

Cultural Competency in Capacity Building

Monographs by

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Organizational Development & Capacity in Cultural Competence: Building Knowledge and Practice

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equity



access



engagement



opportunity

inclusivity



accountability



diversity



openness



The *Organizational Development & Capacity in Cultural Competence* series consists of the following monographs grouped as listed:

**Multicultural Organizational Development:
A Resource for Health Equity**
by Laurin Y. Mayeno, MPH

Organizational Forces and Multicultural Change
by Laurin Y. Mayeno, MPH

Stages of Multicultural Organizational Change
by Laurin Y. Mayeno, MPH

**Encouraging More Culturally & Linguistically Competent
Practices in Mainstream Health Care Organizations: A
Survival Guide for Change Agents**
by Thomas D. Lonner, PhD

**Culturally-Based Capacity Building: An Approach to
Working in Communities of Color for Social Change**
by Frank J. Omowale Satterwhite, PhD, and Shiree Teng, MA,
National Community Development Institute

A Capacity Building Approach to Cultural Competency
by Anushka Fernandopulle, MBA, CompassPoint
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Organizational Development & Capacity in Cultural Competence: Building Knowledge and Practice

Ask anyone who has been working for a sustained period of time to promote cultural competency, build multicultural capacity, or develop culturally responsive systems of health care and they can tell you that there have been decades of effort devoted to increasing recognition of the need for action to address the health needs of diverse communities.

They may sound a bit weary, for systems and institutions are slow to take action, and even when plans are in place, progress often proceeds at a snail's pace...or so it seems. Champions and change agents inside organizations soon recognize that working toward tangible changes felt by patients, clients, and communities affect organizational systems, structures, and practices, along with individual level skills and behavioral change. We believe this kind of leadership, awareness, and investment in organizational development and capacity building, beyond episodic training and policy development, are what determine the pace of change. This monograph series articulates several approaches to organizational development and capacity building in cultural competence.

A Critical Juncture – Development of the cultural competence field has been from the margins of a system that has not fully embraced it, but recognition of the systemic changes required to work effectively with culturally diverse communities are more than a notion. Now is a critical stage in the journey. Can cultural competency become integral to the way that health services are delivered? Will it remain on the margins, trying to push its way in? Or, will it simply fade away as a well meaning, but failed experiment? A lot is at stake – the health of our nation and, particularly, populations with the least access to care which suffer the greatest impact of disparities in health and health care.

Momentum Built – Looking back over the past two decades, the momentum built has been noticeable. Many large health systems – both public and private – have taken action. The players who are engaged in this work are broader than ever before and are lending more teeth to the effort. For example, the Commission (formerly the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations) has begun to highlight issues of linguistic and culturally appropriate care in its accreditation processes. In the nonprofit capacity

building field you hear more and more people say that such competency is an essential component of organizational effectiveness. Now the movement for cultural competency has accumulated a wealth of experience and knowledge that can serve as a foundation for future action.

A Field in its Infancy – From another perspective, these efforts are still in their infancy. Several decades in the history of humankind are but a speck in time when compared to the years of human experience and knowledge accumulated for many cultural health practices, the science of western biomedicine, and even the development of modern health care systems. The field of cultural competency is relatively new, and from this perspective, is just beginning to develop knowledge and wisdom. There is a relatively short history to learn from with little or no evidence base or consensus about what works and what doesn't work. Given this, cultural competency practice provides us with an amazing laboratory for learning.

Need for Good Theory and Practice – Ask anyone who has been in the field of cultural competency for years and they will tell you that many cultural competency efforts are ill conceived. They can cite examples of organizations seeking “quick fixes” through two-hour workshops, which, by the way, managers will not be attending. They can also tell you about concerted efforts that “fail” or that are not sustained over time. One reason these efforts do not succeed is that there is no shared understanding of what success looks like, let alone a clear path for how to get there. Even the term “culturally competent” may suggest a static state that may sometimes direct much effort and energy toward a finite point rather than generative capacities of learning and adaptation. We need both good theory to inform our practice and practice to inform our theory. We need *praxis*, which occurs in the dance between theory and practice, resulting in greater knowledge and, ultimately, more effective practice.

Purpose of this Series – This monograph series came about as a result of the desire to dance the dance of theory and practice in looking at how to make cultural competency come alive in organizations. Its purpose is to promote learning and strengthen the effectiveness of both theorists and practitioners in the field. It explores a variety of frameworks for organizational development or capacity building

and their implications for practice, taking on a number of issues that arise in real world practice. At essence, the basic questions explored are “Where are we going?” “How do we get there?” and “How do we know when we’ve made progress?” Its audience is not the unconvinced; rather it is aimed at those people who are working as change agents within health organizations. It is assumed that the reader acknowledges the importance of this work and wants to look deeper into the complex issues that arise in practice. This monograph series will serve as a jumping off point for a convening of change agents in health organizations who will add their experience and perspectives to the dialogue.

Monograph Series Partnership – This monograph series is produced through a partnership between CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and The California Endowment. After commissioning several cultural competence change agents and researchers to draft papers on organizational development and capacity building practices, The California Endowment asked CompassPoint to organize a day-long dialogue about the papers with cultural competence change agents within health organizations and capacity builders who have worked with health organizations in this area. Ignatius Bau, Beatriz Solís, and Dianne Yamashiro-Omi have all been integral to the planning of this dialogue. For The California Endowment, it is an opportunity to contribute to their vision for culturally competent health systems, which involves partnering with multiple players in health systems, educational institutions, businesses, and communities to develop research, policy, practice, education, and workforce development.

As a nonprofit capacity building firm based in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 30 years, we have witnessed and helped to support the changing orientations of community-based and community-led nonprofits through work on strategic plans, board member composition, and staff recruitment that has only slightly lagged behind the sweeping demographic changes in our communities. This monograph series has been a wonderful opportunity to summarize our capacity building work in cultural competence, work that has developed over time through the lens of organizational effectiveness frameworks.

Description of Papers – The authors in this series share a common set of values as well as their own unique perspective.

- Mayeno’s papers discuss the applicability of multicultural organizational development (MCO) for building the multicultural capacity of health organizations, positing that multicultural capacity and equity are interconnected. The papers look at theories from the behavioral sciences, which have been applied in organizations, including Lewin’s field theory and Prochaska’s transtheoretical model, more widely known as the “stages of change.”
- Lonner’s paper, which had many sections co-authored by Beatriz Solís, is written as a survival guide for change agents and systems who intend to advance the cultural and linguistic (C&L) practices of mainstream health organizations. This paper discusses the key challenge of introducing C&L advances into the cultures, interests, and features of large mainstream health care organizations. Its perspective is that the organizations, not the patients, pose the cultural challenge.
- The National Community Development Institute’s (NCDI) paper delves into the definition of culturally-based capacity building, presenting three field experiences in which this framework was applied. For NCDI, community is central to culturally-based capacity building. In the case studies presented, capacity building is informed by community voices, conducted in partnership with community, and works for community transformation. Organizational players are co-learners and resources for community.
- CompassPoint’s paper discusses the relationship between improving cultural competency and improving organizational effectiveness. It also describes a capacity building approach to improving cultural competency in an organization where systems issues are dealt with through the lens of multicultural organizational development.

Invitation to Readers – In closing, we invite you, the reader, to see yourself as a contributor to the learning laboratory. We hope that these papers stimulate new thinking, provide new ideas for practice, and raise new questions. We hope that these papers remind you that you are not alone in the challenges you face. We invite you to read with both a critical eye and with an open and generous mind. We recognize that that we are on a collective quest and that none of the authors has “the answers.” Each has taken the risk of committing their ideas to paper. We invite you to engage with these papers as part of an ongoing process of learning from theory and practice, taking what we learn and exploring ways to apply it. It is in this spirit of building knowledge that we will widen the practices of creating culturally competent health organizations, and speed the pace of change that is needed to serve and engage people and communities.

Many Thanks – This series and the convening held on July 30, 2007 to discuss the papers would not have been realized without the steady stream of projects, meetings, and networking and grantmaking conducted by Ignatius Bau at The California Endowment. Ignatius is all about widening the field, and we hope that this monograph series contributes to that effort.

Along with graciously agreeing to rounds of review and editing of their papers, each of the monograph authors also reviewed each others’ papers and participated in discussions and planning meetings to shape the day-long dialogue on July 30, 2007, that we organized in conjunction with the release of the monograph series. Anushka Fernandopulle, Beatriz Solís, Laurin Mayeno, Omowale Satterwhite, Shiree Teng, and Tom Lonner, along with the many organizations they have worked with, have seen lots of pages recycled as they put their ideas to keyboard. Each of the authors has many thanks and appreciations for comments they received earlier on their papers, and they are acknowledged with those papers.

I want to thank Laurin Mayeno and Ignatius Bau for helping me navigate through additional conferences, documents, health parlance, and organizational acronyms so that the planning and production process was even more thoughtful and inclusive. In addition to the authors, Ellen Wu, Ignatius Bau, Dianne Yamashiro-Omi, and Melissa Welsh have all contributed their thoughts to this series. Jeanne Bell provided editorial guidance and Cristina Chan combed through and made additional suggestions on each of the papers as copy editor of the series. On behalf of these individuals, we thank the many organizations that we have worked with and that informed each of the papers. Within this large group are the champions and change agents that generated the successes and lessons that we see happening throughout California.

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Culturally-Based Capacity Building

An Approach to Working in Communities of Color for Social Change

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Introduction

In 2003, the National Community Development Institute (NCDI) published an article entitled *Through the Lens of Culture: Building Capacity for Social Change and Sustainable Communities*,¹ which described a culturally-based approach to building capacity for social change.² The article broadly defined “culture” and its multiple dimensions to include *race, language, gender, socioeconomic status, age, religion, sexual identity, disability*, and other aspects of human life. It described the difference between “culturally competent” and “culturally-based” approaches to working in communities of color.³ It discussed the social context in which we do our work – communities of color that are culturally different in a society where the norm is to adulate the dominant white culture. It summarized our core values, our capacity building approach, and our basic strategies for delivering technical support and training services in communities of color.

In this article, supported by The California Endowment, we expand on our earlier analysis by sharing a summary of findings from a literature search and key informant interviews conducted with several client organizations, delving deeper into the definition of culturally-based capacity building and NCDI’s methodology, and putting forth a set of learning questions to foster more dialogue about this topic in the community building field.

