Taking Back the Work

A Cooperative Inquiry into the Work of Leaders of Color in Movement-Building Organizations

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Views Expressed in This Report

Consistent with the epistemic foundations of Cooperative Inquiry (CI), the findings, ideas and recommendations contained in this report are the product of the CI group's inquiry process. Accordingly, they are based on the experience and views of the participants of the inquiry group and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Research Center for Leadership in Action.

About This Research Project

Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) was a Ford Foundation program that recognized and supported exemplary leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. The program also sought to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include these kinds of community leaders. From 2001 to 2005, LCW annually recognized 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees received $115,000 and participated in semiannual program-wide meetings, collaborative research, and a strategic communications effort.

The Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service conducted research and documentation for the program, with an emphasis on engaged scholarship, or conducting research *with* leaders rather than *on* leaders to co-create and share knowledge directly applicable to tough social issues.

At a program-wide meeting in 2006, New York University held a session on Cooperative Inquiry (CI) where 2005 awardees interested in participating could voluntarily form inquiry groups and define a focused inquiry topic. The CI process is based on participants engaging in cycles of action and reflection about a question of common interest. Among the many themes suggested at this session was one that would form the foundation of the group: "*Building and strengthening grassroots organizations led by people of color to contribute to a movement that is both about domestic and global democracy and justice.*"

The seven awardees who ultimately formed a group from this beginning shared a common set of attributes: They were all leaders with positions of formal authority in nonprofit organizations or organizing groups; people of color who had explored and elaborated their racial identities; and individuals committed to movement building and social justice. Together, they created a safe space for difficult conversations that led to a new understanding about the effects of race and racism on their work.

The CI took place in six locations over eight months: New York, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; Denver, Colorado; and Atlanta, Georgia. It proved to be a process of sharing, learning, being vulnerable and safe, deepening relationships, discovering surprises, and affirming beliefs. Through all of this, the participants felt strengthened and sustained. In this document, you will find a series of CI Experience boxes that describe these meetings in greater detail.

The research question developed over a series of meetings and grew from an interesting imbalance. A great deal of anecdotal evidence based on personal experience exists about the challenges of race and racism in progressive movements. This is in contrast to a paucity of research about the specific obstacles facing people of color who lead movement-building organizations. The CI participants sought to discover specifically what these barriers were and how individual leaders and the organizations they serve were overcoming them.

The group decided to invite the facilitators to participate as co-inquirers. After a day of brainstorming, with the help of a question-mapping tool, the group reached its final question: "*How do we build, strengthen, and sustain movement-building organizations led by people of color?*" The conclusions reached and lessons learned form the basis of this report.

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AN IMAGINARY MORNING

The poetry slam went late last night (what fabulous energy young people have!), but the next day starts early anyway. Five voicemail messages are waiting when you arrive at 8:00 am.

One of your most committed volunteers sounds panicky, and your instinct tells you to call him back first. When you finally reach him, he asks if you've seen today's paper. Picking it up, you discover a wonderful article about a "new" and "innovative" project that sounds remarkably like the projects your organization has been doing for many years. But the article isn't about your organization. It's about a group of students from a suburban university who have been shipped into the city for a summer program—complete with pictures of them dressed like models from Abercrombie & Fitch and surrounded by black and Latino children. Why would there be such interest in publicizing this work, yet so much difficulty in getting media exposure for your programs?

The second call is from the accountant who does pro bono payroll services for your organization. She reminds you that you must make a deposit into the checking account if she is to pay folks (including you) at the end of the week. Your staff are loyal to a fault and depend on the organization in practical, political, and spiritual ways. This is not simply a job to them, but a vocation. They know they make a difference here. You groan inwardly. You can make payroll this time, but cash flow problems will start very soon if new funding sources don't materialize.

The third message is from a foundation program officer with whom you met yesterday. She had requested a rewrite of your proposal, refocusing it on issues of "citizen engagement" rather than community organizing. You tried to explain why you chose organizing as your frame and how the term's history set a context that influenced your strategies. The officer, however, replied that the foundation preferred an outcomes-based approach, grounded in academic research. The phone message reminds you that the foundation is "confident" that you can "reformat" your proposal in this way. As the recorded voice goes on about "outcome measures" and "evaluation schemes," you realize that the officer doesn't truly understand what you do. The best strategy might be to say nothing and simply rewrite the entire proposal, but where will you find the time?

The fourth call is from a fellow organizer who wants to map a strategy around a recent incident of alleged police brutality. He says your presence in the group is critical because "everyone else is white." You wonder what that means. Committed to coalition building, you want to be open to working with this group, but the only time the members can meet for the next several weeks is on Thursday night, which you have already reserved for pizza and a movie with your partner and kids.

The fifth message is a low, muffled male voice that says he heard you at the rally and your organization is a sell-out. He growls that you "talk white," taking big grant money and ripping off the community. The caller does not leave a name but sounds vaguely familiar. With the weight of these five calls, you feel overwhelmed, angry, and alone. And it is not even 9:00 am.

THE RIGORS OF MOVEMENT BUILDING

Movement building, fundamentally, is about the empowerment of those affected by oppression. It pays attention to root causes, rather than symptoms. It seeks to focus on institutions and system dynamics rather than simply individual circumstances, and it recognizes certain realities that other kinds of organizing might diminish or obscure. For example, the fact that the country remains divided along racial and class lines is an important variable in movement-building organizations, as is the corollary that racial divisions contribute to class divisions.

Leaders of movement-building organizations face specific and complex obstacles. They deal with keeping their organizations funded, their staff and community engaged, and the media honest and informed. At the same time, they are trying to develop effective organizing strategies and resolve their organizations' conflicts, both internal and external. They work from a perspective that seeks systemic solutions, serves the common good, and fights for social justice. They strive against a tide of denial and complacency, seeing value where others see deficit. They seek to give voice to the experiences of those who have been silenced. Their jobs, by their very nature, are tough.

