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## **CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM**

**Marking Progress:  
Movement Toward Racial Justice**  
Volume 3 • July 2010



# Marking Progress: Movement Toward Racial Justice

## PRE Critical Issues Forum Volume 3

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Full volume and individual articles are available for free download  
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## Foreword



Working in the area of racial justice requires us to ask big questions: How do we transform our society and our institutions? How do we address interlocking systems of racial inequities? How do we simultaneously address institutional racism and interpersonal/internal racism? How does transformational change occur?

For funders these questions become important as we develop our program areas, work on our theory of change, create partnerships with grantees and forge new alliances. And they become important when we try to figure out how the work is progressing. Are our grantees making inroads into these thorny issues? Are we as a foundation doing our part to support those efforts? Have we seen progress towards racial equity in society and communities? In essence, how do we evaluate our work?

Many people shudder when they hear the word “evaluation.” That is probably because it is often under-resourced, over-taxing to staff, top-down directed and sometimes not useful to anyone. To circumvent at least that last point of criticism, as a field we need to address what is appropriate to evaluate when we are looking for the road to a racially just world. Given the complex and pervasive manifestations of racism in contemporary America, determining what to evaluate, how to evaluate and against what yardstick, is a difficult question.

### **Foundations Moving to Catch Up**


Over the last few years the scholarly work on the analysis of structural racism has grown and deepened. The philanthropic community is catching up to the academic and field work in this area and learning how to apply that wisdom and experience to grantmaking. The grantee organizations with whom we work provide guidance and leadership by articulating ideas, theories of change and strategies for building a racial justice movement. But the sheer enormity and complexity of what we are grappling with behooves us to take a step back and evaluate what we are doing.

When I meet with funder colleagues and grantee partners, we forge a common vision of racial equity that requires transformational change on many levels of our society, our policies and practices, our communications and our ways of interacting. Tackling the many intractable and interlocking issues standing in the way requires multiple strategies directed at multiple flexion points over long periods of time. As strategies are employed, constituencies built and policies implemented, we all want to know that these are the right tactics to get us to the transformational change we seek. A campaign victory is something to celebrate; yet over time it may lead to even greater obstacles. Opposition to our vision runs deep. Success begets retrenchment. One need only look at the rise of racist hate crimes following the election of the first African American president to verify that.

In spite of that, we see progress everyday: African Americans and immigrants forge deep alliances on immigration reform, communities of color win pollution abatements and force the scuttling of discriminatory transportation proposals, Latinos and African Americans unite to fight foreclosures. Each of these efforts creates real reform that makes a difference in people’s lives, certainly a key component of any evaluation. When we get a big victory, we can see the importance of key characteristics that led to it — leadership from the community, strong organizing efforts, clear racial justice analysis, developed communications plans. All of these are important aspects of the work to evaluate.

### **A Big Victory, Many More Obstacles**

Yet, even big wins must be seen in the larger context of interrelated systems imposing multiple barriers and areas of resistance. In Oakland, California, we had a big victory in the educational arena in 2009 when students, parents and teachers organized for an expanded high school curriculum that would prepare students for University of California (UC) admission.



As successful and encouraging as that win is, there remain many obstacles for Oakland high schoolers to attend UC. Students still must navigate through an educational system that does not even provide the basic essentials of an education, such as facilities, books and other resources. Nor does it address the other multiple barriers faced by these students living with violence in their neighborhoods, the lack of transportation and the absence of jobs for them and their parents.

*When we as funders think about evaluation of this effort, we need to hold the short-term tactical progress and the long-term transformation simultaneously.*

The advocates and organizers understand this and see their work on this campaign as a piece of a bigger puzzle. When we as funders think about evaluation of this effort, we need to hold the short-term tactical progress and the long-term transformation simultaneously. Our evaluations must focus on a variety of points: the number of students, parents and teachers organized for the effort, a story of the cohesion and endurance of the organizing beyond the campaign, the quality of the campaign communications, the scope of the remaining barriers, the number of students now eligible to attend a UC campus, the importance of electing school board trustees from the community, and so on. Each approach has legitimacy to it, but determining which criteria to use as a yardstick toward progress will be important so that we do not find ourselves chasing reforms that don't add up to substantial transformation.

## **A Discourse's Starting Point**

We should consider a wide range of perspectives and styles of our struggles toward racial justice. Some might approach evaluation through a quantitative approach with data collection, others through storytelling. We are in a stage of experimentation as we grapple with the best means by which to reflect on our progress, critique our missteps and gather evidence of successful practices to tell the story to each other, other funders, organizers and the media. The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity has brought together the thinkers in this publication to jump-start a broader discussion of evaluation in the field of racial justice, both within philanthropy, and among those directly engaged in the work. The absence of a key perspective could lead us to evaluate, and fund, an aspect of the work that does not lead to the sought-after change.

The world is simply too complex to be able to capture all of the factors and causations leading toward real and substantial change.

As funders, we are limited by the system in which we operate as we seek transformational change, while funding with a short time horizon. Keeping the limitations in mind along with the urge to celebrate and strengthen what works should help bring us together to begin this conversation of how we measure and make progress toward our shared racial justice goals.

Quinn Delaney  
June 2010

Quinn Delaney is founder and president of Akonadi Foundation, an Oakland, California-based foundation working to support and nurture a racial justice movement to put an end to the structural racism that lies at the heart of social inequity in the U.S. She is also very involved with the ACLU, having served five years as chair of the board for the Northern California Affiliate. She has served on other boards as well, including those of the Democracy Alliance, Oakland Museum of California, the Tides Foundation, Pitzer College and the Family Violence Law Center. [www.akonadi.org](http://www.akonadi.org)

# Introduction

by Lori Villarosa



So much has been presented in foundation circles on project evaluation, it is difficult to imagine what more needs to be said. Evaluation approaches aimed at measuring social impacts have evolved in many progressive ways in the past decade or more, with significant work on participatory evaluation, cultural competency, efforts to measure advocacy and related social justice work or communications strategies.<sup>1</sup>

*Organizations in this realm have been historically underfunded and operate in political terrain where race-based remedies have been under siege at every level.*


But it seems that of the hundreds of tools and reports on evaluation approaches – even those directly aimed at many of the components of their work such as advocacy or communications – many have not resonated with or even reached racial justice practitioners and advocates. Perhaps it is because challenging the structural underpinnings of racial inequity is an enormously complex undertaking, one being waged in a relatively hostile atmosphere by a relatively nascent and underresourced movement. Racial justice work is highly nuanced and cross-sectoral. It often involves battling long-entrenched and hidden policies and practices, cultural biases and cumulative negative impact. Organizations in this realm have been historically underfunded and operate in political terrain where race-based remedies have been under siege at every level and where “success” can be just as much a political liability as “failure.”

It is also possible that these evaluation approaches just have not been adequately disseminated to or examined by our field, but whatever the reasons for the gap between the desire for and availability of useful tools to measure truly transformational racial equity work, one thing is clear – it is the people working in the forefront of this movement that must take the lead in developing ways to measure real progress. The answer to the

question “How do we know if we’re moving forward?” won’t be divined through the use of ill-suited indicators imposed by funders and consultants unversed in a structural racism analysis.