1 Patricia St. Onge, Breonna Cole, and Sheryl Petty. (2003). *Through the Lens of Culture: Building Capacity for Social Change and Sustainable Communities*. National Community Development Institute, web-published article, pp. 1-10. Website: www.ncdinet.org

2 NCDI defines social change as “fundamentally transforming social conditions, social relationships, social norms, and social practices in communities of color and how they relate to mainstream society.” In this article, the terms “social change” and “social transformation” are used interchangeably.

3 Cultural competency means providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health and social services to diverse populations. To be culturally-based, the capacity building or service delivery process must not only be “culturally competent,” but also focused on social transformation. Our definition of culturally-based capacity building is further explained in another section of this article.

Literature Review

NCDI utilized the Community Development Institute (CDI)⁴ to conduct a review of the literature on culturally-based capacity building in communities of color. The guiding research question was *What are the best interdisciplinary approaches to cross-cultural competency that can inform NCDI's capacity building work in communities of color?*

CDI's interdisciplinary literature search reviewed scholarly journals, books, and magazine articles using spider software and other Internet search engines. The main findings were

- There are many definitions of “culture” in the literature. By and large, authors define culture as *the common history, beliefs, experiences, language, geography, customs, social norms, life-styles and/or artistic forms that are transmitted from generation to generation by a people.*⁵

Culturally-competent capacity building should enhance the quality of life, create equal access to necessary resources, and...foster strategic and progressive social change resulting in a just society.

- Although the concept of “cultural competence” has origins dating back to the late 1800s, it was not until the 1980s that a concerted effort emerged in the social science field to promote cultural competence as a best practice in the delivery of health and social services. Cultural competency is commonly defined as having the knowledge, skills, and values to work effectively with diverse populations and to adapt institutional policies and professional practices to meet the unique needs of client populations.⁶ The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) has adopted a conceptual framework and model for developing cultural competence in organizations. The guiding principles are 1) value diversity, 2) conduct self-assessment, 3) manage the dynamics of difference, 4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and 5) adapt to the diversity and cultural contexts of individuals and communities served.⁷

4 The Community Development Institute (CDI) is a nonprofit organization with an Empowerment Research! Division that provides community-based research and evaluation services in communities of color.

5 See references for various publications with definitions of the term “culture.”

6 National Center for Cultural Competence, Definition and Conceptual Framework for Cultural Competence. Website: <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/index.html>

7 National Center for Cultural Competence, section on Self-Assessment. Website: www.gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/selfassessment.html

- There are three main dimensions to successful cross-cultural service and technical assistance provision with diverse organizations and communities. They are (1) having the “organizational capital” or infrastructure (people, philosophy, and reputation) that enable an organization to successfully work in diverse communities; (2) having the “client support systems” (policies, processes, and practices) that enable an organization to work in the right way; and (3) having genuine qualities that enable an organization to build lasting and trusting relationships with diverse stakeholder groups.⁸
- The Alliance for Nonprofit Management's People of Color Affinity Group defines “culturally-competent capacity building” as a community-centered process that begins with an understanding of historical realities and an appreciation of the community's assets in its own cultural context. The (capacity building) process *should enhance the quality of life, create equal access to necessary resources, and...foster strategic and progressive social change resulting in a just society.*⁹ CDI concluded that this definition is similar to NCDI's framework because of its emphasis on “three C's” – community, context, and change.

Culturally-Based Capacity Building

NCDI defines “culturally-based” capacity building as *providing transformational technical support and training services for individuals, organizations, and communities in their unique cultural contexts based on knowledge, experience, and sensitivity to the issues of race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and religion.* In our practice, we are conscientious about addressing race, culture, and power issues in the organizations and communities that we serve. We intentionally link the capacity building process to a broader social change agenda with the vision of bringing about social transformation in communities of color.

Social Change Work

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Culturally-Based Capacity Building

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Social Transformation

8 *Culturally-Based Capacity Building Research Project.* (2005, November). Community Development Institute, unpublished report, pp. 16.

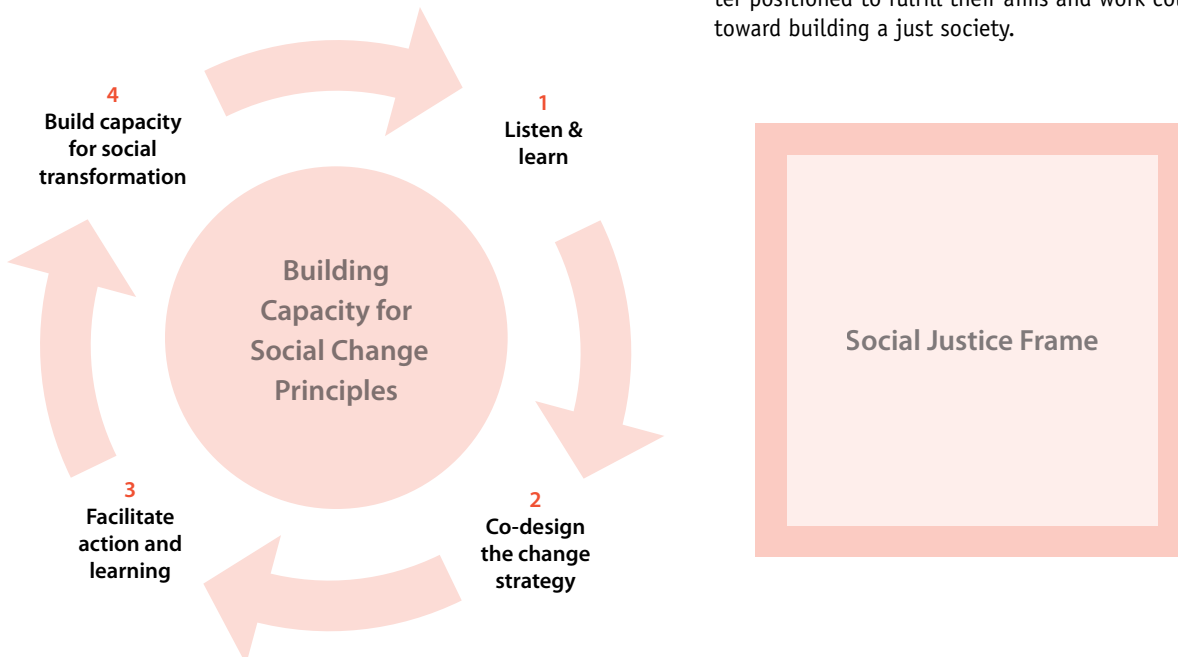
9 Gitin, M. and B. Rouson. (2004, August 13). *Beyond Diversity: Cultural Competency in Capacity Building.* Presentation at the 2004 Alliance for Nonprofit Management Meeting. Website: www.allianceonline.org

The Way We Work

There is a unique and special way that NCDI works in communities of color. The four guiding principles of culturally-based capacity building are as follows:

- 1. We work from the community by listening and learning.** Communities of color and other justice-seeking communities have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that is largely unacknowledged and untapped. We build capacity by listening to, learning about, and building trust with each community that we serve. Culturally-based capacity builders look to the community to develop a deeper understanding of the social conditions, power relationships, cultural dynamics, and complex challenging issues. We seek out the community's wisdom and apply what we learn. As much as possible, we use project teams that reflect the communities that we serve and who employ culturally-based capacity building methods. By working in this way, we have found that communities are empowered to be agents of their own social change process.
- 2. We work with the community by co-designing the change strategy.** For our work to be effective and sustainable, we must form genuine partnerships in communities. By co-designing the work with the community, we customize the capacity building process taking into consideration local conditions, cultural context, resources available, languages spoken, leadership assets, and other important factors. We see culturally-based capacity builders working as peers – not experts – who are facilitators, catalysts, resources, cheerleaders and critical friends in the capacity building process. By working in this way, we have found that communities are more likely to own and take charge of their own social change process.

- 3. We work in the community by facilitating action and learning.** We value learning for action. On the one hand, NCDI assists communities to develop viable strategies and action plans to solve community problems. On the other, we help communities to learn about viable methods of doing effective community building work. We approach capacity building with the understanding that *praxis* – the interplay of reflection and action – is critical for community and individual growth. Therefore, capacity builders should be active participants in the learning and doing process, from conducting community-driven research and developing action plans to connecting organizations and/or communities through peer learning activities. One of our key roles as capacity builders is to document and disseminate information on what is being learned during the capacity building process so that communities can use this knowledge to have greater impact. By working in this way, we have found that communities are able to address deeper issues and formulate solutions to the “root causes” of problems.
- 4. We work for the community to build capacity for social transformation.** Social transformation occurs when a critical mass of community stakeholders come together to define and implement social change strategies with a single sense of purpose. Capacity builders contribute by bringing together the diverse voices of a community to develop a common agenda for social change. We foster capacity building through concrete community engagement, organizational development, and relationship building strategies. We foster community building through results-oriented community development and advocacy activities. Social change is a long journey; beyond the service relationship, we maintain our ties with an organization and/or community as a peer, resource, and friend. Supported in this way, communities are better positioned to fulfill their aims and work collectively toward building a just society.



Below is a matrix that presents a bird's eye view of NCDI's culturally-based capacity building principles in action.

Overview of Culturally-Based Capacity-Building

<i>Core Principles</i>	<i>The Ways We Do The Work</i>
We work from the community by listening and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to community voices Learn from community wisdom Build trust with community members Use project teams who understand the culturally-based capacity building process
We work with the community by co-designing the change strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form genuine partnerships with organizations and/or communities Co-design the capacity building process Adapt methods based on community input Work as a peer, not as an expert
We work in the community by facilitating action and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop viable strategies and action plans with the community Develop a learning agenda with the community that is linked to its action plans Collect and share information on best practices Utilize peer learning techniques Document and disseminate learnings throughout the community/capacity building process
We work for the community to build capacity for social transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote diverse participation Develop a shared vision and common goals Develop results-oriented organizational/ community building plans Focus on building sustainable organizations

The Work We Do

NCDI's capacity building model is called Building Capacity for Social Change (BCSC). Based on thirty years of experience working in and building the capacity of communities of color, we have identified six key areas that are essential to build capacity in communities of color and other justice-seeking communities.¹⁰

- Community Engagement:** Informing, connecting, and engaging people in the social change process.