For leaders of color, racial issues exacerbate these challenges, and silence concerning race from other parts of society further complicates the nature of their movement-building work. In fact, race always remains a salient consideration for these leaders, and however differently it might manifest in various communities or difficult it might be to measure, it cannot be ignored. It is embedded in their professional and personal realities at school, work, home, and everywhere in between. By extension, it is inevitably built into the issues on which their movement-building organizations work. The stories that these leaders tell, filled with pain, complexity, and grit, find little hearing elsewhere in the country.

What is Cooperative Inquiry?

Cooperative Inquiry (CI) is a participatory research technique in which a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue of burning concern to all of them. In this type of inquiry, participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. On occasion, facilitators support the group to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. CI contributes to creating new knowledge grounded in practice, deepens the participants' leadership potential, and strengthens relationships among group members.

The Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) program provided a way, through Cooperative Inquiry (CI), for a small group of these leaders to explore their stories and reflect upon what meaning they might have for the larger community of leaders of color.

In October 2005, in Tarrytown, NY, at the first LCW program-wide meeting for the 2005 cohort, the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service introduced the CI method to awardees and facilitated a program-wide brainstorming session on possible CI topics. At a follow-up meeting in Seattle the following year, members of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) in attendance proposed the topic, "Building and strengthening grassroots organizations led by people of color to contribute to a movement that is both about domestic and global democracy and justice." The proposal came with the request that all participants in the CI be people of color. In response, a group of seven participants and two facilitators came together. The participants, all leaders in social change organizations, were from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the two facilitators, also people of color, were from RCLA. They met six times in eight months, rotating locations among their respective cities of origin.

The ideas of race, racism, and racial identity were woven throughout the CI in a variety of ways: Racism is key to what leaders of color are fighting; racial identity can be a source of support and strength; and the very issue of race itself, while its impact is often minimized or denied, can turn people against one another, while reinforcing systems of privilege.

Unlike other leaders of movement-building organizations, leaders of color deal with these complex issues constantly—inside themselves, their organizations, the movement, and the world at large. There is no respite for them, their children, partners, or families, and their understanding of the problem does not protect them from the rigors of the world they live in. Through the stories told in the CI, the participants affirmed that different groups may be racialized differently, but race always remains central.

Of course, movement-building organizations are understandably sensitive to the concept of "diversity" and how their organizations "look." Participants noted that "diversity" seems to assume that whites are always at the table; their seats are "guaranteed." Then, one or two individuals of color are sprinkled in to make the organization seem "inclusive." However, the opposite—a board or staff comprising primarily people of color—may be automatically considered inferior or un-diverse.

The Good vs. Bad Minority Myth

One challenge that often faces groups comprising diverse ethnic minorities is the "model minority" myth—the idea that one ethnic minority achieves, on average, more success than another. For example, many highly educated individuals recruited from Asian countries to work for corporations and research institutions in the US have become part of the middle class here, establishing themselves as a highly achieving ethnic group, a "good minority." At the same time, poor, less educated Asians, affected by changes in the global economy, have also migrated to the US in search of means to support their families and have often ended up in unskilled, low-wage jobs. Because Asians are stereotyped as high achievers, the majority population of Asian immigrants, who are working poor, become invisible. This creates many challenges, including gaining access to critical social services. Not only does this create hardship for low-income Asians, but it separates them and pits them against other racial and ethnic groups. The resulting competitiveness and resentment can become major stumbling blocks in diverse movement-building organizations.

Talking about race can prove difficult within organizations, even among supposedly progressive colleagues and audiences. There are also conflicts among different organizations of color (black vs. brown) and within the organizations themselves, especially over sexism and heterosexism. Challenges and clashes around women in leadership remain problematic as well. Work is valued in the larger culture based on who is doing it, and some leaders mirror that culture in their attitudes toward "women's work." There is real difficulty getting these kinds of issues on the table, and this failure has killed organizations.

Internalized attitudes of oppression continue to affect people of color. As one CI participant put it, "We carry parts of the outside on the inside." These attitudes can be magnified in organizations led by people of color and constrain the ability both to lead and to follow.

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY

Growing a community organization may be difficult, as it can require a tricky balance between developing staff while advancing an agenda, which in turn creates the dilemma of whether to find necessary skill sets or support a vision. In order to fulfill their commitment to their communities, for example, leaders sometimes have to hire people who don't have the necessary experience and must invest in grooming them for staff and leadership positions. At other times, a leader may have to make the difficult decision of hiring the "most experienced" or "qualified" person for the benefit of an organization, even though the candidate might not

be a local person of color. In fact, more white people are currently supported and hired for community organizing work, even in communities of color.

"This is not a job; this is a commitment."

While hiring the "right" people may be an issue for most types of organizations, it is particularly challenging for grassroots organizations led by people of color—especially those facing other capacity challenges that compound the hiring problem, such as discriminatory fundraising. Many other challenges arise as well. How does an organization set conditions for employment to address short-term needs (those of the current campaign) vs. longer-term needs (building leadership and a succession plan for people of color)? What if no people of color apply? What if those who do apply lack sensitivity to racial issues and (knowingly or not) seek to maintain the status quo? What if they don't "get it" in terms of a systemic change? How does an organization proceed in the face of needing to get work done?

The Cooperative Inquiry Experience: Pre-Meeting in Seattle, Washington

As part of a program-wide LCW meeting in Seattle, all awardees visited the community of fellow awardee Diane Narasaki, executive director of the Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS). The trip was a lesson in bridging various communities of color. The members of Washington State's Asian Pacific community, representing 50 ethnic groups and 68 languages, have diverse origins, beliefs, cultures, and religions. Diane and her colleagues described how ACRS and the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition (APIC) have created remarkable models of unity within this very diverse community.