But still, racial justice advocates do not need to start from scratch. The approaches mentioned above, along with “advocacy evaluation field-building,” should each provide some of the foundational frameworks. Of course, all the best practices in social impact evaluation efforts related to participatory research or culturally competent approaches are applicable to racial justice efforts – and perhaps even more so given the nuances of the issues. But still, these are all only part of the equation. One of the underlying challenges of answering the question “How does one best evaluate work aimed at structural racism?” lies in the understanding that a structural racism analysis is in itself a form of evaluation. This framework shapes the way we examine outcomes and determine the forces that contributed to those outcomes. Without a rigorous analysis of the interacting systems leading to racial disparities, both the change-oriented strategies and the assessments of progress will likely target symptoms and attitudes rather than underlying structures.

As noted earlier, even if one’s work is guided by a well-grounded analysis of structural racism, the questions that complicate any social impact evaluation emerge. Can the effectiveness of a particular intervention be accurately assessed given so many competing social impacts? If an organization is underresourced and unable to reach scale, does that indicate a poor strategy or a need to invest further? How much causation can we attribute to any specific project given the complexity of social forces affecting anything and everything? How much can evaluation discern impacts or outcomes attributable to what are, in global terms, tiny projects launched to address enormous structural issues? In their seminal 2005 publication, *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Strategies for a Prospective Evaluation Approach*, Blueprint Research and Design named key challenges of any social justice advocacy efforts that are also of course true for racial justice advocacy: complexity of issues, role of external forces, extended timeframe, shifting strategies and milestones, and lack of clarity in attribution.<sup>2</sup>



Activists can often point to funders' use of evaluations as a mechanism to dictate the direction and flow of resources and energy in ways that undermine efforts to build a genuine social movement for racial justice. The fascination in philanthropy and government with emphasizing quantitative metrics to capture project or program impacts often leads racial projects to focus on short-term “countable” impacts, or more likely, outputs, to the detriment of any ability these projects may have to describe and analyze progress toward changes in underlying systems and structures. A campaign “win” might be fabulous if it can be documented and defended quantitatively in addition to qualitatively. But tendencies to look at quantitative impacts or campaign wins may address immediate needs for some while weakening the case for more significant changes.

In spite of these challenges, a growing number of national, regional and community-based organizations are basing their work on a structural racism analysis. Several national foundations such as Ford, C.S. Mott, Annie E. Casey, Open Society Institute, Marguerite Casey and Atlantic Philanthropies and others have been supporting individual grants or programs that have advanced understanding of structural racism during the past decade or longer. More holistically and explicitly, the Akonadi Foundation has committed its entire foundation to addressing transformational racial justice movement-building using a structural racism analysis. Most recently, the Kellogg Foundation made an historically major commitment to racial equity, which included a commitment to a structural racism analysis. And a growing number of local or regional, though perhaps less well-known, foundations such as the Barr Foundation of Boston, the Consumer Health Foundation of Washington, DC, and the Edward J. Hazen Foundation of New York have begun applying a structural racism analysis to their grantmaking strategies and theories of change. The mounting acceptance of structural racism approaches makes the search for useful evaluation tools ever more pressing.

PRE recognizes some of the cutting-edge work already done on participatory, culturally competent, social justice, anti-racist evaluation; many of the arguments of those who've developed this work should already be state of the art. (We've listed several seminal or macro resources in this volume's appendix.)

But the racial justice advocates, evaluators, community practitioners and funders who have contributed to this volume are still grappling with the question of what will best enable them to assess progress and impact in their work

Their contributions are concerned primarily, though not exclusively, with foundation-supported projects and programs addressing structural racism. Maya Wiley writes that funders

and grantees taking on structural racism confront a healthy but challenging tension of measuring the complexity of these issues and approaches with existing evaluation tools, and addresses some ways they may be adapted. John Powell and his colleagues at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, acknowledging the history of inadequate and failed policy interventions, assert that we need a systems approach to evaluation.

Rinku Sen of Applied Research Center, and through interviews, leaders of three other movement building organizations — the Miami Workers Center, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Western States Center — reflect on what measures accurately gauge progress on components of transformational change, importantly recognizing how they may differ from perhaps more easily recognized transactional wins or losses. Sally Leiderman, Maggie Potapchuk and Michelle Fine reflect on evaluation approaches they have seen and implemented in field settings. Finally, Soya Jung discusses the challenges that funders face in evaluating racial justice work and shares some of the ways they are addressing them.

We do not pretend to have simple answers to the question “How do we know we're making true progress toward racial justice?” In this volume, PRE has presented an array of perspectives and suggestions that may contribute to sharpening the questions raised by the funders, activists and evaluators concerned with racial justice. In this way, we hope to help position the field to collectively define the goals, adapt or refine existing tools or develop appropriate new ones as needed. With better evaluation tools, we can ensure that our limited financial and human resources are sharply and effectively targeted to those approaches most likely to improve outcomes in all of our communities for the long term.

Lori Villarosa is the executive director and founder of the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE), a multiyear project intended to increase the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism. Lori has worked in philanthropy for more than 18 years; prior to launching PRE in 2003, she was a program officer with the C. S. Mott Foundation, where she developed and managed its portfolio on race relations and institutional racism within the U.S. [www.racialequity.org](http://www.racialequity.org)

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<sup>1</sup> [www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/fdn\\_rev\\_morariu\\_brennan.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/fdn_rev_morariu_brennan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Evaluation/challenge\\_assessing\\_policy\\_advocacy.pdf](http://www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Evaluation/challenge_assessing_policy_advocacy.pdf)



# Getting on the Right Road: Up-Front Assessment is Key

by Maya Wiley



What does it mean to measure the transformation of race? Funders and grantees are increasingly asked to predetermine measurable impacts and quantify them. We are asked to develop strategies, relationships, and outcomes in a linear equation. We assume, we do and we report. But the structural racism lens, a form of racialized “systems thinking,” draws us to multidimensional, complex institutional and social relationships, policies, and practices. It’s more of a constellation than an equation. It’s the stars, not algebra.

The organization I head, the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI), is a strategy developer and implementer. Working with organizations in the field, funders and grantees, we strive to think through evaluation that helps us develop and shift our strategies over time, determining if we are on the road to racial reform — transformation to a nation where racial disparities not only disappear, but we have raised the floor beneath which no resident of this nation will fall.

Given that we are working with great complexity, it is a challenge to determine measurable outcomes before we start the work. Rather than conform to existing evaluation protocols that work for more linear strategies, particularly given the interlocking and evolving nature of racialized structures, we may be better off creating new approaches.<sup>1</sup> To conduct a really good (meaning strategic) evaluation, we must do an up-front assessment that helps shape our work, establish how we will measure performance and begin to develop impact measures. This is a point that both grantees and foundations sometimes miss. A friend often reminds me, “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” All three of these stages of assessment, performance measurement and impact analysis, whatever we or the evaluation field might term these stages, must work together to help us get where we are trying to go. Where are we trying to go, how do we think we’ll get there and are we right? The point of evaluation should be to help us become more effective and impactful.

