collaborations: Considerations to Apply a Racial Equity Lens will help expose the subtle, yet pervasive mechanisms that lead to the marginalization of people of color and culturally specific^v organizations (CSO's).

COLLABORATION conflation

There is a strong interest and movement towards collaboration in the victim services field. In many cases, partnerships such as cooperation, coordination and collaboration are conflated. It is not uncommon, upon examination of collaborations to find they amount to little more than a referral network, function independently, and centralize leadership and control. This can occur in both partnerships that include, and those that exclude or marginalize CSO's.

The impact of that exclusion, however, is not equal. Universal frameworks may suggest that dynamic is not unique to culturally specific communities, however, this fails to recognize the frequency and pervasiveness of this exclusion and diminish the significance of racial oppression. There are many ways collaboration is conflated with other forms of partnership that are particularly insidious and oppressive for culturally specific communities. These strategies not only fail to constitute collaboration, but further perpetuate inequities. They include:

REFERRAL

- Claiming to collaborate with culturally specific organizations when the nature of that relationship is to send people there for services.
- Directing clients who don't speak the language of your agency to other programs.

COOPERATION

- Creating resource materials, surveys, etc. in English only and requesting CSO's translate it so their constituencies can access it.
- Inviting CSO's staff to serve on task forces and advisory committees late in the process and at their own expense.
- Requesting a review of materials for cultural relevance once complete and without prior consultation on its development.

COORDINATION

- Keeping authority in dominant organizations while CSO's update/report on work.
- Seeking participation at the final stages rather than at the conception of projects.
- Requesting CSO's use own time or restricted funding to benefit to partner/project.
- Including hourly/daily compensation for time that does not allow for payment of additional staff, equipment, supplies, overhead, etc.
- Keeping contracts as low cost as possible by not inviting CSO's to discussions and meetings for the development of a tool or product, compensating for just a few days to review the materials developed to "integrate" culture.

COLLABORATION conflation

(contd...)



EXPLOITATION

Some actions that mainstream organizations and systems consistently engage in, are particularly insidious in marginalizing, undermining and exploiting CSO's. They include:

- Reaching out to a CSO one has no relationship with to secure funding that requires cultural responsiveness.
- Using tight turn arounds as an excuse to provide limited information or not involve CSO's in determining project need, scope, and approach.
- Requesting a CSO collaborate on a funded project without providing compensation for their work; especially from more heavily resourced organizations and institutions.
- Determining and proliferating opinions that a CSO lacks competence, is unreliable, or is not fully invested when their perspective is not aligned with one's own, they don't operate in the same time frames, or are stretched beyond their capacity.
- Disallowing resources and opportunities for CSO's to build their capacity as part of a process, learn the unwritten rules designed and navigated by mainstream organizations, and be a part of "the big picture" on projects.
- Using the CSO as a "surrogate," through which the race, culture or equity work is done instead of doing own work to dismantle structural racism and eliminate oppressive practices.
- Appropriating knowledge and content developed by CSO's by integrating it into own resources without citing the source or posting it on to own websites/resource centers and reporting dissemination metrics instead of providing a link to the original source so CSO's can track metrics and get "credit" for their own work.



TRANSFORMATIONAL collaboration to promote equity

Transformational collaborations that promote equity require a commitment to understand structural racism, admit how what we design is influenced by it, and acknowledge how each of us, our work, and our organizations is shaped by it. To resist structural racism, mainstream organizations should acknowledge their complicity and engage in collective problem-solving and decision-making, equitable partnerships, and transformational collaboration. It is possible to intentionally facilitate a more deliberate sharing of power as an explicit part of our work. Strategies that foster racial equity in collaboration include:

DO YOUR OWN WORK

- Educate yourself on values inherent to U.S. culture, learn to identify them, resist imposing them, and work to dismantle them. They include paternalism, either/or thinking, progress meaning more, bigger, better, strict adherence to time, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, and individualism.^{vii}

TRANSFORMATIONAL collaboration to promote equity (contd...)

- Deepen your understanding of the intersections of oppression, privilege, and liberation.
- Study feminist work by women of color and use those frameworks to shape approaches rather than simply acknowledging them as other models.

EXAMINE THE TOOLS YOU USE TO DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

- Unpack how those tools were created and by whom.
- Recognize evidence, research, and evaluation are not culture free.
- Appreciate that concepts such as objective, valid, credible and values such as “worshiping the written word” serve as veneer for maintaining inequity grounded in racism.
- Actively work to counteract the academic tendency to diminish the power of narrative and lived experience.
- Investigate the historical misuse of research and evaluation in ways that have

violated basic human rights of indigenous people and communities of color.

ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICES

- Question frames of reference that elevate sexism as a primary issue and others, including racism, as auxiliary.
- Allow for different communication styles, attitudes toward conflict, and approaches to completing tasks internally and with partners.
- Ask crucial questions such as:
 - Do our approaches account for the most marginalized rather than incorporate their needs as time and resources allow?
 - Do I credit CSO's and individuals for their contributions, whether provided in verbal or in written form?
 - Do I use limited resources as an excuse to exclude appropriate partners?
 - Do I examine problems, consider policy, and design and implement interventions from the perspective of the most marginalized?

RECOMMENDATIONS to analyze current partnerships

- Review projects and budgets for an equitable distribution of resources.
 - Do budgets include resources for CSO's to familiarize themselves and participate in all project activities or are they relegated to a specific task or workgroup?
 - Are there opportunities for learning and capacity building?
 - Can they cover over- head, equipment, office supplies, administrative support, etc.?

RECOMMENDATIONS to analyze current partnerships (contd...)

- Examine how you engage with potential collaborators.
 - When do you approach partners and in what way?
 - Have you explored with them how your approaches are closely aligned with what your and their community reflects and how they differ?
 - What have CSO's heard about how people of color, people who are deaf or have a disability, LGBTQ, and other culturally specific staff and consumers are treated in your organization or institution?
- Analyze the distribution of resources, authority, and recognition.
 - Is the majority of project funding maintained by your organization as the lead to cover program staff for coordination of the project despite significant core expertise living elsewhere?
 - What degree of involvement in priority setting, decision-making, and recognition do partners receive?
 - Do they update and report to you or are you accountable fully to each other?
 - Are they adequately resourced to participate fully and design strategies from the inception of an idea to implementation?
 - Will you speak for or about marginalized communities without their full input, participation, and consent?
 - How will CSO's contributions be documented, recognized, reported, and disseminated?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Working toward transformational collaborations often reveals unanticipated layers of complexity. In such cases, operating within the status quo can undermine collaboration. At the administrative level, it is important to establish clarity as early as possible, particularly when substantial differential in power and resources exist between organizations. For example, when organizations apply for federal funds, relationships must be defined as contractor or sub-recipient. This distinction is important to determine the level of collaboration between agencies and the administrative burden on the collaborating agency. As a consultant, the administrative burden is lower, but the opportunity for transformational collaboration is also lower. To engage in a transformational collaboration, a sub-recipient relationship is required, but the administrative burden is also higher. When CSO's do not have the capacity to respond to this administrative burden, mainstream organizations that wish to promote racial equity and avoid perpetuating structural racism, may need to mentor CSO's through strategic partnerships. This may include:

- Offering resources to conceptualize, draft, and submit proposals instead of expecting CSO's to use unrestricted program resources (if those exist).
- Building CSO's capacity to meet the administrative demands of grants management instead of limiting their participation because of the lack of capacity.
- Advocating for and educating other mainstream partners, the community, funders, etc. when new approaches and practices are challenged.

CONCLUSION



Transformational collaborations can promote equity, inclusion, and meaningful engagement. They will produce more useful tools, minimize tokenism and the replication of institutional oppressions, and contribute to environments that share power and foster racial equity.

Engaging in transformational collaborations that promote racial equity will not be easy. In fact, it will likely feel like forces are working against you at every juncture since inequity is built into the structure of society. Challenging these structures will not be possible without risk, perseverance, and relentless commitment. Transformational collaborations that promote racial equity significantly change mainstream organizations and systems as opposed to expecting the assimilation of CSO's to operate within already established parameters. But it is through this challenge that we can create more fundamental change for those who need it most.

i Collaboration: What Makes It Work 2nd Edition, Mattessich, Paul W., Ph.D., Murray-Close, Marta, B.A., Monsey, Barbara R., M.P.H., Wilder Research Center

ii Starr, Ruby. (2018). Moving from the Mainstream to the Margins: Lessons in Culture and Power. Journal of Family Violence. 33. 10.1007/s10896-018-9984-1.

iii The author uses dominant culture and mainstream to refer to researchers, service providers, organizations, systems, etc. that represent the prevailing or dominant values and practices of a society with little or no focus to operate from the worldview of culturally-specific communities.

iv Lawrence, K. & Keleher, T. (2004). Structural racism. Retrieved from <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Definitions%20of%20Racism.pdf>

v The author uses culturally-specific to refer to services and organizations created by and for specific cultural communities, such as Latino, African American, Asian, Native, Indigenous, Muslim, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender, questions (LGBTQ), people who are deaf, people with a disability, immigrants, or other cultural groups with evolving and intersecting identities

vi Ibid 2

vii See for example Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001, available at http://www.cwsworkshop.org/PARC_site_B/dr-culture.html



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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