Senior leaders have learned that, as CI participant Ricardo Martinez said, "This is not a job; this is a commitment." What drives them is internal—this is not a "career model." The notion of organizing as a profession is a new concept that the group members do not follow. Professionalization—of which the increasing number of organizers with advanced university degrees are emblematic—could threaten grassroots organizing because it creates a gatekeeper dynamic, deciding who is qualified to make change and who is not.

Young, local organizers in new organizations, on the other hand, may have the calling, but they do not have access to necessary training or mentorship.

"Nobody helped us; we started with the realities of our own community and just got to work," said CI participant Ai-jen Poo.

Simple communication can also be an issue. As one of the CI participants pointed out, "Sometimes five different languages are in the room." The inability of some organization members to travel, due to immigration limitations, identification document requirements, and so on, also poses a formidable obstacle to effective leadership.

"Sometimes five different languages are in the room."

FUNDRAISING VS. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Finding the financial resources to keep organizations alive was the most common obstacle mentioned by both the CI participants and others whom they interviewed. Difficulties appeared in many forms and for multiple reasons. By choice, these organizations are working in communities that lack even basic infrastructure.

CI participant Richard Moore recalled a church group that generously offered his organization a number of fax machines. "They contacted us for all the right reasons," he said. "They wanted to help us and support our network, and we deeply appreciated that. But we had to explain that we work in both urban and rural communities, and many of those communities wouldn't be able to use the machines because they didn't even have telephone lines yet. So one of our challenges is educating people about how deep these infrastructure problems really are."

The work of raising consciousness and building awareness takes time and needs multiple forms of assessment to judge progress, both quantitative and qualitative. Some groups feel pressure to avoid any potential organizing issue for fear of controversy, especially because they are easily misunderstood given the fundamentally political nature of their work. For example, a potential funder told one that they were "racist toward white workers" because they focused on workers of color!

Challenges Faced by Leaders of Color…

The CI method is based on multiple cycles of action and reflection. The CI actions included collecting stories from leaders of color across the nation, and the CI reflections consisted of processing these stories and struggling to understand the powerful and recurring issues around race that so many of them raised. Below are a few examples:

…The Beloved Community Center, in Greensboro, North Carolina (BCCG), which is dedicated to fostering the kind of community spirit envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., struggles with a local city councilman who is accused of being a slumlord. This presents a conflict, as the man is African American and has done a significant amount of good for the community. Ultimately, Beloved's position is "we stand with the people" and "people of color may have to be models" when they hold positions of public trust.

…Organizations led by people of color report feeling at risk of being "colonized" by white people. In one example, white volunteers went on strike rather than follow the leadership of people of color. They wanted to take over the organization and insert their own leadership. They were thanked for their service and told to leave.

…In another example, two guests, African-American women from the Gulf Coast, shared their "colonization experiences" of white progressives and liberals who sweep in, dominate local efforts, and refuse to accept the leadership of people who live there. They identified, for example, a cycle of actions that "create" the story that young black people are not "stepping up to the plate" to do community work in New Orleans. Their early ideas for change and reparation find no support and starve on the vine, although similar (white) efforts do receive support. As a result, it then appears as if black young people are not involved in trying to rebuild their communities.

…Young women of color experience being "pimped out," meaning they feel mistreated and abused by whites in nonprofit community work and emotionally and spiritually damaged by attitudes that seem to communicate, "You're female and bilingual, and we're not, so we'll use you."

The most demanding leadership work is often related to the mix of developing the strategies of an organization while simultaneously finding money. In Richard's words, "Some days we're fundraisers, and some days we're fund-losers." Leaders of color are caught in a complex knot of necessity, strategy, and values with regard to finding support for their organizations. In the midst of very scarce resources, they must still grapple with the question: are there sources whose money they wouldn't take, such as government offices, arms manufacturers, tobacco companies and others? On the other hand, taking money sometimes is a way of administering justice. As Richard put it, "It is our money, a resource that the movement has created. So how can we strategically recoup it?"

"Some days we're fundraisers, and some days we're fund-losers."

These leaders lack access to "long money networks." CI participant Cidra Sebastien described a New York City program founder who started by simply tapping family members and (other Ivy League) friends. Leaders of color are less likely to have these social networks for funding, so their programs are more likely to be reliant on larger, more impersonal and bureaucratic sources of support.

Participants wondered, as they explored their fundraising experience, whether philanthropy is becoming more socially conservative. One sign of this has been cropping up in the language of funding organizations: "Youth organizing" has been changed to "youth development" and sectioned off as a specialty. "Community organizing" has become "civic engagement." These leaders have been subtly and directly asked to water down their work through their language at a time when it is probably more necessary to "pump up the wording," that is, to talk clearly about political education and social justice.

The richness of the CI group's experience, in microcosm, identified one of the most serious barriers with which leaders of color struggle: their unique role, which requires constant reinterpretation and subsequent translation into multiple languages for multiple worlds. Without deliberate and intentional networking, this particular role can lead to a certain isolation and professional loneliness—diminishing the opportunity for day-to-day collegial sharing and ongoing development. For these leaders, opportunities like the CI provided rarely occur "naturally." The sense of being without a community of professional support, or as one CI member put it, of "never having a home," drains energy and dampens creativity. So it is meaningful that this group comprised individuals who are successful and find ways to persevere. It demonstrates, at the least, that leaders of color can deal productively with this barrier.

FOUR STRATEGIES FOR TAKING BACK THE WORK

In order to build, strengthen, and sustain movement-building organizations led by people of color, changes must start from within those organizations, their communities, and the leaders themselves. CI Facilitator Linda Powell Pruitt tied the group's overarching strategy together: "We didn't start out with strategies about how to convince funders. We didn't start out with strategies about how to recruit new communities. What we're thinking about is working from the inside out." In general, the strategies are about making changes in the way leaders of color conceptualize and carry out their work, rather than trying to change external actors.