We often make unexamined assumptions. Assumptions may be right and they may be wrong. We need to know why we are successful or why we fail. For example, we might assume that to win we need facts and data. If we don’t examine that assumption and we lose, we might come to the wrong conclusion that we need more facts and data. But what if the truth is that the facts don’t matter nearly as much as how our audience feels? Without examining our assumption, we will evaluate our progress inaccurately. Our best intentions can be thwarted by presumptions and our failure to examine what we have done, and this may be particularly true when it comes to the work of racial transformation.

In addition, knowing where we are trying to go and surfacing our assumptions about how we will get there, we must decide what we are measuring over time. Structural transformation of race really has several indicators of systems change:

1. meaningful educational opportunity;
2. the ability to form networks and relationships across race;
3. the ability to live in a community with decent housing, schools, amenities and that are sustainable;
4. democratic participation.

These outcomes help to provide direction for our work, but we need to go further with the articulation of our goals and benchmarks for meeting them. Consider the post-Hurricane Katrina fight by black public housing residents to save public housing. They complained that they were forced to move, or required to make decisions without adequate information or meaningful choices.

It would be easy to assume that moving people of color from cities to suburbs is transformative. But academic research shows that not all suburbs are growing in opportunity. Some are in decline. If inner-city public housing residents moved to a suburb in decline, they don’t necessarily fare better. Some folks who are disabled or have additional challenges need networks of support

that do not necessarily exist in the suburbs. An assumption that moving the residents will improve their lives may be well intentioned and may be wrong.

*Transforming race means transforming the participatory structures of our society so that people of color are helping to shape what those structures are, enter them and have a say.*

In the case of Katrina-affected New Orleanians, making decisions “for their own good” would be counter to a definition of structural equity for many of us. Transforming race means transforming the participatory structures of our society so that people of color are helping to shape what those structures are, enter them and have a say. An even better indicator of structural transformation for public housing residents would be whether they have mechanisms that enable them to define what affordable housing options might work for them and ensuring that they are connected to jobs and services, both in New Orleans and in other cities.

## Race-Conscious Evaluation Tools

Such indicators – absent in many traditional forms of evaluation – are more likely to emerge when we use race-conscious evaluation tools. We need race-conscious tools to build policy advocacy strategies and mount arguments for racially just transformation funding. Strategy and evaluation should work alongside each other. Some tools can be modified or combined for these purposes. At CSI, we use our own three-dimensional matrix of questions, along with several decent, widely accepted tools that we actively racialize, adding the systems lens to make them work for us. For example, for our assessment work we are borrowing the military’s “after-action review” process, which includes a before-action review set of questions. We add to it our assumptions about how race is operating and how we think we might be shifting it. We need race-conscious evaluation tools to help us:

- ▲ assess trends and forces that influence the particular problem we are trying to solve, including the role that race is playing within them;
- ▲ identify the multiple institutions, including the actors, who directly and indirectly influence that change and the racial status quo we must challenge;
- ▲ evaluate the relationship between actions or inactions

of “the field” (policy organizations, research institutes, community groups, lawyers, etc.) and the outcomes we can observe.

This cannot be a race-neutral evaluation. These core elements require an understanding of racialized nature of dynamics in relationships, biases and capacities. We have to use a matrix that includes intended and unintended consequences, attitudes and biases, and capacities related to making the restructuring we seek informed by how race operates, not just what race is. CSI’s three-question matrix helps us to assess what we should be doing, how we might do it, with whom and to what end. The matrix includes questions of impact, influences, forces, trends and people:

### Impact and influences

What are our intended impacts on racial inequity and what unexpected events, interactions, or outcomes are emerging or might influence our intended impacts?

### Forces and trends

What institutions, policies and actors influence the racial inequity problem we are trying to solve?

### Who

Who must we be in relationship with to make progress on impacts and what do those relationships need to produce?

This is a learning approach. Benchmarking should be iterative. Asking and getting answers to these questions could provide information for a more dynamic, informative, and strategic and evolving approach.

It is worth noting that when CSI uses this approach, it is often without financial support. As management consulting from the private sector increasingly influences nonprofit and foundation evaluation, program officers and grantees are more often being asked to demonstrate success by predetermining quantifiable outcomes. Often these requests come without any additional resources and without any thought to development of the right kind of measures, some of which may be more qualitative. If we are to do this work well, we will need to customize the evaluation, which requires time and careful thought. Funders who request it should also provide funding to support us to conduct the work.

## Can Broadband Access Be Transformational?

In creating our racial equity work focused on economic recovery, assessment helped us create strategy. For example, we knew that government makes inadequate “infrastructure” investments – transit, schools, etc. – in communities of color. We asked,



“Which pots of money, properly directed, could close the racial opportunity gap?” Educational quality, health care access and economic development (multiple institutions that collectively embody an opportunity model) all depend on high-speed Internet access. Communities of color do not have sufficient broadband access in many places. We made an assumption that if we and our partners influence more money for broadband expansion in communities of color, it would be transformational in a structural way because its impact would be broader than Internet access.

We cannot assess race neutrally. A tenet of “systems thinking” is that systems work to maintain their stability. In a racialized systems theory, that means systems work to maintain their racial status quo, often without doing so consciously. Telecommunications firms might control public infrastructure money, their monopoly, and push for infrastructure investment that matches their business models and maximizes their infrastructure. This will maintain a racialized status quo of disconnected poor communities of color without making a conscious decision to discriminate. The assessment requires us to identify racialized “patterns.” Where and how are communities left out of important systems? Which ones are we focusing on for intervention and why?

*Systems work to maintain their racial status quo, often without doing so consciously.*

We had to ask these questions because if we were to get broadband to communities of color, the communities would not enjoy meaningful access if the broadband was not affordable. We also needed to know what would ensure that the infrastructure would be put to opportunity-building uses. We focused then on a model of community-scale broadband infrastructure that was more affordable to build and would be directly used by and benefit the community. The model would expand public spaces with high speed Internet and spaces that could be hubs for uses such as telework centers and computer training labs. Building the infrastructure is not enough if the partnerships and capacities do not exist to translate the infrastructure into educational, health and economic opportunities because those systems are lacking in communities of color. So partnerships were critically important to not only winning money for the community-scale infrastructure model, but having the right community support.


A funder then asked CSI for two-year outputs and benchmarks for driving American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA, or stimulus) dollars to communities of color. At CSI, we set annual

and 5-year benchmarks to help our strategy development, learning, performance and impact evaluation processes. The funder pushed us for “quantifiable” benchmarks that could demonstrate how much money got to communities of color as a result of our efforts. It made clear that it was equating our “impact” with “money to communities” and our value as a grantee with how much money we influenced. The funder was asking about “output” and “scale,” implying that the amount of money moved would determine the significance of our work. We had some steps that we thought we could quantify tied to the broadband infrastructure and adoption application we were supporting in the Mississippi Delta region. ARRA provides \$7.2 billion in broadband infrastructure and sustainability funding. Output and scale questions are legitimate.