For the past two years, NCDI has been working in Detroit with the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods Initiative, bringing together thousands of African American and immigrant residents in six culturally and linguistically diverse neighborhoods to engage in community visioning and planning together and then implement their action plans.
- Community Organizations:** Building strong organizations and networks and developing institutional capacity for social change.

Over the past two and a half decades, the NCDI team has provided capacity building services to more than one

thousand organizations in forty states and ninety cities. Each year, we work with about one hundred organizations – from grassroots groups and service providers to public agencies and funders – to deepen understanding of the role of capacity building in the social change process. In virtually every engagement, we assist organizations to become more effective in carrying out their missions and challenge them to link their work to broader social change goals.

- Community Relationships:** Building relationships and forming viable partnerships across racial, social, and cultural fault lines.

One East Palo Alto is a community-based intermediary that NCDI helped create as part of the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. It is an organization that has mastered the art of bringing together diverse populations – in this case, African Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders to work together on common goals. East Palo Alto is a city that has changed from a majority African American community to one where Latinos are now in the majority. The One East Palo Alto story offers many lessons for the field.

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a descriptive summary of how NCDI works to build the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities of color.

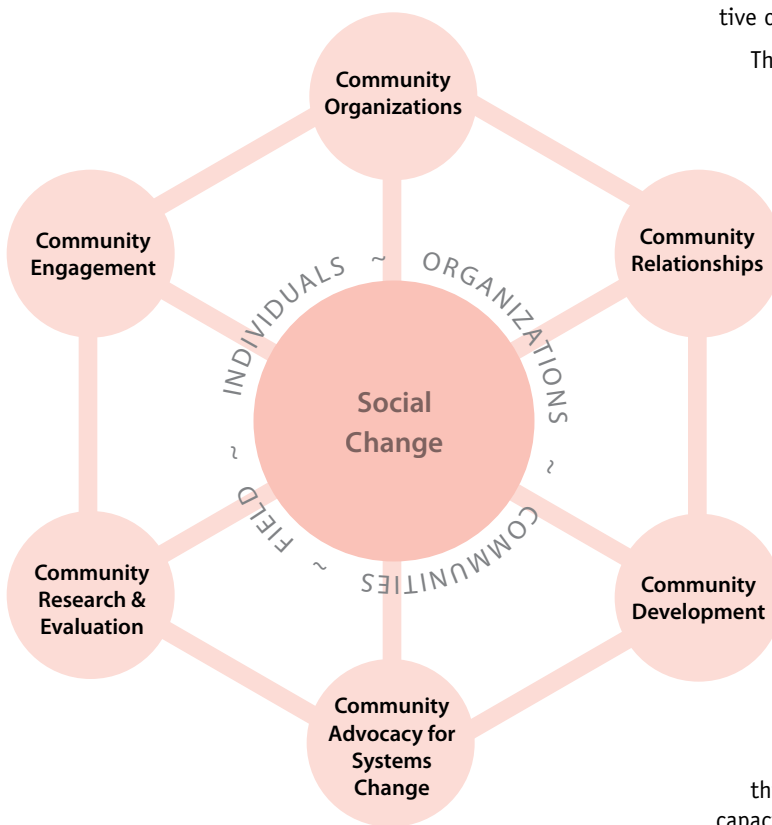
- **Community Development:** Improving the quality of life by changing material and social conditions in the areas of economics, education, health, housing, public safety, and family life.

NCDI is honored to have been invited to work with a wide array of amazing people, who, in their own ways, are moving mountains and paving uncharted paths to improve social conditions for people of color in this country and around the globe. The organizations that we serve typically engage in organizing, advocacy, service delivery, or development work at the local, regional, national, and international levels on behalf of low-income

but rather engaged thousands of community members in defining the strategic recommendations to guide his administration during a four year term of office. The Dellums Transition Team called upon NCDI to co-design this people-driven transition process.

Over a six month period, more than one thousand community members participated on forty-two task forces (such as youth development, police accountability, “greening” the city, financing universal healthcare, and affordable housing) which met weekly and developed policy recommendations on over a hundred questions that were generated through the election campaign process. The Dellums transition process is an example of mobilizing and empowering the community to effect policy change and promote institutional accountability.

SIX TRANSFORMATION AREAS



- **Community Research and Evaluation:** Documenting and telling the community building story from the perspective of the community.

The Community Development Institute is an affiliate of NCDI which has formed Empowerment Research! (ER!), a department whose mission is *to strengthen the ability of public agencies, foundations, and community-based organizations to empirically frame and address community problems and to increase the capacity of underserved communities to understand and impact public policy.* CDI offers an impressive group of knowledge services for communities of color including policy analysis, demographic analysis, transportation and land use analysis, community surveying, and environmental impact assessments – all with a focus on informing and enabling communities of color to use information as a political tool in framing and advocating for social change.

Community research and evaluation is an area where communities of color have the least capacity and where we strongly encourage community organizations and funders to invest in this often-overlooked but critically important area of capacity building work.

communities of color and other justice-seeking communities. Strengthening organizations and connecting organizations both within and across their content work areas is at the heart of the community building process.

- **Community Advocacy for Systems Change:** Changing institutional policies, practices, and modes of investment. In July, 2007, Mayor-elect Ron Dellums of Oakland, California decided to implement a different kind of electoral transition process – one where the transition team was not just comprised of a few leading experts,

In summary, BCSC is a methodology that is rooted in the racial and cultural dynamics of communities, based on social equity principles, shaped by the voice of the community and focused on social transformation. As culturally-based capacity builders, race and culture matter in all aspects of our work. For us, social equity is not only a fundamental principle, but an achievable goal. In our capacity building work, we have found that a community is able to guide its own transformation process when it has good information, adequate resources, and the right kind of technical support. When capacity building is done right, social change occurs in response to the voice of the community.

- ✓ **Race and Culture**
Race and culture matter in all aspects of our work. Therefore, one of our primary roles is to learn about the cultural dynamics and to address the racial disparities in the organizations and communities that we serve.
- ✓ **Social Equity**
Social equity is a fundamental guiding principle and an achievable goal. Consequently, another important role that we play is helping organizations and/or communities to envision an alternative and a desired future and to link their work to the broader social justice movement.
- ✓ **Community Voice**
Building capacity in the BCSC model requires that we engage communities according to their own norms and patterns. For example, if Latinos are the majority group in a community or organization, meetings should be conducted in Spanish and not just translated from and to English. If we are working in a Native community, the talking circle might be the mode of decision making. In these important ways, organizations and communities that work with us drive how we work, and have the decision-making role on their own journey and destination.
- ✓ **Social Transformation**
Finally, we believe that communities can guide their own social transformation process when they have quality information, sufficient resources, and the right kind of support. Our biggest success as capacity builders occurs when innovative things happen in communities of color and are sustained after we are gone.

Why We Do the Work

Communities of color – the people, organizations, and institutions – face enormous challenges as a result of structural racism, economic disparity, social dysfunction, and cultural domination in American society. NCDI focuses on building capacity for social change to enable communities of color to play a pivotal role in transforming the social institutions and practices that perpetuate racial injustice and inequality. We approach our work from the point of view that capacity building is part of a much larger and more purposeful journey that is beyond facilitating the next meeting or creating the best strategic plan – i.e., a journey that keeps social transformation at the center of the capacity building process.

Capacity building focused on bringing about social change goes beyond fixing a particular problem or addressing a single issue. *Working in this way means focusing on solutions and social change, not just on fixing problems.* It is the difference between letting problems define our world or setting our own agenda to be in the lead. It's how we work with organizations and communities that may feel

stuck, showing them how to think differently, dream bigger, reframe issues, ask different questions, and connect what they do day-to-day to the bigger context of influencing societal change. It's the way that we integrate our capacity building work with the social change movement to build the broadest base of engagement across the widest constituent base, whether we are working on board development or team building.

NCDI's approach to capacity building is fundamentally different from most mainstream management consulting. Profit is not our primary motive for doing this work; rather, we are working to bring about social change. Instead of seeing ourselves as experts, we see ourselves as peers with the following primary roles:

- 1. Identify and utilize indigenous wisdom**
Uncover, appreciate, and build on the innate wisdom and resources of the community and challenge community members to look at and use their collective wisdom and power to overcome problems to bring about social change.
- 2. Broker knowledge and resources**
Research and share information on best practices in the capacity building and community building fields and link community members to financial, human, and technical resources that can be used to implement feasible and tested problem-solving strategies.
- 3. Build bridges across cultural identity groups**
Strengthen relationships across cultural identity groups, especially in communities with rapidly changing demographics.
- 4. Provide technically superior capacity building support**
Provide effective technical support services for communities of color that respond to their changing needs.

Whether the capacity building work is to help develop a theory of change, to identify best practices, to design a community building process, or to improve organizational effectiveness, capacity builders need to listen to the community, broker knowledge and resources, build bridges within and across communities, and provide top-notch technical support. This is not only what's needed in communities of color, it's also the right thing to do.

Case Studies

CDI conducted a number of interviews with several organizations served by NCDI to document our methodology. The guiding research question for these interviews was *How is the culturally-based capacity building model implemented and how effective is the model?* In this article, we discuss NCDI's work with two of the organizations, linking the culturally-based capacity building methodology to what was going on at the time in these organizations. The two organizations are:

- One East Palo Alto (OEPA), a multiethnic community-based intermediary in East Palo Alto, California. Its mission is to develop resident leaders, broker resources and services, build the capacity of individuals and organizations, and advocate for significant change leading to improved social, physical, spiritual, educational and economic well being for residents of EPA. NCDI had a key role in founding the organization as part of a comprehensive community initiative sponsored by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation.
- Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), an Asian American advocacy organization in Oakland, California. Its mission is to improve the living and working conditions of low-income Asian immigrant women and their families through education, leadership development, and collective action. During the past ten years, NCDI has provided various technical support and training services to the organization.

One East Palo Alto

A Community-Based Intermediary in East Palo Alto, CA

The Community¹¹

East Palo Alto (EPA) is a small, low-income city that incorporated in 1983 after decades of political, economic, and social neglect by San Mateo County. The "incorporation movement" was led by a group of African American activists who sought self-determination and the right to self-governance for the community. The main goal of incorporation was to gain control over three main areas: land use, police, and economic resources to improve the quality of resident life.