> **The Cooperative Inquiry Experience: New York, New York**
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> The CI group met formally for the first time in New York to focus on three main tasks: 1) define the role of the facilitators, 2) get to know each other better, and 3) refine the CI's broad research topic. By defining the facilitators' role, the group shifted the uneven power dynamic that can develop in a research relationship between a large university and community participants. After asking the facilitators to leave the meeting room, the CI group discussed individual and collective purposes in the inquiry process and decided to invite the facilitators to participate as co-inquirers.

"I'm thinking that as far as creating our models, our culture, our foundations," said CI participant Reggie Moore, "if we can get those of us who have the resources in our communities to invest in our organizations, we won't have to look outside of our communities for the resources we clearly have within. It's basically about reclaiming our voices, our ideas, our institutions, and our communities. It's going to take a huge amount of resources and creativity to harness that and get that back."

The group agreed that leaders of color need to recognize, first, that they have power. They have expertise in their organizations and communities; a history of movement building from which to grow; relationships that help them do their work—even when they don't have funder support—and a strong sense of their own values and culture. These are their strengths, their reality.

"We are acts of resistance," declared Richard.

Not only do they need to recognize their own power, but they must always recognize their own responsibility. When discussing issues of race in the United States, it is easy to blame others for the current situation.

Richard continued, "There's a tendency, at times, to always blame something on somebody else. And sometimes within that tendency is the inclination always to blame things on white folk. And you know, quite frankly…we've got to bear some of our own stuff…We have to get over our feelings of victimization, or else we'll always be victims."

"We are acts of resistance."

The group hopes that the following strategies will help other community-based leaders of color to recognize the power within themselves, their organizations, and their communities and to find the strength to create the change that they want to see.

I. CRITICALLY AND INTENTIONALLY DEFINE THE WORK

The group members came to the conclusion that they and all leaders of color need to pay attention to the language they and others use to define and describe themselves and their work. That language should reflect their own values and reality. Unfortunately, common discourses on issues of social change impose language that is often unhelpful or does not resonate with experiences of the affected individuals and communities. For example, the school improvement discourse usually focuses on "risk," "deprivation,"

and "damage." The issue of racist violence is discussed as "hate crimes," removing the word "race" and stripping away the racial aspect from the violence. The group concluded that leaders of color need to take back the language. If they allow the language of the community and the movement to be co-opted, they will have lost the core of their work.

Richard recalls how some funders urged him not to use the term "environmental racism" because it was too contentious and to replace it with "environmental justice." Similarly, leaders of color need to define leadership in their own terms so they can articulate their own models to others and avoid becoming trapped into particular leadership structures defined by people outside of the community.

In particular, they need to be crystal clear about what they are "for" and not fall into the uncreative trap of understanding only what they are "against." They need to be clear about mission and vision, not only because this helps them work proactively, but also because it protects their organizations from changes driven by others.

The Cooperative Inquiry Experience: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

In Milwaukee, the group members began learning from each other and becoming comfortable with tackling their research question together. They gave presentations of their work, organizations, and communities and visited the Milwaukee-based members' organizations. Will Allen's group, called Growing Power, showed how a small piece of urban land could be highly productive and become a center for community activity. At Reggie Moore's organization, Urban Underground, Milwaukee youth shared their work and led workshops on education, policy accountability, and domestic violence.

Leaders of color need to be crystal clear about what they are "for" and not fall into the uncreative trap of understanding only what they are "against."

For example, the Brotherhood/Sister Sol (BHSS) is a Harlem-based organization with a mission to empower young black and Latina/o women and men to develop into critical thinkers and community leaders. They are very clear about their mission, purpose, and the way they want to work together, and they clearly stood for keeping their membership within these two cultural communities. Periodically, BHSS staff has conversations about what it means to accept people who were not black or Latina/o into its programs.

During a conversation about a young person joining a program who did not identify as black or Latina/o, Cidra challenged the program staff to think about the implications of this decision. The fee structure, program design, and curriculum were created to serve people from a predominantly black and Latina/o community. Cidra felt that it was important to remember why BHSS was created and to apply the BHSS mission and vision thoughtfully when making decisions.

Funding Pressures

While pressures to change emerge from within an organization, as illustrated above, every one of the group members and most leaders with whom they consulted for this project agreed that funders' practices put formidable stresses on people of color trying to maintain the integrity of their organizations' missions. Nevertheless, they cannot allow funders to define their work or the movement more generally.

For example, funders explicitly and implicitly force leaders and staff to change their language, which changes the nature of what they do. Foundations have created a category of work called "youth work" or "youth issues," which includes such topics as education and youth violence. However, the group believes that youth issues include all family and community issues, not simply some smaller "subset" defined by funders. Anything that affects families makes an impact on young people to various degrees.

II. PRACTICE TALKING OPENLY ABOUT RACISM TO LEARN ABOUT THE POLITICAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF RACE

The group members concluded, based on their own experiences, that in general, both people of color and white people have a difficult time talking about race, often because they lack knowledge about current race issues and/or the history of racism in the United States. Also, discussions about race are often perceived as divisive. As a result, many people find it difficult to engage in conversations about race in a thoughtful and nuanced way, one that does not devolve into a "blame game." The group members found there is a great need for political and historical education for everyone, including people of color, who may not sufficiently know their own histories.

The Power of History

History shapes our lives—although many of us do not really understand how it does so. In particular, people of color, American and immigrant, need to be educated about putting racism in context so they can make the connections between history and their everyday lives.