But the benchmarks the funder wanted would not measure several other indicators of success towards racially just transformation. For example, questions like: Are more black communities and leadership engaged in the fight for broadband and how? Are there new relationships between these leaders and communities and decision-makers and other organizations and institutions? Are they engaged in finding other strategies to get broadband and make use of it? These are important questions because the answers may suggest that there is more to build upon to meet the goal of broadband access and adoption in the longer term, even if the stimulus grant is not a large sum or the grant is not approved. Also, these questions help to capture CSI’s added value and recognize the role of actors that the funder and other funders were not supporting and perhaps should to reach their goals. Equally, if not more importantly, these questions help both the grantee and funder become more effective. From the outside looking in, it feels as if funders could, but often do not, think about how to ask for evaluation that helps the grantee think about and improve strategies and effectiveness. Too often, the evaluation seems to be about a more narrow accountability than longer-term effectiveness and success. Funders have a tremendous stake in the success of their grantees. This stake is a real opportunity to see evaluation as a strategy and effectiveness tool and not simply an accountability tool. And the good news is the funder will still know and be able to hold the grantee accountable with this approach.

## **Layered Approaches**

Creating and implementing solutions requires attention to as many of these multiple layers as possible. This means that we must build relationships with others who can address broadband adoption, who work on telecommunications reform, who are community based and working on the social benefits of broadband adoption, who can fund or accomplish some of the other work that must be done that CSI cannot and should not do.



Southern Echo, a leadership training and organizing group based in Jackson, Mississippi, offers an on-the-ground example of an up-front assessment, whether or not they called it that or thought of it as assessment, that shaped work and performance measures with a structural race lens. Southern Echo's project started with a campaign to redistrict in order to bring about school reform. Voting rights was the entry point to improve education and it was a beginning, not an end. The process they used includes what I would call "assessment" of the landscape to choose the entry point. But it also tells Southern Echo and its funders what to measure in the short run and what to try to understand and change for next levels of work toward educational excellence for all Mississippi's children. "Systems thinking" of structural racism tells us that if the problem is with our schools, causes will include housing, tax structures and a web of policies and practices. I don't know if Southern Echo used any of these terms, considered its work in the context of evaluation or employed any tools that the field of evaluation would recognize. What I know is that they did great assessment-level evaluation work; that they, and many others, have some impressive performance measures that have not been called performance measures; and that the work has had a structurally meaningful impact. In particular, it has opened up the opportunity for many more successes on the road to structural transformation.

Most of what I have described as assessment, or strategy development, evaluation also directs our attention to our measures of performance. Where does that lead us on impact evaluation? In our view, impact evaluation should tell us two things:

- ▲ Did we produce some measurable, group-based equity?
- ▲ Did we create systems that not only help produce, but begin to reproduce (as oppose to undermine) that equity over time?

Our work in pursuit of racial transformation is, I argue, an iterative quest and none of us can do it alone. We are all stars in a constellation.

## Next Steps

- ▲ Program staff at foundations could do more to examine their portfolios in conjunction with the foundation's other grants and the work of others influencing racial equity.
- ▲ Foundations and grantees could help answer the two questions by surfacing our assumptions about existing racial conditions, mapping them and seeing which ones prove true and which ones untrue.

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<sup>1</sup> Wigboldus, Seerp, Jim Woodhill, Irene Guijt. "Navigating Complexity: Introduction. Presentation. Innovation Dialogue on Navigating Complexity." 26-27 May 2008. Wageningen International Programme for Capacity Development and Institutional Change. Available online at [http://portals.wi.wur.nl/files/docs/File/navigatingcomplexity/Navigating%20Complexity%20Intro%20\[Read-Only\].pdf](http://portals.wi.wur.nl/files/docs/File/navigatingcomplexity/Navigating%20Complexity%20Intro%20[Read-Only].pdf).

# Systems Thinking, Evaluation and Racial Justice

by john powell\*



As racial justice advocates and theorists, we need an evaluation approach that acknowledges what we know from a history of inadequate or failed policy interventions. We know that what works on a micro level may not be able to be scaled up; what appears promising in the short term may have no impact in the long term, what helps in the short term may in fact harm in the long term, and even policies that are far removed from the traditional concerns of racial justice advocates can either ameliorate or exacerbate racial disparities.

In short, a systems approach to evaluation is needed, because racial conditions must be seen as not simply an outcome of certain attitudes or policies, but as dynamic interconnected processes that are part of a larger socioeconomic and political system that creates racial meaning and constrains or enhances well being for everyone. Attitudes can be important, especially as they relate to policies and practices. But even when focusing on attitudes, it is often more useful to examine unconscious attitudes in society rather than conscious attitudes of individuals. (For example, many whites now support the idea of racially fair policy, but reject any effective way to implement such policy. Such resistance is often the result of unconscious anxiety about the policy itself.) That's why we must be willing to evaluate success in overcoming structural racism by outcomes of the interactive systems and not the intent of individual or the stated goal of particular policies. The efficacy of a policy can only be adequately understood by looking at how it interacts with other policies and the environment to advance desired outcome. To achieve such understanding, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity has begun to move toward more rigorous systems science-based methodologies for understanding both disparities and opportunities.

Consider the current financial crisis in the black and Latino communities. An individual approach to understanding and addressing the crisis locates the failure and therefore the repair in the individual. The problem is then addressed at the individual level by locking up a few unscrupulous lenders or providing financial literacy to individual borrowers. Neither of these steps can begin to examine or fix the system. Nor do they reflect an understanding of how the black and Latino community is connected to the larger community and indeed the global network. If the failure of the credit market is a systems failure with a strong racial footprint, then the individual efforts will likely prove inadequate.

While our understanding of structural racism is full of insights from systems thinking, our methods of evaluation have not caught up with these insights, and our theories of change are still far too often based on a view of racialized conditions as isolated and individual rather than systemic, group-based and interconnected. As our language becomes more steeped with systems concepts, we need to apply these new lessons in a deliberate and rigorous manner.


## Feedback Loops

The interaction of institutions and processes can change the dynamics and function of a system. A system can take conditions and information to produce changes in the system. These changes are called feedback loops. One must be careful not to confuse a single event or outcome with the dynamic nature of a system. Instead of looking at single events, it is often more productive to look at patterns over time. The efficacy of a policy can only be adequately understood by looking at how it interacts with the environment and with other policies, and the extent to which it produces desirable stable patterns. This approach will shift our focus to relationships over time instead of looking at concrete separate indicators or a single domain at a fixed moment in time.

For example, a relational view of integration by race and class has implications not just for the marginal groups but also for

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\* Thanks to Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity Research Associate Eric Stiens and Deputy Director Andrew Grant-Thomas for their contributions to this article.



the dominant groups. Our actions take place in systems that are adaptive. The response or adaptation can be delayed at one point and accelerated at another. This can cause us to under- and overestimate that long-term change. What might look like a big change, the end of formal segregation, may turn out to be less significant over time as systems respond, adjust and react. As a result, racial justice advocates have to understand the endurance of racial hierarchy and exploitation in the U.S. despite a number of important advances such as school desegregation that were seen as major steps toward ending racial injustice in America.