East Palo Alto is located on the San Francisco peninsula adjacent to the cities of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. It spans an area of 2.5 square miles and has a diverse population of 33,000 residents. Over the past six decades, the population has changed from 95% majority white in the 1950s; to 62% majority Black in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; to a Black plurality in the 1990s; to 67% majority Latino in the current decade. At this time, the two other main populations are African Americans (26%) and Pacific Islanders, mostly Tongans and Samoans (7%).¹²

11 The descriptions of the City of East Palo Alto and the One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative were taken from various unpublished planning documents and program reports prepared by the organization.

12 U.S. Census Reports for 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

A wide range of economic and social challenges troubled East Palo Alto during the first ten years of cityhood from 1983-1992. In 1992, the press dubbed EPA as the nation's "murder capital" because it had the highest per capita murder rate of any city in the USA. Since that time, however, there has been steady progress in rebuilding the community, evidenced by new community development, new community-building initiatives, and a new multicultural community spirit. Silicon Valley's explosive economy spilled over into EPA in the mid-1990s, resulting in higher land values, housing and commercial development, increased tax revenues, an influx of middle- to upper-income residents and, as a by-product, more gentrification.

The Organization

The One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (OEPA) was a Hewlett Foundation-sponsored, community change initiative that began in 1999 and ended in 2006. OEPA was founded by community members on the assumption that effective, deep-rooted, and long-term solutions to poverty and disinvestment can only be achieved if the community itself has a primary role in planning its future and directing the community change process.

During the past six years, OEPA evolved through four main stages – an initial planning phase from July 1999 to December 2000; the formation of a community-based intermediary from January 2001 to December 2002; operating as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization beginning in November 2003; and, since January 2007, functioning as a freestanding nonprofit without Hewlett Foundation funding or oversight.

OEPA's vision is *to transform East Palo Alto into a community where residents celebrate their diversity and are engaged, informed, and empowered to attain the economic, social, and educational resources they need to enjoy a good quality of life.* Its mission is *to develop resident leaders, broker resources and services, build the capacity of individuals and organizations, and advocate for significant change leading to improved social, physical, spiritual, educational, and economic well being for residents of EPA.* OEPA is the only organization in EPA that brings together all the different ethnic groups to advance a common community agenda.

NCDI's Role

CDI played a key role in creating and developing OEPA from its inception in 1999. Omowale Satterwhite, founder and president of both CDI and NCDI, helped to launch the initiative in 1999. As the "community partner," CDI coordinated the initial community planning process and provided the first staff team for the initiative. Over the next five years, NCDI staff provided capacity building support for organizational planning, board development, human resources, and community engagement.

The Methodology

Working from the Community

As the community partner, NCDI did extensive outreach into the community in the last two quarters of 1999. NCDI capacity builders talked with residents, organizational, faith-based, and civic leaders from the three primary ethnic populations (Latinos, African Americans, and Pacific Island-

ers) and facilitated weekly community forums on key issues such as education, housing, and police/community relations to lift up the diverse voices in the community. From the thirty to forty people who consistently attended these forums, community residents formed a community advisory group to learn more about the social conditions, power relationships, cultural dynamics, and complex, challenging issues in the community.

Working with the Community

As the community partner, NCDI coordinated a year-long planning process in the year 2000. During the first nine months of the planning process, an average of one hundred and fifty residents attended the weekly community planning meetings. At each meeting, there was a greeter from each cultural community, a multilingual registration process, and multiethnic food, childcare, and written/oral translation for the participants. The meetings began and ended with community-building activities to promote a sense of community, connect residents from different ethnic groups, and build trust in the initiative. Following the advice of the community advisory body, we formed ten planning groups that met weekly for six months. Each planning group had a facilitator, recorder, researcher, and translators (as required). After each weekly meeting, a one page summary was prepared for each planning group in multiple languages and shared with the group members at the next regular weekly meeting. From time to time, the planning groups were invited to share information about their work to keep everyone informed about the entire planning process.

Working in the Community

The Haas Center for Public Services at Stanford University was selected to be the “University Partner” by the foundation. Its role was to conduct research, provide technical assistance, and engage students in the community planning process. Thus, on a weekly basis, Stanford students attended meetings, served as recorders for community planning groups, and conducted research between meetings to respond to research requests. The Haas Center compiled a demographic profile of East Palo Alto and published a directory of agencies, organizations, and businesses in the community. In addition to the research tasks undertaken by the Haas Center, NCDI, in its community partner role, hosted peer-to-peer learning dialogues with activists from several communities and sponsored periodic events to promote cross-cultural understanding among the residents.

Working for the Community

After the first two years of the initiative, NCDI’s role shifted to “technical assistance intermediary” (2002-2004) for the entire initiative. In this capacity, we provided technical support and training services in the areas of organizational planning, board development, human resources, and community engagement. Specifically, our role was to conduct an annual assessment, develop a technical support plan, and support OEPA in building its board, expanding its membership, hiring an Executive Director, drafting an annual plan, raising funds, and addressing other key organizational issues. Since 2005, our focus has been on helping OEPA to develop and to implement transition strategies to sustain the organization beyond 2006 after the end of the Hewlett grant.

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates

An Immigrant Rights Organization in Oakland, CA

The Population¹³

Women of color have historically suffered discrimination due to racism and sexism in this country. Immigrant women of color have also always faced another set of changes: anti-immigrant sentiment and language discrimination. This long and complex history of anti-immigrant sentiments, institutionalized discrimination, and traditional obstacles (i.e., lack of literacy, poverty) serve to prevent immigrant women and their children from fully participating in the political process and advancing their needs.

The constituents of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) are low-income, immigrant women who work in the garment, electronics, hotel, and other low wage industries in Alameda and Santa Clara counties. The garment industry has earned the reputation of being a sweatshop industry because garment jobs typically involve low wages, instability, and severe working conditions. Women working in the electronics and hotel industries also have similar workplace problems, especially lack of health insurance.

The Organization

AIWA was founded in November 1983 by workers, community activists, and union organizers. For the last twenty-four years, its mission has been to promote justice and power among low-income, limited English speaking Asian immigrant women workers and youth so that they can bring about positive changes in their workplace, community, and broader society. AIWA serves low-income Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean immigrant women between 21 and 65 years old and youth between 16 and 21 years old.

AIWA is a community-based organization that works to improve the living and working conditions of low-income Asian immigrant women and their families through education, leadership development, and collective action. The organization is committed to providing women and youth with the resources, tools, and opportunities to be their own best advocates as they work toward social and economic justice. It promotes civic engagement, giving voices to immigrant women and youth who historically have none as they work to create systemic change.

All of AIWA’s programs are designed to encourage participation and leadership development. AIWA has learned through experience that the best way to develop leadership among low-income immigrant women and youth is through replicated peer trainings. AIWA’s current program scope includes outreach activities, literacy and computer classes, leadership development and skills training programs, health and safety workshops, and campaign internships. It has found that having committees of peer leaders to work on these programs and guide the organization’s direction is the best method to develop collective grassroots leadership and remain strong while working on targeted justice campaigns.

13 The descriptions of AIWA were taken from various unpublished planning documents and program reports prepared by the organization.

AIWA had developed a specific leadership methodology called the “Community Transformational Organizing Strategy” (CTOS) to develop immigrant women and youths’ self-confidence, leadership, and active participation in the campaigns to improve their working and living conditions. The CTOS methodology was developed after many years of working with the immigrant community and observing the process that occurs as women become involved in civic engagement.

NCDI’s Role

NCDI has provided capacity building support to AIWA during the past ten years. Our initial work in the mid-1990s involved facilitating AIWA staff meetings focused on its national garment workers campaign. Since then, NCDI’s primary roles have been to assist with organizational planning, to provide leadership training in such areas as facilitating meetings, strategic planning, and board development, and to facilitate staff meetings to address key organizational issues.

The Methodology

Working from the Community

During the initial engagement period after AIWA had launched a national garment workers campaign, NCDI was invited to facilitate staff planning meetings addressing various campaign issues. At that time, the NCDI president had only a limited understanding of Asian cultures. Consequently, he gave high priority to learning about cultural norms in Asian communities and about the organizational culture at AIWA. With painstaking patience, he asked questions, read documents, observed meetings, and sought advice about how to best serve the organization. Throughout the learning process, AIWA staff worked with and guided him in deepening his knowledge of the organization and the Asian community. As a result, the president was able to establish a high level of trust and build an enduring partnership with the organization.

Working with the Community

Throughout our work with AIWA, the main strategy has been to utilize a co-design process to define NCDI’s scope of work and methodology for serving the organization. Typically, this involves conducting joint planning meetings with the entire staff and, where applicable, similar meetings with Membership Board members. In the co-design process, the president attends one or more meetings to get an orientation and status report on the organization, facilitates a dialogue with the staff to identify outcomes and strategies for the technical support project, and then drafts a technical support plan with outcomes, strategies, timelines, roles, and costs. The draft plan is reviewed by the AIWA staff and desired revisions are communicated to NCDI. This process continues until the AIWA staff is satisfied that the scope of work and methodology are adequate to meet their needs.

Over the past ten years, NCDI has assisted AIWA with developing various organizational plans. One of our basic tenets during each planning phase was to create learning spaces where people could participate in the planning process based on their own cultural norms and social practices. Thus, our approach was to first hold separate planning meetings with Chinese garment workers in Oakland and Korean electronics workers in San Jose. Since the NCDI president

was the only person in these meetings who did not speak the native language, all meetings were conducted in Chinese or Korean with periodic translations into English. Further, all ideas recorded on easel paper were simultaneously written in two languages – Chinese/Korean and English.

After the initial planning meetings in Oakland and San Jose, the next step was to convene joint meetings to develop an integrated organizational plan. These meetings were all conducted in three languages with simultaneous translation of conversations and written documents including the recordings on easel paper. For example, the Chinese participants usually spoke in their native language with simultaneous translation into the Korean and English languages. When Korean participants spoke, they too talked in their native language with translation into Chinese and English. This is how culturally-based capacity building works, by creating spaces where people can participate in their own culturally authentic ways.