For example, during the 1960s and 1970s, the United States economically and politically supported the industrialization of the Four Asian Tigers: Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. The export-driven economies of the Tigers were supported by the United States as a containment strategy against socialism, and the success of those economies was a sign to the world that capitalism worked.

This policy had implications for the way Americans perceived different races. For example, if those Asian countries "succeeded" while others did not, many people might jump to conclusions about why.

This kind of historical information can be helpful in undoing the racism that exists within the United States and the internalized racism within the social justice movement.

Communities of color need to develop a common analysis of what happened before, in order to understand why their lives are the way they are now. Commonalities, historic and contemporary, exist across the struggles of different communities of color. They need to discover what these are and use them to build connections across the communities. The group identified five ways to provide political and historical education:

1) Make information more accessible;

2) Develop effective intergenerational models;

3) Write histories and pass them on;

4) Learn from other cultures; and

5) Create safe spaces for reflection.

Making Information More Accessible: Historical Resources

The group referred to several helpful sources of historical information that contributed to their understanding of race in the United States. Group members asserted the importance of making these and similar resources easily accessible. These sources were:

- *Walk Out*. This film tells the true but little known story of a group of Chicano students who staged a compelling 1968 walkout to protest the injustices of the public high school system in East Los Angeles. (HBO: 2006)

- *Moynihan Report*. This report argues that the roots of black families' problems lie in a legacy of slavery, growing urbanization, discrimination, and a tradition of matriarchy. (U.S. Department of Labor: 1965)

- *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex* by INCITE! Women of Color against Violence. (South End Press: 2006)

- *Building Power, Sharpening Minds* (Political Education Curriculum) by the School of Unity and Liberation. (SOUL: 2007)

Developing Effective Intergenerational Models: Voices of Wisdom

Beyond standard learning materials, such as books, films, and reports, the group members realized there were immense learning resources that could be found just by looking across generations. The importance of building effective intergenerational relationships arose in discussions at every meeting. There were two aspects of intergenerational models that they identified: The first was the value of passing wisdom and knowledge from one generation to the next. The second was the benefit of "growing our own leadership."

Leaders of color need to value the lessons and voices of people who have been in the movement for a long time so they can avoid past mistakes, understand their roles and advance social movements. The CI group included both established leaders who had been in the movement for decades and younger leaders.

Ai-jen Poo, one of the younger leaders, stated that her organization lacked the presence of older leaders. Consequently, CAAAV staff had to turn to other organizations to learn from the lessons of previous movement leaders. She expressed the value of being able to share the CI space with leaders who had lived through the Civil Rights Movement. Older generations not only provide wisdom and knowledge, but they must also provide support. Existing organizations should actively work to include experienced community members in their work and at the same time, support the next generation and develop successors in the movement.

The group members currently employ a number of different intergenerational models in their own work:

- The Beloved Community Center of Greensboro (BCCG) invites black people and young people to its board, which was predominantly white in the past. This initiative was not easy to implement, and co-directors Joyce and Nelson Johnson needed to hold a hard discussion with the staff to explain the significance of such a structural change.

- BCCG holds a program called Freedom Summer, which invites young people from the neighborhood to work at the organization as interns. In 2006, there were four high school and six college students. Two of the interns were white, while the others were black. Again, there were challenges to implementing such a program, which necessitated time spent on reflecting and understanding the context behind problems. For example, the BCCG staff complained about a lack of work ethic among the black interns. After many hard conversations, however, the staff realized that the lack of work ethic was not due to the interns' laziness, but rather to their being unaccustomed to employment. Their families were often on welfare, and workplace behavior was not a regular part of their upbringing.

- The Board of Padres Unidos and Jóvenes Unidos (the organization's youth initiative) is composed equally of youth and parents.

- The Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) organizes an annual Youth Organizing and Training Institute (YOTI) program. Trainings include intensive, hands-on skill-building sessions. The format of the program combines multicultural and political education, as well as direct action organizing. YOTI allows for a broad political discussion to take place among youth. Youth from Jóvenes Unidos participated in the YOTI in the past.

The Cooperative Inquiry Experience: Albuquerque, New Mexico

At the CI meeting in Albuquerque, many stories began to gel around clearly defined themes such as political education, the importance of reflection, and the discourse on race and social justice in the United States. At an evening reception, the group met with community members and their families as a great way to discover the richness and unity of New Mexico. The next day, Richard Moore invited four community leaders to share their work, stories, and personal experiences. Group members began to recognize the commonalities of struggles among organizations and realized the need to figure out how to make connections across communities.

Writing Personal Histories and Passing Them on: A Legacy of Experience

It is the responsibility of the older generation to document their work and to pass it on to the next generation. This kind of documentation can occur in various forms, from oral histories, to journaling, to more formal forms of documentation. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, there were many independent, grassroots newspapers that documented the Civil Rights and other movements. Those newspapers have almost all disappeared, but the need for an independent voice that represents the community's stories remains. Specifically, the CI group discovered how important it was to learn about one's community—with its successes, struggles, and growth—from the people within the community.

Learning from Other Cultures: Lessons from the Hopi

As part of the LCW program-wide meeting, the CI members visited the Hopi Reservation and had the opportunity to learn about Hopi culture and history. From this experience, the group learned that Hopi are taught by their own people, so they know their history, and they know how their history explains their current life experiences. The Hopi have a relatively intact worldview, which is passed on to their youth. Conversely, immigrants and US-born people of color are largely taught by the dominant culture, which is white. As a result, immigrants and US-born people of color do not have their history and culture built into their everyday education and are unable to pass on a unified worldview to their youth.

The trip to the Hopi Reservation taught group members two important lessons:

1) They needed to learn about their communities' histories from within those communities; and

2) They could learn a lot from others about ways to strengthen their communities and organizations.