This suggests both strategic interventions and monitoring and understanding the systems' response. To do this effectively requires an examination of relationships, reactions, feedback and evolving outcomes, as well as maintaining a sensitivity to the larger environment that produces dynamics where these processes are occurring. It requires ongoing processing and adjustments to this new information. This also requires a much more subtle notion of racial meaning and practice. Such an approach would generate a number of questions that would help us as we think about evaluation, including the following: What are the dynamics of race, class and gender policy in the U.S.? Where and how is the work of challenging racial hierarchy being done? Does the work being done reflect our stated values? And finally, what would a structure or system that is just require?

A temporary success may actually set in play dynamics that will undermine long-term success and stability. The short-term integration of schools by race or class may set in motion longer resegregation caused by white flight through the use of housing or other non-school mechanisms. This requires evaluation over an extended timeframe to better understand the dynamics that might not be obvious in a single snapshot. It also requires looking at patterns that might be emerging. A systems approach also focuses our attention onto the group instead of the individual. This suggests a different approach to implementation as well as a new approach to evaluation is necessary.

## Systems Thinking and Evaluation

Within a structural theory of racialization, a systems approach to evaluation becomes a necessary part of our activism. A systems approach to evaluation for racial justice implies a willingness to grapple with the following ideas:

1. We must expect that interventions will have unintended effects and that these unintended effects will occur far in both time and space from the original intervention. This suggests that the racial impacts and outcome of all policies need to be taken into account

(as it is unlikely that any policy will be race-neutral) and that we must broaden the evaluations of racial justice interventions themselves both spatially and temporally.

2. We must accept that structural adjustment and resistance is a part of nearly all interventions in a complex system. We do not make a single intervention and then stop. We must see how the system and actors in the system respond and make the necessary adjustment.
3. We must begin to make better use of the full range of systems methodologies at our disposal for both evaluation and program design – including qualitative mapping methodologies and modeling.
4. Evaluation must focus on relationship and patterns. Some important relationships might be outside of the initial boundary used for understanding the problem.

Funders and advocates need a theory of change that is sensitive to catalytic interventions and positive and negative feedback in response to these interventions.

## Unintended Consequences

In systems thinking, there are no side effects, only intended and unintended effects. Without trying to take into account the unintended consequences of a policy and examine what their effects on the systems are, the evaluation may end up being misleading or wholly inadequate. The evaluation must focus on outcomes over time, not simply intentions or inputs. But even here we must be careful. What might appear as an outcome might in fact be an unstable state that is supporting a new undesired pattern. Our evaluations must be sensitive to possible change including retrenchment and instability. One common mistake is to see the system or environment as relatively static and nonrelational. Not only is this incorrect, but the very intervention of well intended policy can accelerate the dynamics of an environment. Because a dynamic system can adapt, there can be movement without substantive change or a dynamic equilibrium.

When we focus on a single dimension in a system, we often fail to see how a system might adjust that will undermine our effort or produce negative outcomes, sometimes to devastating effect:

- ▲ In Portland, Oregon, an attempt to control urban sprawl led to policies that ultimately had a negative impact on the housing experiences of communities of color because they contributed to the creation of spiking housing costs and a climate friendly to gentrification in the inner city by changing the demand without paying attention to supply. This can be seen as an unintended, but predictable outcome.

- ▲ Nationally, in many regions with small, fragmented jurisdictions, school desegregation efforts have been shown to correlate to relocation of whites and middle-class families (white flight), sometimes resulting in greater isolation for low-income students of color after the initial effort to integrate.
- ▲ After accepting the validity of substantial research showing that living in a high-poverty community depressed the life chances of residents, the federal government adopted a number of programs to help people move away from such areas. Many of these programs focused on the dynamics of poverty while failing to take into account the dynamic relationship of race, school and jobs. Because of racial dynamics, poor whites were more likely to land in middle-class communities while poor blacks were more likely to land in distressed, low-opportunity communities. Studies of some of these relocation efforts have shown that because these programs focused on a single indicator – high-poverty neighbors – without considering other indicators such as schools, jobs or stability, the programs did not have the intended consequence.
- ▲ An effort to reduce class size for children of color in California by mandating reduced class size for all students backfired because the increased demand for teachers across the board pulled many experienced teachers away from low-income schools, reducing the experience and quality of teachers in these locations.
- ▲ Although the full dynamics and impact are still not well understood, the current subprime mortgage fiasco may be traceable, in some small part, to efforts by the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to increase black and Latino home ownership. This push, in concert with changes in banking laws, set up the conditions for a highly racialized housing and banking catastrophe.

Because racialized conditions are part of nearly every area of life, it is a near-certainty that most public policies – even ones that purportedly have little to do with race (new zoning in a commercial district, a change in tax policy, and so forth) – will affect racialized impact and access to opportunity. This means program designers should attempt to predict the impact of the full range of policy proposals on racial equity and inclusion. Evaluators, meanwhile, must look critically at programs and policies to determine their racial effects.

## Expanding Evaluation Boundaries

The past 50 years have seen no shortage of policies intended to reduce income and employment gaps that persist along racial boundaries. Yet we have seen little movement, and many gains

such as those realized in the immediate wake of the 1960s War on Poverty programs were quickly reversed. Why?

Neither segregationists nor integrationists would have believed a time traveler from today telling them that ultimately the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision would not make a difference in the degree of integration of many schools, yet many school districts have segregation levels near pre-Brown levels. Why?

In systems thinking terms, we refer to this as policy resistance, the tendency for the effects of a policy to eventually undermine itself through balancing feedback, and it is the standard behavior of interventions in a complex system.


Furthermore, not only do policy interventions tend to undermine the goal of the policy, but this tends to happen with many years separating the policy and its effects. This tilts evaluators and policymakers toward using policies that show a short-term positive effect, but lose that effect over the long term. When combined with philanthropy that funds outcomes and results based on short timeframes, we end up with organizations that are very good at fixing problems, but not in a sustainable way.

Often evaluators want to focus on what did and did not work in a particular intervention over a short time rather than on the system as a whole. For example, they may examine a failed intervention for students and try to isolate specific factors to assign blame for the failure such as “curriculum not appropriate, didn’t hire enough staff, treatment drop-out was a problem.” A systems evaluation is much more interested in relationships and the effects intended or not, in how the dynamics of this particular system produced this unwanted outcome and how the particular program affected system structures.

*Rather than thinking of evaluation simply as a means to understand whether or not an intervention worked, we need to think of evaluation as a way to better understand the system itself.*

Rather than thinking of evaluation simply as a means to understand whether or not an intervention worked, we need to think of evaluation as a way to better understand the system





itself. This means paying special attention to paradoxical effects, and being willing to expand the timeframe of our evaluations.

Stories about how change is occurring, even if incomplete, nearly always capture the dynamics of a system better than even the most sophisticated multivariate tools which simply show correlation, but leave the how and why of the correlation unanswered.