Working in the Community

After the national garment workers campaign was won, AIWA tackled the basic question of “what next?” in its social justice work. One of the perplexing questions that had not been resolved was how to develop an integrated program framework for its service delivery and organizing activities. In our work with other organizations facing the same issue, NCDI had designed a seven step planning process for developing an integrated program plan. The seven steps were building awareness, initial engagement, member enrollment, service provision, leadership training, organizational leadership roles, and community/movement leadership. NCDI shared this model with AIWA staff, who used it to develop the CTOS leadership methodology. After the initial framing of the CTOS approach, the organization undertook an extensive program review to deepen understanding of its leadership methodology and developed a sophisticated database to document and track the impact of its leadership development work. Today, AIWA is a learning organization that engages in data-smart program planning on a regular and consistent basis.

Working for the Community

NCDI has not had a direct role in assisting AIWA to implement its social change strategy and apply the CTOS model.

Learning Questions

In thinking about the next phase of our work, NCDI has identified a set of key capacity building questions for community builders and organizational leaders. These core questions are presented below.

For Community Builders

The basic community-building questions that culturally-based capacity builders need to be mindful of include the following:

- 1. Community Engagement**
How do we engage residents and other constituents to play active, relevant, and meaningful roles in the social change process?
- 2. Organizational Infrastructure**
How do we integrate organizational development with building institutional capacity for social change?
- 3. Relationship Building**
How do we build sustainable and authentic cross-cultural partnerships? How do we involve cultural groups that may be reticent about coming to the table?
- 4. Community Development**
How do we change the socioeconomic conditions in communities to improve the quality of life? How do we ensure access to institutional services and/or resources and equitable results when we bring different cultural groups together?
- 5. Organizing/Advocacy for Institutional Change**
How do we mobilize and empower communities to work together to achieve policy change and institutional accountability?
- 6. Community Research and Evaluation**
How do we help communities to document, analyze, frame, and tell their own stories about lessons learned and best practices in building healthy communities?

For Organizational Leaders

There is a direct relationship between the quality of life in a community and the capacity of its institutions to address basic human needs, build community, promote social transformation, and achieve institutional change. Therefore, organizational capacity-building is at the heart of the social change process. The basic organizational development challenges for capacity builders who work from a culturally-based perspective are¹⁴

- 1. Identity (Vision, Mission, Values, Strategies, and Niche)**
How do we support organizations in developing identity statements that define their basic purposes, articulate their strategic aims, reflect the voices of their diverse

constituencies, and commit them to advancing the cause of social justice?

- 2. Leadership and Governance**
How do we support organizations in developing diverse boards that govern with vision, competence, and compassion? What are the guiding principles for determining who should be at the table and defining the roles they should play?
- 3. Planning**
How do we support organizations in developing long-term and short-term plans that are responsive to diverse community voices?
- 4. Finance**
How do we support organizations in developing strategies to increase philanthropic giving (time, talent, and money) from within communities of color and to launch enterprise activities resulting in sustainable earned income streams?
- 5. Systems and Infrastructure**
How do we support organizations in building an organizational culture that values equity, inclusiveness, and diversity? Are these systems the same or how are they different from mainstream organizations?
- 6. Human Resources**
How do we support organizations in recruiting, training, and maintaining a culturally diverse and capable staff team? How do we help them to deal with power sharing issues? What are the most effective tools when we are trying to work through language differences and cultural expectations in organizational and community settings?
- 7. Program Development, Management, and Evaluation**
How do we support organizations in developing culturally-based programs that are responsive to the community's voice? What are culturally appropriate ways for engaging constituents and developing partnerships with other community organizations?

Final Thoughts

Building Capacity for Social Change is offered to capacity and community builders as a tested way of working in communities of color, and ought not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all "cookie cutter" template. The ways of working described here in need to be adapted to each organization and/or community in which one is invited to work. This approach, because it honors the indigenous wisdom and assets of each community and organization, will yield effective results with most communities and organizations working for social change.

To lead people walk beside them...
As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate...When the best leader's work is done the people say, "We did it ourselves!" — Lao Tzu

14 These seven capacity areas are generally accepted in the management services field as basic requirements for building a sustainable organization.

About the Authors

Omowale Satterwhite

Frank J. Omowale Satterwhite is a national leader in community development who focuses on working with communities of color and other marginalized communities. He has personally provided technical assistance to over one thousand grassroots community-based agencies and social justice organizations throughout the United States and abroad. He has incorporated the values of equity, democracy, and local empowerment for social change throughout all of these efforts. He completed an undergraduate degree at Howard University, a master's degree at Southern Illinois University, and holds a PhD from Stanford University.

Omo is currently the president of the National Community Development (NCDI) Institute which he founded in 2001. He is also the founder and a current board member of the parent organization, the Community Development Institute (CDI) located in East Palo Alto, California, with which he has been involved for twenty-three years. Both organizations are nonprofits dedicated to assisting low-income communities in combating the causes of racism and poverty through political empowerment, economic development, and social revitalization. Their work focuses on strengthening community-based institutions, training indigenous leaders, developing strong families, and building healthier and safer communities.

Through this work, Omo has not only supported the development of many communities throughout the country, but has also inspired many hundreds of individuals to use the methods and strategies that he has developed. These individuals have consistently encouraged him to describe and codify his methods, which is why this article has been written.

Shiree Teng

Shiree Teng, an independent capacity builder to foundations and nonprofit organizations, has over twenty-five years of experience working with public and nonprofit organizations as front line staff, executive director, board chair, trainer, and consultant. Her fields of expertise include community organizing, public health, housing, early care and education, employment and training, and labor education.

Shiree was a former program officer at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy Program, and currently serves in a consultant capacity to this and other foundations. Shiree is skilled in facilitation, organizational assessment, planning, and evaluation, stakeholder analysis, board and staff development, communications, diversity, and uses a culturally-based orientation to her practice.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Shiree is fluent in three spoken dialects of Chinese, and has a lifelong appreciation of issues facing immigrants and communities of color. In 1996, she was selected to participate in an international seminar on "NGOs' Role in Building Civil Societies," held in Salzburg, Austria, with fellowship support from the W.K.

Kellogg Foundation. Shiree received her BA in Psychology and Social Welfare from the University of California, Berkeley, and is working on a doctoral degree in Human and Organizational Development.

About NCDI

NCDI is a decidedly different kind of capacity building organization. In contrast to mainstream consulting firms where the clientele are largely corporations, public agencies, or large nonprofit organizations, NCDI's focus is on low-income communities of color, particularly emerging organizations and groups.

If we worked primarily with mainstream agencies, we would be called "consultants." However, at NCDI, we prefer to be called "organization helpers" or "capacity builders" who facilitate social change.

In conventional consulting contexts, we would be seen as experts who have more knowledge and wisdom than those whom we serve. At NCDI, we understand that wisdom lies within and flows from the community.

In traditional consulting firms, the primary motive for the work is profit; at NCDI, our motive is to build sustainable capacity for social change and community transformation where power and resources are more equitably distributed in our society.

Through it all, we consistently remind ourselves to be humble and vigilant in serving communities as responsible agents of social change. Seeing ourselves as servants in the change process reminds us of the greater purpose of our work.

Please see our website, www.ncdinet.org for more information.

The roles of capacity builders are to help individuals, organizations, and communities to...

	Develop the Leadership Capacity of Individuals	Strengthen the Capacity of Community Institutions	Transform Communities as a Whole
Engage Community Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement leadership development programs for community members ▪ Engage community members in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing a shared vision for community change ○ Identifying common community goals, assets, and solutions ○ Implementing effective community outreach/education programs ○ Building trusting cross-cultural relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and implement a consistent community feedback mechanism ▪ Recruit community residents and service consumers as board and staff members ▪ Develop a sustainable feedback loop involving residents and/or service consumers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create sustainable community outreach/education channels ▪ Develop and implement a community change agenda that empowers residents, builds leadership, and defines a social change vision ▪ Develop community-based, constituent-led structures that enable people to manage their own affairs
Develop Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design, develop, and implement leadership development programs for residents and organizational leaders ▪ Develop strategies to organize residents and other stakeholders to hold community institutions accountable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct regular organizational assessments, strategic planning, and evaluations ▪ Build core organizational capacities to better lead, manage, govern and adapt to external changes ▪ Build an organizational culture that integrates capacity building as a norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster a community-wide culture that values organizational effectiveness and capacity building ▪ Form partnerships with stakeholder groups ▪ Promote a systems model that emphasizes collaborative approaches to delivering services
Build Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage in, facilitate, and lead cross-cultural bridge-building ▪ Strengthen constituents' ability to build social networks and capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build internal cross-cultural bridges at all levels ▪ Organize clients, peer community-based organizations, funders, and policy makers to develop shared goals and achieve results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote understanding of the cultural practices and values of diverse groups ▪ Celebrate, embrace, and honor cultural traditions, preferences, beliefs, and achievements

The roles of capacity builders are to help individuals, organizations, and communities to... (cont'd)

	Develop the Leadership Capacity of Individuals	Strengthen the Capacity of Community Institutions	Transform Communities as a Whole
Enhance Community Infrastructure and Improve Social Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand knowledge through training and peer-to-peer learning in areas such as housing, jobs, education, etc. Compile and distribute information on current and future community development projects and plans Train community members to become wise consumers of experts and consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide baseline data on material and social conditions in the community Implement programs that reflect the community's vision and improve material and social conditions Mobilize and leverage private, public, and community resources including money, knowledge, networks, and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and hold a community change agenda and corresponding baseline and performance measures for residents, institutions, and external stakeholders Develop a community report card and conduct periodic quality-of-life assessments
Advocate for Systems Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage residents and leaders to identify key advocacy issues and work together for a common cause Provide training to develop research, planning, organizing, communications, and other critical advocacy skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build organizational capacity to conduct and engage in power mapping processes Identify existing advocacy organizations and campaigns Engage peer organizations and their constituents in defining advocacy goals and developing the capacity to speak with one voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review community history and former advocacy campaigns with stakeholder groups Facilitate a process to define and update the community's policy agenda Engage community stakeholders in advocating for policy changes that will directly benefit the neighborhood Link resident leaders to a broad policy development process (city, county, and region) Develop a community-based process that will be used to hold organizations and key stakeholders accountable to achieving shared results
Document and Tell the Community's Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the capacity of community members to develop their own research and learning agenda Provide training in participatory evaluation and other popular education/evaluation methods Engage residents and leaders in the evaluation process and share findings with them Create the demand and support efforts to tell the community's story from the residents' perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive asset map Conduct regular assessments of program effectiveness and project outcomes using both standard and participatory evaluation methods Engage community organizations in continuous research and development, modeling innovative practices and leading by example Build the capacity to document and share organizational journeys, lessons, and insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile information on community history, demography, organizations, leadership groups, social networks, planning projects, advocacy campaigns, and capacity building programs Develop, instill, and refine the community's capacity to tell its own stories Document and share the community's learnings and journey with others

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A Capacity Building Approach to Cultural Competency

Improving Cultural Competency Improves Organizational Effectiveness

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Many organizational leaders feel that cultural competency is something that they should work on, but are not fully able to articulate why. Sometimes activities in the realm of cultural competency are mandated by funding requirements. When leaders are asked about the reasons for such activities, many have a hard time articulating more than the stated requirements or justifying the use of time or resources beyond the minimum required. Even leaders who have a real interest in improving organizational cultural competency, and who can articulate why it is important, are often at a loss about how to effectively approach this topic or effect change.