The visit was a very powerful learning experience. CI group members, along with the LCW 2005 awardees, traveled to various spiritual locations, participated in Hopi cooking and craft workshops, toured the reservation's radio station, heard and watched traditional Hopi song and dance, and spent the day meeting the Hopi people. In all, these experiential learning opportunities had a lasting impact on the group members. They also learned about the power of culture and its ability to affirm one's identity and dignity.

While much of the CI group's learning from other cultures happened in a US context, Ai-jen Poo's experience in the Philippines demonstrates the wealth of sophistication, commitment, and inspiration that exists in movement-building organizations around the globe. In 2006, Poo visited urban poor communities in the Philippines and was inspired by the organizers' level of commitment to their community. The organizers were housed, fed, and clothed with whatever the community could provide them.

Learning methods like those described above—the use of traditional learning materials, intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and experiential learning from within and/or outside of communities—provided the CI members with much food for thought. The task now is to figure out how to create spaces to integrate and tailor the learning to fit their individual, organizational, and community needs.

Creating a Safe Space for Reflection: Time in Uncharted Waters

One critical strategy for facilitating education about racism—among people of the same race, across different communities of color, and between people of color and white people—is to create safe spaces for reflection. Responses from interviews that participants conducted affirmed the importance of putting aside specific times and places to reflect, as leaders don't often have the opportunity to build it into their regular practice. These spaces need to be safe so that participants can get out of their comfort zones. In the group's experience, those conversations that contain a potential for conflict or allow people to test uncharted waters can be opportunities for participants to learn something new and even transform their own thoughts and feelings. The CI method provides a useful model for this kind of reflection. (See pages 3 and 19 for information on replicating a CI.)

"Part of dismantling racism is also doing positive work…"

To foster conversations that are less structured than a CI, the group organized small discussions at one of the LCW program-wide meetings about the barriers people of color often face. By the time those discussions occurred, all awardees had previously met three times at three-day, program-wide meetings over the course of two years. Awardees had already built both professional and personal relationships with each other. Therefore, a great degree of comfort, respect, and empathy existed among group members. This dynamic proved essential when talking about the barriers with which people of color must cope. The experience demonstrated that nurturing personal relationships helps one to "go deep" into these issues.

In order to pull people out of their comfort zones and into a place where they could be challenged, members assigned them randomly to the discussion groups. Participants were mixed in terms of race, age, gender, experience, and organizational affiliation. The group felt that these small group discussions were successful in engaging participants. In fact, one of the members described participants as "hungry" for the opportunity to speak up on the issues. Each group developed strategies to address the barriers

that it discussed, and many conversations about race continued among participants even after the session ended. The task was then to find ways to continue the momentum that had developed and create opportunities to act on the group's reflections in the members' personal and professional lives. Although a session can be helpful in kicking off a conversation in organizations and communities, one-time workshops are not enough.

As Nelson Johnson exclaimed, "You can't workshop your way out of this!"

The group concluded that movement-building organizations need to find ways to hold similar conversations, building racial analysis and education into their day-to-day work. In the experience of the members, workshops on dismantling racism can also be risky, depending upon who organizes them. They should strive to dismantle racism in a positive way.

"Part of dismantling racism is also doing positive work," said Ricardo Martinez. "It's not to have a gathering of folks that are going to talk about all the times they got shot at and almost hung and all this stuff. But they really talk about, you know, ways to really organize around what are some of the strategies to dismantle racism and create this kind of multicultural kind of society that's developing everywhere."

III. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

"This [movement building] is all about relationship building," said participant Will Allen. It is important to build relationships at multiple levels: the personal, the organizational, and the community. These relationships contribute not only to the growth, strength, and sustainability of organizations, but also provide support to leaders of color as individuals who often work in very challenging contexts.

Because the group members experience oppression both personally and organizationally, they realize that they need to take time to care for themselves. Their practices demonstrate that personal sustainability for these leaders depends upon the relationships they have built among colleagues and the community. Here are some examples:

- The CI group held a reception at the meeting in Albuquerque in order to meet members of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice community. The guests' families were also welcome to attend. This sense of family is characteristic of the CI members' approach to leadership, and they feel that it is important to foster it in as many aspects of their work as possible. Having children, family, and community present reminds them of why they are doing what they do.

- Many of the CI members use rituals and spiritual traditions to build unity within their organizations and communities. Some of the organizations practice particular rituals that serve to cleanse and ground the staff as individuals but also build a bond that unifies the group. Some of these rituals include carrying corn in one's pocket and smudging (a Native American tradition of purification with the smoke from burning herbs). For Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, a multi-issue organization led by people of color who fight for educational equity, student rights, and justice for immigrants, staff smudging helps cleanse the spirit and reaffirms that Chicanos and Mexicanos have a right to be on this land.

- Padres y Jóvenes Unidos also holds talking circles for their young people.

- A common practice among the cultures in the CI group is that of collecting money regularly within a community and then rotating the funds among community members as a little extra financial support. This practice is part of Korean culture (called Kae), African culture (called Sou Sou, based on "esusu," the word for "cooperative" from the Yoruba people in Nigeria), and Latin American culture (called Tanda in Mexico and some other parts of Latin America).

Accountability to Communities

The benefits of building relationships with staff and community include more than personal sustainability in movement building; it is also about the ability to reflect the needs of communities and to remain accountable to them. Some examples of mechanisms that the CI members use to develop a deep relationship with their communities include:

- Holding weekly meetings to build community. The Beloved Community Center in Greensboro does this. The meetings are a space for political arguments, personal news, and other discussions. All internal staff is involved, and anyone can join. Participants represent the whole community, and roughly 15 to 20 people attend each meeting.

- Simply doing what you say you are going to do. Establishing a track record of fulfilled commitments helps garner community support.