The Kirwan Institute has moved toward a multidimensional analysis for its opportunity-based housing analysis and mapping. Recognizing that where you live is often the anchor for many other disparities (access to employment, education, exposure to crime or toxics, social/community capital, etc.), we have strongly urged policymakers to consider multiple indicators of opportunity and to site low-income housing in areas of higher opportunity. However, what we have not adequately done yet is examine the dynamic nature of how those various opportunities interact over time.

We must monitor outcomes over time and across domains. In assessing the stability of the outcome or change, one must be sensitive to processes that can destabilize or undermine the outcome. The more processes support an outcome, the more stable the outcome is likely to be.

Because systems transmit information and react through feedback loops, understanding, anticipating and responding to changes in systems requires identifying and monitoring these loops along with outcomes. Stakeholders, including funders, while using more conventional evaluation models, must have a theory of change and a sophisticated understanding of what drives or retards change in a system. These perspectives can help inform the focus of interventions, and aid in the identification and monitoring of the feedback loops. In other words, stakeholders must come to a fuller understanding of race and how it is shaped by and, in turn, also shapes systems.

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# Where are We Going with That? Use Transformational Goals to Measure Racial Equity Work

by Rinku Sen

Racial equity requires the transformation of all aspects of our society, from popular thinking to legislation. Yet realpolitik involves transactions – interim steps – that take us only partly there. One way to assess whether these steps are taking us in the right direction is to constantly measure them against transformational goals. By examining the impact of such transactional advances on public discourse, constituency building and the implementation of policies, advocates can have a better sense of whether their work is moving communities toward meaningful racial justice.

For both funders and organizations in the field, three aspects of change toward racial equity are particularly important to build into planning and evaluation. These are: discourse, which refers to the clarity of our ideas and the level to which they are echoed by others; constituency, which refers to all the people whose participation is needed to make change (those affected, potential allies, journalists and policymakers); and policy implementation, where we track the final outcomes of our work. These categories reflect the understanding that racial inequity has institutional roots, girded by policies and practices that create our targets for struggle.

By transformation, I mean a fundamental shift in the logic and desired outcomes of one or more institutions. By transaction, I mean a helpful improvement that may hint at the underlying fundamentals without actually changing them. All transactions, however, are not created equal. How close each accomplishment takes us to transformation depends entirely on how we design interim actions and imagine their role both internally (within the alliance or organization) and externally (in relation to the issue and its institutions). Measuring effectiveness in this context means clearly articulating an analysis and vision, generating high leverage transactions, then gathering the qualitative and quantitative information that tells us how well the plan worked. The evaluation needs to enable us to address the gap between the long and short terms.

At the planning stage it is extremely easy to be vague about our transformational goals, while being very specific about our

activities. We need more balance there, and more connection between these, so that our work can add up to something new. For example, efforts to support unemployed people of color through extended unemployment benefits are transactional. On the surface, such a small policy change doesn't redress the occupational segregation that affects people of color disproportionately. But this example could play out in many ways, based on the organization's strategy in its specific context. If winning extended unemployment is part of a southern organization's plan to challenge racial hierarchies and build a multiracial organization of unemployed people in a state where most are black, then this might be a critical victory on the way to fuller racial equity by building a unified power base among people with the most at stake.

Progress toward transformation would be more likely if the group:

- ▲ highlighted the racial dynamics of unemployment;
- ▲ emphasized the role of institutions in causing the problem;
- ▲ had a plan for leveraging that victory to move on a larger issue;
- ▲ generated support for a strong government role in a fair economy;
- ▲ took an organizing approach to monitoring access through participatory research; or
- ▲ advanced alliances that will later enable a multi-institution approach to connected problems.

Any of these intentions, effectively carried out, could push extended benefits from being a nice short-term win to being a building block for new racial arrangements. Without a long-term strategy, attention to issue framing, or a constituency plan beyond "outreach," a group is more likely to get stuck in the transactional space.

## Clarity+Echo=Changing Discourse

At the Applied Research Center (ARC), we believe that effective evaluation starts with excellent planning. We measure racial

justice progress through the lens of discourse, constituency and policy implementation; each category has several elements.

Changing racial discourse requires both clarity and echo. Clarity refers to how well we introduce or expand the use of new language and ideas (or discredit existing language and ideas) in the body politic. But internal clarity isn't enough. Reframing requires constant repetition, over the course of years, which we call echo.

Transformations have to be grounded in values, and transactions that don't elevate notions of institutional accountability, equity, inclusion and human rights are less likely to set the stage for transformation. This is the difference between, say, arguing that the war on drugs has been too expensive or arguing that it constitutes a system of racial control. Arguing both is an increasingly common strategy.

Our values can take on a vague, rhetorical quality when we don't get specific about how we articulate them, particularly in comparison to the imperatives of a short-term fight. Negotiation is a part of social change, and not every constituency can reject potential short-term benefits such as legalization for undocumented immigrants or reduced sentencing for drug convictions to hold out for a giant paradigm shift such as a new approach to national borders or the abolition of prisons. We can keep progressing while grappling with the real-life implications of policy decisions if we focus concretely on how we wish to change the discourse.

The racial discourse in the U.S. is a mess of narrow definitions and outdated paradigms. Most Americans define racism as a matter of individual, intentional and direct bias. The two primary approaches to race are colorblindness and diversity. Colorblindness is the refusal to see race, while diversity is focused on getting a range of bodies around the table, but both operate from the individual definitions of racism. Proponents of either approach can claim the exceptional story of Barack Obama stands as proof of their success – he's the first post-racial president for some, and a marker of the power of diversity for others. In neither case is there an adequate focus on the structures and rules that keep large racial disparities in place.

Thus, a critical measurement of progress lies in whether we can help Americans, including low-income people of color, understand what causes the racial divide today. Can we illuminate the relationship between institutional action and individual experience? Do we have a clear and appealing alternative to the very intuitive "solution" of colorblindness? Can we popularize the

concept of racial consciousness? Do we have a stock of stories and examples that anyone in the organization can use in speeches, trainings, or letters to the editor? Without clarity about which idea we are trying to change and how, we can't make our interventions add up over time.

*A critical measurement of progress lies in whether we can help Americans, including low-income people of color, understand what causes the racial divide today.*

In measuring echo, quantitative measures will dominate. New media technologies allow us to create and distribute reports, stories, videos and all manner of other tools that repeat our frames, and they have the added benefit of built-in metrics. At the same time, new technologies have threatened the very existence of traditional media sources. The days of faxing press releases to reporters on your issue or geographic beat will soon be a thing of the past. Fiscal crises and reorganization of print and broadcast media now force a smaller number of reporters to cover more ground. While a mention in *The New York Times* is still very important, it is harder to get than ever before, and we have to learn to use alternative media to get large-scale attention.

New technologies allow us to measure audience size and reaction in ways that were impossible just a few years ago. We can measure the number of eyeballs from particular zip codes that watched our latest video, see from reactions and comments what kind of material is popular; count the number of people who downloaded our reports, and so on. In addition to the pure numbers, we can also measure the kinds of media we're earning (ethnic, independent, mainstream), and understand the nature of resistance or support we receive in the blogosphere. We can do Lexis/Nexis searches to look at the frequency with which local news outlets use our language from one year to the next. We can collect stories about who responded positively and negatively to our new frame, and consider those results against the audiences we're trying to reach.