In this article we will argue that **improving cultural competency improves organizational effectiveness**. We demonstrate that is not a separate boutique issue to be dealt with when the important work of mission achievement is well on its way, but rather is inseparable from mission achievement in nonprofit organizations (and in organizations overall). We will also describe a **capacity building approach to improving cultural competency in an organization** where systems issues are dealt with through the lens of **multicultural organizational development**. We have developed this approach from lessons we have learned in the course of supporting many organizations grappling with these issues.

This paper emerges from our work with small to medium-sized community-based nonprofit organizations over many years of capacity building work. It has been particularly informed by our work on a three year project supported by the California State Office of AIDS where we worked with thirty-five health and social service organizations in California which provide HIV prevention programs and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS. As a nonprofit capacity building organization, we have also worked with many nonprofits that were created by and for particular racial and ethnic communities or for pan ethnic communities. Our approach has also been informed in general by our experience with process facilitation in organizational development.

Cultural What?

Terms like culture and cultural competency can mean different things to different people. In this paper we are defining **culture** broadly as the beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors of a particular group of people. This definition encompasses not just ethnic/national culture, but also, for example, deaf culture, or the culture of urban gay men. This is a more expansive definition than is sometimes used but is one that we have found helpful in doing this work. One important aspect to keep in mind about culture is that it is **acquired or learned**, and thus can be acquired or learned by others. Another important aspect of culture is that it changes over time and is not monolithic (think about varieties of “American culture” over time and location). So there are moving pieces within moving pieces in this puzzle!

Cultural competency refers to the ability of organizations and individuals to work effectively in cross-cultural or multicultural interactions. Although this term is commonly used, the word “competency” can give a false connotation, one in which an entity is deemed either “competent” or “incompetent,” like a “pass” or “fail” in the subject. We have found that development in this area is actually more like movement along a spectrum rather than a binary toggle switch. All individuals and organizations can be said to be somewhere along in such a spectrum.¹ Still, even along a continuum there are positions of greater or lesser awareness or skill in this area, like in any area. Another term that we use to refer to the ongoing process of improving cultural competency in an organizational system is multicultural organizational development.

¹ For more on the concept of a spectrum, please see the work of Terry Cross. Cross, T., B. J. Bazron et al. (1989). *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care: Volume 1: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who are Severely Emotionally Disturbed*. Washington, D.C.: National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center.

Organizational Self-Reflection

There are some broad questions that a leader can ask (and lead the organization as a whole to ask) to begin to give attention to this area:

- How does working effectively across cultures relate to our mission?
- How does our ability to work across cultures relate to our effectiveness as an organization?
- What would it look like if we were more effective or skilled in this area?

If these questions seem too broad, one can hone in on particular organizational areas where the extent of an agency’s effectiveness often comes to light. Looking at these areas is one way to avoid a boutique approach to the subject. Improving cultural competency positively affects an organization’s ability to achieve its mission through improving an organization’s ability to

- Attract certain client populations,
- Serve targeted client populations well,
- Retain certain client populations,
- Deal with issues within staff,
- Recruit and retain the best board, staff, and volunteers, and
- Work with other organizations effectively.

Every executive director wants to achieve success in these areas, and yet they may not make the connection between the important work of multicultural organizational development and the above areas. What are some signs that there may be work needed in a given area? One way is to look at anecdotal information (like what people say) or qualitative information in a structured way; this can be supplemented by looking at some more quantifiable indicators:

Questions	Indicators
Are we reaching out to the diverse populations in our service area?	Statistics on who is being contacted compared with demographics of area or of those with needs
Are we serving different client populations well?	Evaluations of service matched with demographic info
Are we retaining clients from different populations?	Statistics on who stays in a program matched with demographic info
Are there cultural obstacles for staff at our organization?	Turnover statistics, surveys, exit interviews, history of conflicts between those of different cultures
Are there related issues between staff and management?	Organizational chart including demographic analysis, history of conflicts between those of different cultures
Are there related issues between staff and board?	Demographic analysis, history of conflict or misunderstanding
Are there cultural issues related to our board?	Demographic analysis, history of conflict or misunderstanding
Are there cultural obstacles in our collaborations with other organizations?	History of difficulty in collaboration with other organizations

These are some preliminary suggestions on where to look for areas for improvement. We will explore this further when we talk about assessment later in the paper.

An Integrated Approach to Multicultural Organizational Development

One common framework suggests that organizational systems are separate and that it is important to attend to each independently. For instance, some of these systems might be

- Governance and Boards
- Financial Management
- Fundraising
- Program Development
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Facilities

And adding to the list one more separate “system”

- Cultural Competency

In actuality, cultural competency cannot be dealt with in isolation from other parts of organizational life. It is not a separate and independent area but is part of the success of each of the earlier systems and should be considered an aspect of each of these, as a constant added dimension.

- Cultural Competency**
- Governance and Boards
 - Financial Management
 - Fundraising
 - Program Development
 - Human Resources
 - Information Technology
 - Facilities

Let us take an application of this in the area of governance and boards. Does the board have the right kinds of people to effectively govern the organization, not just in terms of financial and fundraising skills but also in terms of skills in cultural competency? If not, how can the board improve in that area? If it means bringing new people onto the board, are there ways that the board currently interacts that would make it difficult to engage someone from a particular culture? These should all be considered part of the area of governance and boards.²

² We would also argue that there is an intersection of other systems (such as financial management and governance) which needs to be attended to for any successful organizational development effort. For more information on this, please refer to work on living systems theory, like Margaret Wheatley's book, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. (2006). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Working at the Level of One Organization

Cultural competency can be a “loaded issue.” While a group of organizations’ leaders might get together to learn about a topic like technology (where there is less stigma in admitting that your email server does not work as well as it could), most of these leaders are likely to have a harder time admitting in front of peers (and often to themselves) the areas in which their agency can improve in cultural competency. Large cohort trainings can provide support if done in a “train the trainer” manner to support leaders in cultural competency work. There can also be some interesting and helpful takeaways in cases where organizations feel safe to share their experiences in this area (which is usually when there are non-directors acting as representatives). However, the cohort model of a large training with people from a variety of agencies, while attractive in its efficiency in serving many organizations at once, is not the best method of intervention for individual organizations.

Because each organization is in a unique situation regarding, for instance, its history, location, staff, and target population, a standardized approach that may be given in a large training is unlikely to be successful. Each organization has different needs and priorities for the development of cultural competency; each organization is part of a unique ecosystem that must be understood in order to do work in this area. Based on these particular factors, a unique approach needs to be undertaken in each case. This leads to the importance of doing some kind of assessment of the situation for an individual organization as an early step in the work of multicultural organizational development.

The work of multicultural organizational development is best done at the level of an individual agency, with a team of people from the agency creating as safe a space as possible for an honest discussion regarding what is going on. People need to be able to have frank conversations about the barriers to success in this area, and it is unlikely this will happen when others are present who will be competing for grants, clients, and contracts. Cohort trainings can be used selectively and strategically, but the bulk of the work needs to be done with an individual organization.

The Dreaded Diversity Training?!

Working on the level of the individual organization, one common error is to assume that training is the best way to develop cultural competency. In some organizations the annual daylong diversity training has become institutionalized as the main means of addressing cultural competency. In terms of multicultural organizational development, the one-day training is “an answer” that can sometimes be very effective, but without clarity about the original question, it could be an incomplete or wrong answer (especially when done in isolation from other interventions). There can be a lack of clarity in the organization about the real purpose of such trainings when they are not part of a broader plan for development. While there is some satisfaction in being able to check a box that “we took care of it” for this year, like the mandatory annual fire drill, the annual diversity day may not lead to real success in improving cultural competency.

In fact we have found that many staff members dread the annual diversity day much more than the annual fire drill. One-day trainings can raise false expectations that some lasting change will come out of the session. And while a daylong event may be one ingredient in creating change in an organization, without follow-up it rarely delivers lasting change or addresses systemic issues in the organization.

Multicultural organizational development requires ongoing integrated organizational attention. For this reason the annual diversity training done in isolation can be disappointing. Organizational clarity on why a group is doing cultural competency work and what its intended objectives are can help in selecting the most appropriate interventions.

In addition, many of the one-day diversity trainings focus on personal insight and transformation. This is a critical piece in social change in our society, but on an organizational level can miss ways in which systems and cultures need to evolve. There is no knowing how much people take away from such a training, or if those who most need such a training have been paying attention! Even if all have gained a lot of insight, the problems on an organizational level are likely to persist if systemic issues are neglected.

It Takes a Team

When leaders consider how to improve cultural competency in their organization, they often think about hiring an outside consultant to help with the work. While it can be very beneficial to have a skilled individual from outside the organization assist with the process, it is also essential to locate the work itself within the organization. A consultant can be hired to facilitate a process with people from the organization, but they will not be able to just come in and “fix things.” Still, a skilled facilitator can act as a partner in developing a unique workplan for ongoing attention to multicultural organizational development. Later in this paper we discuss the role of the consultant further.