- Tapping into the community for expertise and power. The group suggests mapping its assets—social, capital, symbolic, intellectual, and cultural—and harnessing those assets for the community's good. Throughout the CI process, group members were reminded that many of the answers to their questions already exist in their own communities. Tap into this wisdom and knowledge before relying on information from outside to solve problems.

The Cooperative Inquiry Experience: Denver, Colorado

At the last CI meeting, in Denver, members pulled together their reflections, actions, stories, and critical analyses. While this marked the closing of the CI process, it also started a new phase of the group's work. As Angie Chan declared when reflecting on what she learned from the CI group members, "I feel like I've got a new pair of eyeballs!" Members were committed to integrating what they learned from each other into their day-to-day work and continuing their conversations on race, social change, social justice, and movement building.

An exemplary organization in terms of building relationships and alliances is Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), led by fellow LCW awardee Diane Narasaki, in Seattle, Washington. As part of an LCW program-wide meeting, the group had the opportunity to visit ACRS and the community it serves. This trip was a lesson in bridging seemingly different communities of color. The members of Washington's Asian Pacific community have diverse origins, beliefs, cultures, and religions. Together, they include immigrants, refugees, and native-born Americans of all ages. These varied cultures also share common problems, including anti-immigrant bias and discrimination, as well as poverty and sexism. Racial profiling has threatened their civil liberties, and language barriers often limit access to needed services. ACRS and the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition (APIC), which Narasaki co-founded, are remarkable models of multi-racial unity within a community. They are successful because they are able to communicate the commonalities in the struggles of different ethnic groups and have established a track record for successfully mobilizing these diverse groups to work together and achieve their goals.

...Both organizers and service providers need to work together...

Building Alliances

ACRS is a primary example of how leaders of color can successfully build relationships beyond their communities with other organizations led by people of color. This type of relationship building may be difficult because of the racism that exists even among communities of color. However, they must look beyond stereotypes and create multicultural alliances if they hope to build connections across their struggles. They need to align themselves toward a common vision, even if they have different immediate interests.

The lesson of looking beyond stereotypes applies not only to racial but to organizational differences. Leaders of color need to find allies in unlikely places, such as the government, which is often an opponent. Both Richard Moore and Will Allen told stories of finding very supportive people within government agencies. They were officials who wanted to do the right thing and took risks to help their respective organizations. Leaders also need to build relationships with funders in order to sustain their organizations. Allen, for example, keeps good friends who are funders but has never asked them for funding. He hopes that the funders will become so connected to his organization that they would be willing to provide substantial support if asked. This type of relationship takes time to develop.

The group also discovered the need to better understand the relationship between organizers and service providers in movement building. Although organizers and service providers represent only two types of organization among many within a given movement, both need to work together. The group encountered a perception that service providers and organizers perform discrete functions, and that while service providers are critical to addressing the immediate needs of community people, they do not function to transform society. Meanwhile, organizers were seen as systemically examining why current problems exist and aiming to challenge and change the politics and power of existing systems.

However, service providers and organizers do not exist as independently as this. As the CI group understands the relationship, providing services can build trust in a community, which then increases the community's ability to organize (e.g., waging campaigns, carrying out demonstrations, and so forth). This ultimately strengthens the social justice movement.

For example, Moore explained that SNEEJ doesn't organize cultural events just because it's fun and a celebration of one's culture. "You also do it to build unity in a community."

Opportunities for community members to participate in activist movements can occur in other ways as well—which is helpful for individuals who might not want to be out front, publicly participating in demonstrations, but who might very well be interested in showing support in less visible ways.

"For example," Moore said, "a gas station owner might not come out to walk beside you on campaign marches, but maybe he'll fill up your van's fuel tank once a week for free to help you with transportation costs." Both organizers and service providers work to build their constituents' capacity, but in different ways. The group concluded that organizations led by people of color need to create a better alignment with all organizations that serve their communities.

IV. BUILD STRONGER ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

It is important to pay attention to infrastructure in order to create an organization that reflects its community's values and to protect it against the scrutiny of funders and unwanted change. The immediate goal of building an effective organization, however, can sometimes be at odds with the long-term goal of building community.

Leaders of color need to work at fostering organizational cultures that reflect community values and traditions, and inculcate these cultures in the Board and staff. Will Allen, for example, took his Board and staff (a multi-racial group) to the Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee. He noted that this was a good starting point from which to work because it illustrated the mistakes that we, as a society, do not want to relive.

Staffing Challenges

All of the group members found it difficult to balance representative staffing with staffing that would meet the immediate needs of their respective organizations. For example, in response to intense foundation scrutiny over financial management practices at Growing Power, Will Allen hired a CPA to handle all of the accounting. Given that explicit need, Allen's hiring choice was based mostly on qualifications and skills. In another example, Joyce Johnson, of BCCG, framed this dilemma as an issue of hiring as a community-building mechanism rather than one intended to meet particular needs. BCCG has hired people who did not have all of the necessary experience but were part of the BCCG community and would make a contribution in their own way.

The strategy in Joyce Johnson's example may be difficult for some organizations, depending upon circumstances, but it reflects the notion that expertise and wisdom exist in various forms within the community. Leaders should tap into the community for this knowledge and experience, as described above, and be careful when using outside consultants. Consultants have become such a regular, almost commonplace part of movement-building work, it is sometimes easy to forget the implications of what they do, given that they are not from the grassroots struggle. At the same time, leaders should be open to learning from other sectors about ways to strengthen their organizations' infrastructures. The corporate sector, for example, invests considerable resources in studying issues such as effectiveness and sustainability. There is much to take from these studies, but organization leaders need to make sure that they tailor their learning to the situation in their own communities.