## Constituency

Even the best ideas have limited exposure until critical masses of people become willing to fight for them. For the sake of simplicity, I will define a constituency here as all the people who are willing to fight for a particular change, which should include those who would be positively affected by it. In multiracial

organizing of any kind, a common problem is that groups make “outreach” plans to get particular communities engaged in an agenda that is already set. This is extremely common among predominantly white organizations that wish to appear diverse or to deflect attempts to split them from communities of color. But it can also be seen among organizations of color that want to work with others. The outreach model sidesteps the hard work of building constituency: conversation and research to understand how the problem affects that community, working through any obstacles together, addressing historic conflicts, crafting priority solutions that work for all, and framing the issue broadly enough to draw multiple communities. Efforts that aim for real constituency engagement have to know and act on the difference between outreach and organizing.

In a transformative constituency-building strategy, then, we would have to measure the actual ownership a particular group of people is taking on a given issue, and the sophistication with which it is developing its power base. Ownership is marked to some degree by decentralized engagement – when groups commit themselves to a particular fight, picking up its framework, demands, or tactics in their own context. The immigrant rights movement offers an excellent example, as thousands of tiny organizations in Latino, African American, Asian and white communities nationwide have marched together for immigration reform. A constituency of color, though, does not stand in for the analysis that drives the discourse intervention. While people of color are more likely to acknowledge the presence of racial discrimination, they aren’t necessarily more likely to see its institutional and structural dimensions.

Some of the goals and markers of such organizing might include:

- ▲ internal alignment on concepts, frames and goals;
- ▲ a new group of people identifying with racial justice;
- ▲ expanded set of leaders with particular skills;
- ▲ communities taking initiative to start work on an issue, and
- ▲ progress on resolving historic conflicts.

Demographics are also critical to measure in constituency building. This is where most foundations and many organizations begin and end their evaluative inquiry into race. While diverse demographics don’t guarantee successful advocacy or implementation, it is important to set demographic goals based on your strategy and values, and to measure progress against those goals. At ARC, we ask attendees of our programs to fill out a demographic survey because we are concerned with reaching large numbers of young people as well as particular racial groups.

## Implementation

Ultimately, we want our racial equity work to change public policy and institutional practice. Rarely do we win the exact policy we want at once, particularly in our most ambitious efforts. Thus, it’s critical to be able to measure the meaning of incremental change here, particularly the role of lost policy struggles in creating or slowing momentum toward the victory. I use policy very broadly here to refer to legislation, regulations and practice. The point here isn’t to have all the questions answered with a yes, but rather to identify the remaining space between our goals and our achievements so that we can adjust the strategy. This is an especially important principle in long-term efforts to make change. Because compromise is an inevitable part of those efforts, assessing policy implementation against those goals will always produce shortfalls – the question is whether we can leverage the victories for further struggle. This is a good reason to build data gathering into most policy demands – data tells us whether our solution is working and what else needs to be done. A recent example is in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that Congress passed to stimulate the economy. A group of organizations worked to get antidiscrimination guidelines built into the bill itself, but only succeeded in getting the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to use them in setting regulations for the act’s implementation. The mandate is less strong, and a regulatory victory has less effect on the discourse than a legislative one, but the OMB adoption nevertheless offers leverage to state and local groups that hope to influence the distribution of ARRA funds. That answer would be reflected as a response to the third question below.

Some of the key questions here are:

- ▲ Which policymakers supported us, and why?
- ▲ How did the final policy compare with our demands? What did we gain and what is still left to fight for?
- ▲ Did we pass new policy, create implementation guidelines or both?
- ▲ How are we monitoring the effective implementation of the policy?
- ▲ Is there an explicit focus on reducing racial disparities or generating racial equity built into the plan? If not, did we develop a way to keep that frame in place?

Consider the example of the Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) in Minnesota. OAP is an intermediary organization that trains and supports community groups. For ten years, it had done good work in diversifying its own base. About half of its trainees, board members and small staff were people of color. About five

years ago, however, they were unable to prevent internal conflict over its racial direction. Several key players began to organize internally around a set of demands designed to make OAP prove that it was a racial justice organization. In the end, the board of directors (including members of color) rejected their demands, two board members and one staff person left the group, and OAP initiated a racial justice assessment of its work and the context in which it was operating.

During that assessment, board members and staff interviewed 60 Minnesota activists of color. They discovered that while people gave them credit for working hard on inclusionary organizational practices, the state's racial politics were pathetic. Communities of color lacked power not just in the mainstream, but also within progressive circles, greatly limiting their ability to push an equity agenda. The diversity that OAP had built, devoid of an actual racial analysis, wasn't enough to help the group move beyond reaching out to communities to actually integrating the concerns of communities of color into a broad progressive agenda.

As they reflected on the fallout of the internal struggle, OAP also began searching for projects that could change the larger landscape. Their first project was a Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity, wherein they graded state legislatures on their performance against a set of racial equity criteria. They organized a committee of advocates and community leaders, including traditional community organizations, ethnic associations, workers' organizations and others who reviewed the criteria and chose bills to track through the legislative session. The report analyzed the racial impact of bills, and then graded each public official on their vote. The grades were often predictable, but sometimes not. For example, conservative legislators sometimes voted progressively on race issues as they tried to keep up with the rapidly changing demographics of their districts. Legislators of color sometimes received poor grades because they didn't take leadership on issues of racial equity and show up to vote.

The first year OAP released the report, the state's largest daily newspaper, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, refused to publish the story that its reporter produced. The head of the editorial board told OAP's director by phone that the newspaper had its own

*The newspaper's editorial said that all of the state's policy proposals should be subjected to a racial impact analysis just like those in the report card.*

view of racial disparities, and racism had done nothing to do with it; the board leader essentially accused OAP of race-baiting. Months later, OAP helped someone who had a good relationship with the editors to develop the language to describe the need for a racial equity lens. That ally set up a meeting between OAP and the editorial board. Following the next report card, the newspaper's editorial said that all of the state's policy proposals should be subjected to a racial impact analysis just like those in the report card. Since then, OAP has also started an educational equity collaborative that has recently fought for and won the practice of racial impact analysis at the district level.

*By circling back year after year to the report card, they have continued the discussion — and created echo — on a significantly different, more meaningful terrain than where it started.*

OAP's first report card named five champions of equity — lawmakers who sponsored multiple bills that could possibly impact people of color in particular. The fourth report named 31 champions. The champions, from both sides of the political aisle, represented rural, suburban and urban districts with varying concentrations of constituents of color. In addition, the state legislature as a whole and the governor showed improvement in major issue areas. In the first report, none of the criminal justice bills studied were signed into law. By the fourth, pass rates on progressive criminal justice bills rose to 100 percent. OAP found a way — first by laying out the standard, then by persisting in efforts to reach the *Star Tribune* and state legislators — to bring significantly more clarity to discussions of racial equity. By circling back year after year to the report card, they have continued the discussion — and created echo — on a significantly different, more meaningful terrain than where it started.