Nonprofit organizations are created by and populated by people. These staff, board, and volunteers are all humans with cultural locations and identifications. Who needs to be involved in such an effort from within the organization? A team of people with some level of understanding in this area and a diversity of cultural lenses. Cultural competency is the kind of issue in which the executive director or senior management alone does not necessarily know better than line staff what is currently going on or what might help improve things. The front desk receptionist, for example, often holds a wealth of information about who comes into the client waiting room, who doesn't stay for their appointment, what people are looking at while they are there, and so on. At the same time, it is essential to have some representation of senior management on the team for their organizational perspective, to cultivate a deeper sense of ownership of senior managers, and to give the process legitimacy.

The team should be made up of people who are interested in the process, who have some level of facility with multiculturalism, who are from different levels of the organization, and who represent a variety of demographic characteristics. It is not a good idea to put the person in the agency with

the most resistance to the topic on the team or to draft people who have no interest at all. The team should have a leader who can coordinate the convening of the group and provide leadership within the group. This leader should be given authority from the highest level of the organization to engage in this work. In some cases the leader of this team would put out a call for those who are interested, saying that they will choose from that pool to balance the group. Other group leaders like to invite particular people to create the team intentionally in this way. Staff who are involved should be given official time away from their other work to participate, otherwise the cultural competency work may become their lowest priority and cause the process to become stagnant.

In terms of demographics, if the issue that the agency is grappling with is the retention of a particular population, the team should avoid inviting one person from that group who is expected to be a “representative” or “expert.” At the same time, it is worrisome to have nobody from the population involved in the process. Ideally the team will have more than one person from that group on the team, as well as people who are not from the population. If there are no members from the population already involved in the organization, the team should consider how to involve appropriate community members with the effort (for instance by having them review and discuss data results with the team, rather than simply serve as respondents).

It may be unusual for an organization to do work in a multi-level team, so it is good to devote much of the first meeting to setting up norms for the group such as roles, group agreements on communication, decision-making processes, and scheduling. It is also worthwhile for team members to spend some time to get to know one another and to engage in teambuilding activities to build trust and understanding. It is also important to clarify the decision-making processes and the delegated authority of the team in this area.

The Work of the Team

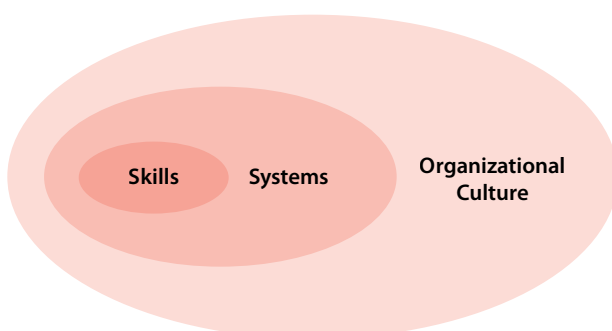
When considering embarking on a process like multicultural organizational development, many organizational leaders will want to know how much time it will take. The answer is, of course, it depends—on many factors including the organization's ability to hold team meetings and other activities going on in the organization's calendar. Below is a rough calendar for the shortest amount of time it might take to get to a tailored plan for multicultural organizational development. Once the plan is developed it should become an integrated part of organizational life so that the work is ongoing.

Week 0	Team leader goes through the process of selecting the team
Week 1	Team meets to get oriented to the process and to discuss proposed areas of focus for the project and the current ideas of what is going on.
Week 2	Team develops a plan to gather more information to assess focus area(s)
Week 3-4	Data collection
Week 5	Team meets to discuss information gathered and what it suggests; begins drafting a workplan
Week 6	Team finalizes the workplan and decides on evaluation
Week 7- ongoing	Work is done on plan areas; the team or management team continues to monitor the plan for success

Examining Your Universe: Assessment

A key piece of doing the work of multicultural organizational development is the initial assessment. The design of the assessment, done in conjunction with the team, should be to discover strengths as well as areas for improvement. The first step is to identify the priority issue or issues at hand and to see if there are some initial ideas about what factors contribute to the issue, which should be recorded. The assessment might be very specific, such as determining the *current effectiveness* of the group in reaching and serving African American gay men in the Los Angeles Crenshaw district, or a wider assessment of the *overall capacity* of the organization to work effectively with diverse populations and communities in that district. Regardless of the scope of the assessment, the planning team and consultant should consider and adopt a framework for the team to define the organizational functions and competencies that are important to multicultural effectiveness. These definitions may evolve over the course of the work, but it is good to start with a common language and concept of organizational multicultural effectiveness and how they reside within the organization.

As consultants, we strive to open up the discussion and scan for many issues that can be understood in the framework of organizational effectiveness. This helps planning team members to consider specific issues from their vantage point and to link them to organizational capacities instead of focusing upon a specific person or group as the problem. Issues can be identified in areas of skills, systems, or culture (and sometimes all of these), which are nested areas.



For example, a particular case manager may not be effective with certain clients because of a lack of training, supervision, mentoring, or inadequate information records. Training can be seen as a skills issue, but probably interacts with HR systems of orientation and professional development, as well as an organizational culture that may not value taking time out for training. Supervision and informational records can be traced to systems issues that are probably impeding the effectiveness of many more people. A lack of supervision could relate to the skills of the supervisor and an organizational culture that may not value taking time for supervision.

The next step is to figure out how and from whom the group can get more information about whether these initial ideas are true and/or what else is going on to contribute to the situation. The group can use many different methods in seeking further information. For instance, some information may already be there in terms of client satisfaction surveys or employee surveys. Other information may need to be gathered for the project. The group can decide on the best format for a survey (paper, online, verbal interviews) or decide that focus groups or facilitated conversation may glean helpful information, depending on characteristics of the group. A timeline should be developed for information gathering and roles assigned for the process.

When further information has been collected, the team can assemble to look at the results and to see if it points to other factors involved in the situation. Some of these may be on the level of systems, some on the individual level, and some on the process level. Based on this the group can brainstorm suggested actions that will begin to address these factors.

In assessment surveys and focus groups it is helpful to ask into positive experiences people have had to bring to light times when things worked well at the organization, in addition to soliciting bad experiences or opinions about what is missing at the organization. With this approach the workplan can include building in support for existing positive factors as ongoing supports to multicultural organizational development so that these factors do not diminish.

Beyond “You Eat Rice, I Eat Pita”: The Social Justice Angle

When working with community-based nonprofit organizations we find that the work of multicultural organizational development is best achieved when grounded in an analysis of oppression and social justice. Using a social justice lens from the very beginning connects the work to the mission and values of the organization. It also recognizes that individuals and organizations are imbedded in the larger context of a society which conditions all of us and in which oppression still operates.³

In many settings diversity work focuses on generically valuing differences between cultures without any analysis of the historical and contemporary interactions between groups.⁴ Diversity is considered important because anyone should be able to contribute to the work of an organization. While no one would disagree with this, this approach does not translate well to a mission-driven organization because it stops short of recognizing the obstacles that can be caused by societal systems of oppression and the way these systems and interactions can play out in an organization. Work around cultural competency can eventually run into this social justice framework when staff, board, and clients encounter racism or other forms of oppression in their daily lives and while receiving services or working in organizations.

Recognition of the existence of systems of oppression is present in even the most conservative organizations. Signs that systems of oppression exist in our society are part of the accepted life of organizations already, so much so that we take them for granted. If systems of oppression did not exist EEOC anti-discrimination language used in hiring and promotion policies would be unnecessary. These policies have become a common enough part of our workplace landscape that it is easy to overlook the roots of why such elements exist, though they leave an indelible scent.

If there is a sincere desire to improve in the area of cultural competency, using a social justice lens for this work helps from the very beginning to connect the work to the organization’s foundations. Conversely, ignoring the anti-oppression lens can leave significant root causes untouched, limiting success of the project and ultimately the organization as a whole. It limits buy-in from people who already have this analysis, an analysis which may be the basis for the organization’s existence. In nonprofit organizations, most of which have a mission of improving society or people’s lives in some way, a less comprehensive approach to cultural competency will largely meet with failure among clients, staff, and board whose social analysis of the world has probably been one factor leading to their involvement with the organization.

3 There is a parallel to the diagram of imbedded circles above in which an individual (in this case an organization) exists in the context of systems and a culture where oppression still operates.

4 See Patti DeRosa’s excellent article, *Social Change or Status Quo? Approaches to Diversity Training*, which outlines various approaches to diversity training and their pitfalls. Website: <http://changeworksconsulting.org/Div.Approaches-11.21.0.pdf>.

Examples of Multicultural Organizational Development

Example 1 Improving Service to Clients through Strategic Focus

We worked with one organization engaged in HIV prevention work in an urban area in California. The organization had been founded to work with women living with HIV and their families. It had a drop-in center that was a warm and comforting place, but which had begun to attract people from all demographics. Staff members were reluctant to turn people away, but found that when they did not differentiate between priority clients there was a negative effect on women with children. Some of those coming in were men who were homeless and active substance users. This changed the atmosphere of the drop-in center and made the women feel like it was a less welcoming place to bring their children.

Staff engaged in a process of clarifying their values and the main population that they aimed to serve. This took them into some strategic analysis of their current environment: what other organizations were serving various populations in the same urban area? They discovered that people could get similar services in many places, but what they had to offer that was unique was their focus on women and their families. They also got feedback from a client survey that confirmed some of these impressions.

Another aspect of their work was around trying to raise their overall level of culturally competent service. Some staff reported sometimes observing other staff or volunteers engaged in interactions that lacked cultural sensitivity. A staff poll showed a wide divergence of answers when asked what a person would do if they saw someone engaged in an interaction that seemed culturally inappropriate. Some said do nothing; some said talk to the staff member immediately; some said talk to the staff member later; some said talk to the person’s supervisor. Staff agreed that it was a shared goal for them all to serve clients in a culturally appropriate way, and that all of them had room to learn and grow in this area (moving away from the idea of being either culturally competent or not). We worked on a way for staff to support each other through developing a shared language around intervening in a situation or in talking to another staff member soon after an incident. The grounding of all of this was a collective desire to provide caring service to their priority clients.

A third element of their process was in realizing that they did not have skills in working with some segments of priority clients. Many staff members were not sure how to best communicate with clients who were actively using substances. Some were also not sure what the particular issues were for those who were addicted to substances. The team devised a quarterly training series on such topics that would help them work better with the diversity of people and needs at their center.