Diverse Boards are helpful and often required by funders, but diversity in itself does not offer all of the skills and strengths necessary to address an organization's issues of racism. In addition to creating diverse Boards, organizations need to provide Board members with a cultural education, which includes history, practices, and values. In order to preserve organizational cultures from unwanted change, leaders of color should also try to create opportunities for Board members to have some hands-on involvement in the organization's work. One-shot meetings will not enable them to understand the culture in a meaningful way.

We need to nurture new leaders who have demonstrated "true passion."

As described in earlier sections of this report, organizations led by people of color are under various pressures to change, whether in the language they use, the scope of their work, or the resources allocated to meet particular grant requirements. Therefore, a critical strategy for an organization led by a person of color is to develop a succession plan that ensures the organization's sustainability and the maintenance of its values. Allen pointed out that, in his experience, people can become very excited about a new idea that works, but then the excitement wanes, and they're on to the next thing. Leaders of color should be mindful of this, so that they strengthen movement-building organizations and do not foster career-driven organizations. They should find and grow passionate leaders to take their places.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

These lessons are intentionally listed in very broad terms because the group believes that each organization and community needs to apply them uniquely, according to its own context.

I. CRITICALLY AND INTENTIONALLY DEFINE YOUR WORK

- Pay attention to the language that you use to define yourselves and your work so that it reflects your experiences and reality and does not water them down.
- Prevent others from defining your work and the movement. Changing your language changes your work.
- Be clear about your mission and vision because doing so helps you work proactively and protects your organization from changes driven by others.

II. PRACTICE TALKING OPENLY ABOUT RACISM TO LEARN ABOUT THE POLITICAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF RACE

- Provide needed political and historical education to people of color and white people.
- Make helpful sources of historical information accessible to boards, staff, volunteers, and others.
- Build effective intergenerational relationships to pass on wisdom and mentor new leaders.
- Encourage older generations to document their work for the next generation.
- Learn about one's community—with its successes, struggles, and growth—from the people within the community.
- Create safe spaces for reflection about race and racism.
- Find ways to continue conversations about race and build racial analysis and education into your day-to-day work.

III. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- Build personal, organizational, and community relationships that reflect community needs and help you remain accountable to them.
- Take the time, as a leader of color, to take care of yourself.
- Communicate the commonalities in the struggles of different racial and ethnic groups and establish a track record for successfully mobilizing these diverse groups to work together and achieve their goals.
- Look beyond stereotypes and create multicultural alliances so that you can build connections across your struggles.
- Better understand the relationship between organizers and service providers. You need to work together to build a strong movement.

IV. BUILD STRONGER ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Pay attention to the infrastructure of your organization so that it reflects your values and protects against funders' scrutiny and unwanted change.
- Develop an organizational culture that reflects your values and traditions.
- Develop a succession plan to ensure the sustainability of the organization and its values.

The CI group was intergenerational and diverse in terms of gender, experience, and race. This composition allowed members to share and learn about the relevant histories of their communities and of the social justice movement more broadly. Sharing among the diverse participants proved important because it revealed the similarities in their struggles and communities, both in terms of historical and current contexts. The solidarity and support they felt for one another created an environment that fostered personal and professional rejuvenation.

It is very difficult for groups to reach the place this one did, where deep conversations on a topic as contentious as racism are possible. There is no cookie-cutter model for getting to that place, but the CI method provided ample freedom for group members to shape the learning experience to fit their own situations.

For us, the key ingredients of the CI were:

- The mandate of the CI members to define the role of the facilitators;
- Facilitators who took part in the group as co-inquirers;
- Collective decision-making;
- Group members with a knowledge of the issues, context, and history of racism in the United States;
- Good food;
- Time—each meeting was two days long and the members met five times;
- Building flexibility into meeting agendas;
- A sense of humor;
- Trust in each other's intentions because all were rooted in work in the community;
- Only people of color in the room;
- CI as collective work; and
- Group members with sophisticated group skills.

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- Nelson Johnson

LCW Flagstaff program-wide meeting, CI session
- LCW 2005 awardees, funders, and partners

United States Social Forum 2007
- Participants at the LCW CI workshop

Other community organizations referred to in this report
- Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), Seattle, WA (www.acrs.org)
- Hopi Foundation, Flagstaff, AZ (www.hopifoundation.org)
- Minority Executive Directors Coalition (MEDC), Seattle, WA (www.medcofkc.org)

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program
Leadership for a Changing World was a program of the Ford Foundation that recognized and supported community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it sought to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year from 2001–2005, Leadership for a Changing World recognized 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees received $115,000 and participated in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research, and a strategic communications effort. LCW was a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Institute for Sustainable Communities and the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
As the leadership research and development hub for the field of public service, the Research Center for Leadership in Action fosters leadership that transforms society.

Founded in 2003 at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, a top-ranked school for public service, the Center's unique approach integrates research with practice, bridges individual pursuits and collective endeavors, and connects local efforts with global trends. RCLA scholars use innovative social science methodologies to address ambitious questions that advance big ideas in leadership.

Public service leaders rely on RCLA to create customized leadership development and capacity-building programs that facilitate critical reflection, peer-to-peer learning, and transformation at the individual, organizational, and systems levels.

RCLA collaborates with the spectrum of public service organizations, from government agencies to nonprofits and community-based groups across the country and around the world. Partners include more than 700 social change organizations, universities, and leadership centers in the United States and abroad, local and state government leaders, and major foundations and corporations, including the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, AVINA Foundation, and Accenture.
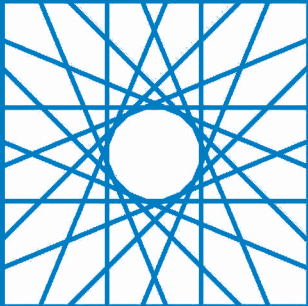
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For more information about Leadership for a Changing World and the Research and Documentation Component, visit www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership or call 212.998.7550.

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