In this example the organization addressed all three levels of skills (through the trainings); systems (through decisions about priority clients and through the shared language and practice of engaging each other around incidents); and culture (through affirming their priority clients to create a certain culture in the center).

Example 2 Cultural Competency through a Nonprofit Fundraising Lens

How does an organization advance its mission and strengthen cultural competency in the area of fundraising?

Fund development is a practice of developing strong donor relationships. The donor relationships are cultivated by mutual learning between the donor and representatives of the organization, and by identifying common interests and shared values related to the mission of the organization. With each new gift comes a commitment by the organization to be accountable for that support and to interests shared by the donor and the organization, such as increased access and quality health care to people in underserved communities. It also requires board members, staff, and other representatives of the organization to effectively communicate the relationship between a compelling mission and strong community support.

This aspect of fundraising, particularly how a group develops grassroots donors, is also a way for organizations to deepen their cultural competency with communities they serve by finding ways to engage their patients and clients in a reciprocal relationship of support and giving. Yet many community-based nonprofits struggle with this notion, and many of those based within communities of color still tend to see the work of fundraising as asking wealthy white people for money. It is not a unique phenomenon at these organizations that mostly white “allies” comprise the donor roster. Meanwhile, many mainstream health organizations that also serve these communities are reaching out and cultivating donors of color through learning about the cultural practices of giving in these communities.

The Fundraising Academy for Communities of Color was created as a capacity building program for nonprofit organizations based in a community of color in order to help ethnic and racially identified organizations become more effective in their fundraising efforts.⁵ This academy highlights the issue of cultural competence within fundraising as a necessary competence in fundraising effectiveness. In the past three years, over sixty organizations including multicultural youth development groups, American Indian health centers, Black AIDS service organizations, Latino cultural centers and Asian and Pacific Islander social justice organizations have participated in this training and coaching program to develop donors within their communities and to deepen relationships with people in these communities.

Most of the participants (executive directors, fund development staff, program staff, and board members) identified the need for organizational development activities such as instituting new information systems or organization-wide education as a part of better fund development. Almost all of the participants identified that shifts in both organizational culture and behaviors were needed in order to raise money differently. Similar to other organizational change efforts, when the organization lacked leadership ownership, a realistic strategy, or good data to inform the strategy,

then positive changes in the fundraising academy were limited to changes in attitude among participants but did not affect organizational effectiveness. Groups that involved key staff and board members in the academy and had the commitment of leadership were able to develop and act upon fund development plans and actively cultivate and solicit new donors from their communities. Following are some new ways that these groups began donor cultivation and fundraising:

- Involving American Indian community members in developing a healthy recipe cookbook that was sold at health fairs and at the health center,
- Meeting with prospective donors who are of Japanese American heritage to ask for support, but not requiring a response at that meeting so the person would not lose face if they could not meet the request,
- Profiling Black church congregation members who have been donors in the agency newsletter, to reduce the stigma associated with AIDS/HIV in the Black community, and
- Developing a special donor roll of *Promotores* who helped to sponsor their statewide conference.

Work such as this is still being tried and tested by the groups as a way to build knowledge about creating a donor relationship in shared and different cultural contexts. Knowing that many of these efforts begin small and require time to take hold, the financial impact of donor development often cannot be the sole motivation for organizational change. Several participants have identified that one of the most effective changes has been that they communicate with community donors more often and, as a result, they are less afraid to ask them for financial support. Learning to communicate the value of the organization’s role and impact in the community, listening to community donors, and surfacing shared values to accomplish higher impact work are often the other more immediate benefits.

One participant says, “I no longer think of this kind of asking as begging, when I am asking people who know our mission because their family members have gotten healthier here. I know that what we are doing (at the health center) deserves the support of our community. When we have this kind of awareness and a relationship, there is no shame in asking or giving.”

⁵ This program was developed by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training (GIFT).

Example 3 Organizational Change to Engage New Communities

We worked with one community organizing group which is a coalition of congregations working around issues of health and safety in a small California city. The group was comprised of a variety of different faith leaders, all from various Christian congregations. Interestingly, each experienced the coalition as very diverse, since each group was only used to dealing with its own denomination. Still, the population of the city had been changing since the group had begun, including the arrival of many new immigrants and new faith communities.

The group decided that it would be most in keeping with their values to try to engage the various new faith communities through their leaders. These included the Hmong shaman, the Pakistani imam, and the Latino Pentecostal minister. It also was clearly beneficial to the achievement of their mission to engage more communities in their collective organizing: as the area became more diverse it became critical for them to build coalitions with new groups so they could bring their issues to the city with significant numbers behind them.

Trying to expand their ability to work with faith leaders in the changing community required the group to examine practices at their meetings that might be difficult for newcomers. They had to consider such systems issues as their traditional opening prayer – always a Christian prayer – which might not seem so welcoming to another faith group when Christians were in the majority. They also had to examine their use of Roberts Rules of Order as the process through which decisions were made and meetings were run. This could be experienced as an obstacle to participation by those not used to parliamentary procedure. The group had to be willing to change the way it did things in order to make room for different kinds of people in the group.

The group also had to build trust with new immigrant communities through finding out what their main issues were and providing help on projects already relevant to them. While the group originally concerned itself with issues around health and safety, they had to broaden this definition to include issues of immigration and language access. Group members had to demonstrate their solidarity with the newer faith communities through work on issues that were most pressing for them. Through a gradual development of trust and building friendship between leaders, the group has begun to bring in and to pay attention to newer communities and their needs.

Indications and Contraindications for Success

Many factors can lead to or hinder success in multicultural organizational development. Following are some of the common indications and contraindications:

The Importance of Leadership Support

It is essential to have the support of the executive director for such a project to succeed. Ideally the management team as a whole should on balance be supportive of the efforts. It is also important, however that more people than just the executive director are interested in the project. In the end the systems changes will usually impact a variety of other staff, so there need to be some champions of the project at a variety of levels. The multilevel team often facilitates this so it does not seem like just the executive director's pet project.

The Challenge When a Project is Mandated by an Outside Entity

In some cases the project catches fire in the organization though mandated by the outside. But in many cases when such a project is done only because it is imposed as a condition for funding or goodwill of an outside entity, the work is done in the most minimal way and real engagement does not follow.

In cases where the work is mandated by an internal force, like the board, on the heels of a potential lawsuit or other critical event, the work can be successful if there is a genuine desire to engage with the topic, but again if just done out of obligation it is hard to garner good results.

The Challenge When a Project Coincides with Another Organizational Lifecycle Event

In some cases there is something big happening for the organization that is taking the bulk of the organization's focus. This can be a big positive or negative change: a budget crisis, layoffs, transition of the executive director, a move to another building, expansion to a new site. In some cases it depends on where the focus for the project lands and whether that area of the organization has attention for multicultural organizational development. For instance, even if a capital campaign is going on that involves the board and development staff, a multicultural organizational development project can still work within an organization if the focus of the work is in an area that primarily involves program staff (like a collaboration with another organization).

The Challenge When a Project Coincides with Another Large Organizational Initiative

Even the healthiest of learning organizations only has so much attention for capacity building beyond the energy required to run its programs and keep its doors open. If there is already a full scale initiative going on in the organization, such as a revamp of organizational structure, it can be too much to launch another intensive initiative – people have only so much time and energy to meet in teams and be facilitated in meetings! At the same time, paying attention

to cultural competency should be a part of any large scale initiative in the organization.

Many of these factors are similar to those needed for engaging in any substantial organizational development effort, but since multicultural organizational development can be a particularly challenging area for work, it is even more easily halted by these challenges.

Attributes for Good Consultants

What type of consultant is best suited to help facilitate a process of multicultural organizational development? Can anyone serve in this role? One important attribute is a deep awareness of their own cultural location as well as a high degree of skill in cross-cultural communication. It is also important that the consultant be a good facilitator to support the team and the process, especially in navigating complex or confusing territory. To help with multicultural organizational development a consultant must have skills in understanding organizational systems and experience with organizations. It is also important for a consultant to have grounding in the dynamics of oppression such that they can help a group to see and to work with these as they are playing out in systems or interpersonally. Finally, flexibility and creativity are very helpful in doing this work as it requires innovation and adaptability to the needs and situation of each group.

While the consultant can play an important role as the facilitator of a process, it is crucial that ownership for the plan and its implementation lie within the organization. By allowing everyone to participate in discussions and by guiding the process along, the consultant is essentially another tool for doing this critical work in an organization. Too much reliance on the consultant as the owner and driver of the process will mean that the momentum behind it will be gone when that person leaves the building and when their tenure with the organization ends.

Evaluation and Ongoing Work on the Plan

For any process of multicultural organizational development to succeed, the work has to become part of the prioritized activities of the organization. Attention to the elements of the plan itself should be held at the highest level of authority possible in the organization. The team that worked on the plan can be employed in evaluating that the plan is being implemented, but responsibility for its implementation needs to be held by those who can make sure the activities get carried out. Another aspect of evaluation is to engage community members when appropriate to see whether the activities once carried out have the desired effect of improving people's experience of the organization. The organization can go back to its original questions about whether they are better able to achieve their mission through the improvements that have taken place.

Conclusions

Multicultural organizational development is a substantial undertaking by an organization, similar to choosing to engage in any capacity building process. Multicultural organizational development also requires ongoing consistent attention. Though the process of developing a plan itself has significant value, a plan will not create full results unless its elements are truly implemented. In order to do this it is important to make sure that the organizational commitment and resources match the requirements of the plan. Leaders and funders need to be aware that multicultural organizational development takes a substantial investment of time and resources to realistically facilitate positive change.

Paying attention to cultural competency should be an element in any organizational planning process (like strategic planning or fund development planning) through asking appropriate questions and trying to explore them. Are we reaching the populations we need to reach? Are we successful in our collaborations? Who are we accountable to for our work through the mechanisms of funding? Questions like these are important to integrate into these planning processes.

Doing work in cultural competency may not seem as easy as one would like it to be, but organizations have successfully improved in this area. It is a process, but one in which there can be movement. Paying attention to cultural competency can be an excellent impetus to engage communities, staff, board, and volunteers in a meaningful effort to serve the organization's mission more fully.

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— Anushka Fernandopulle

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