Within five years, OAP's members made major progress in all three areas of evaluation: they've shifted the discourse and established a racial equity standard for the state's policymakers, starting with internal alignment on the concept of racial equity itself. They've built an invested constituency among people of color. And they're on their way to policy implementation. Each of these accomplishments reflects to OAP's transformational approach to racial equity. The progress on criminal justice bills and in other policy areas are still small markers, of course, but they constitute a great deal more progress than OAP and

its allies had when their primary definition of equity was the supremely transactional notion of getting diverse bodies in the room. The transformation strategy emerged from their deep inquiry process and thorough evaluation of each step they took against the goal of building and exercising multiracial power in pursuit of racial equity.

This paper suggests broad categories in which we can do our planning and evaluation, but in the end, there need to be enough resources devoted to the act of evaluation for the movement to achieve real scale. The tools and time available to racial justice groups for these activities need to be greatly expanded. While external evaluators can be important at particular times, consistent internal planning and evaluation will have the most effect on a group's commitment to and skill over time.

Achieving racial equity is more than possible, but it means starting with clear definitions and goals. As funders and grantees alike struggle to measure their impact, identifying precise indicators will be increasingly important. Those indicators need to be grounded in a core reality of doing this work – we never win the most important changes in a linear trajectory. There's always pushback, loss, compromise that makes the line of progress loop back and forth. Ultimately we have to take ourselves out of the daily work enough to make sure that it is the right work.

Rinku Sen, president and executive director of the Applied Research Center (ARC) and publisher of *ColorLines Magazine*, is a leading figure in the racial justice movement. Rinku has written extensively about immigration, community organizing and women's lives for a wide variety of publications including *The Huffington Post*, *Jack and Jill Politics*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Forbes.com*. Her latest book, *The Accidental American: Immigration and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Berrett-Koehler) won the Nautilus Book Award Silver Medal. She is also a member of the PRE Advisory Board. [www.arc.org](http://www.arc.org)



# Evaluating the Racial Justice Movement: Voices from the Frontlines

PRE Executive Director Lori Villarosa conducted a series of interviews with community activists engaged in racial justice efforts to hear their perspectives on the prospects and challenges of evaluating their organizations' progress. In early 2010, she spoke with Dan Petegorsky and Kalpana Krishnamurthy of Western States Center, based in Portland, Oregon; Cathi Tactaquin, executive director of the Oakland, California-based National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and Gihan Perera and Badili Jones of the Miami Workers Center. Following are excerpts from each of these conversations.

## Identifying Markers of Change at Multiple Levels Interview with Western States Center

**Dan Petegorsky (DP)** and **Kalpana Krishnamurthy (KK)** are staff members of Western States Center, which was established to help strengthen and further develop the progressive movement in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. For more than two decades, the center has served to connect Western activists, building their sense of shared values, honing their strategies for building power, sharpening their political analyses and forging relationships and alliances with the broader movement for social, economic, racial and environmental justice. Its Research and Action for Change and Equity Program (RACE) supports organizations building power in communities of color, immigrant and refugee groups and communities in addressing vital racial justice issues.

### **PRE:** What do you think are meaningful indicators for measuring progress in addressing structural racism?

**KK:** I think there are some new tools that cities, governments and organizations are pushing to help us get there – racial equity impact statements, racial equity report cards.

There are ways of evaluating the end impact of policy through the racial disparity lens and ensuring that you have race-neutral outcomes at the forefront of policy rather than 20 years down the line. Some of those tools have gained traction in ways that are significant. For example, assuring that there are racial equity benchmarks in jobs programs that happen at the state level – these types of benchmarks are how the measure of progress can be made. And we have been trying to figure out what those tools were going to be for years now.

**DP:** It can, though, be very challenging to measure and evaluate strategic interventions to address structural racism. Over time it's not difficult, methodologically, to measure progress or retrenchment in structural racism as it affects various sectors

– housing, political representation, educational achievement, employment, wealth creation. We know how to conduct disparity studies and how to measure whether the end effects of policies, culture, education are affecting specific populations – until laws are passed making it illegal to collect such information.

### **When we're measuring the progress of interventions year to year in the context of larger forces, how do we know when it may be that there's no change but we have staved off even harsher numbers?**

**DP:** I'm talking about over longer ranges of time. Depending on the complexity of the data and how you construct the regression analysis, if it's done right, the evaluation will look at those various factors. But it's hard to assess which specific interventions will produce which outcomes within the context of, say, a grant period.

**KK:** The way that we're describing this may make it sound as if we think evaluating this work is so simple but I think that there's two things that come up as barriers. First, the capacity of organizations to gather and manage the data. When Dan talks about "regression



analysis,” he’s lost me. I don’t know how to put the data together and I don’t think many of the organizations we work with at a community organizing level have the capacity to put that data together either. So yes, we may know how it should or could be done, but the people on the ground and community-based organizations that need the tools have no way to access that data.

Secondly, as much as we’re articulating that there are really clear ways to look at policy – and how race-neutral and universal policies have not done the work that they were supposed to do – the reality is that organizing using a structural racism analysis is still in its emerging stages. We don’t have enough of the right tools that are built around the core fundamentals of different sectors. I think that sometimes we’re using a blunt object to do fine surgery. We do have a couple of tools (such as racial equity impact assessments or report cards) and need to develop more. And some will have to be sector specific. We need both academics and organizers to develop them.

**DP:** One other thing in relation to what Kalpana just said: even where it’s possible to do some good evaluation – there are reasons why some of the institutions that have the capacity aren’t doing it. There’s another level of fear based on the current legal framework – there have been efforts to prevent you from even gathering the data that you need to measure what we’re talking about. Recently there was some controversy about the city of Portland’s programs that were supposed to be helping women and minority-owned businesses. While on the surface, there was concern because it appeared that 51 percent of these public construction-related contracts were going to firms owned by white men, the deeper story was that city officials were pleased that they had been able to develop any programs at all. They weren’t sure they could legally structure a program designed to give priority to people based on race, so instead they organized it to include a certain level of small business that was not racially defined. So while the 51 percent figure was alarming to some, the city officials saw the program as a victory given the obstacles they faced in developing a response to the construction contract disparities.

*Many of the organizations we work with at a community organizing level don’t have the capacity to put that data together.*

And of course in this present moment there’s the reluctance of the Obama administration to frame anything as having race-specific impact or intent.

Measuring the quality of intervention remains problematic. One way it’s problematic: in relation to foundations, the timeline for funding is so stunningly short term that it is impossible to measure the impact of any real meaningful interventions in a structural sense, at least as they’re taking place. You can say “Did you do this specific input?” and talk about the output, but in terms of the outcome, you can’t evaluate it within the context of short-term funding.

**KK:** Too often when we look at strategies and interventions for tackling structural racism we’re only looking at policy outcomes and not any of the community organizing measures that allow organizations to build on those wins and move successfully towards addressing other pieces of structural racism within their communities. Meaningful indicators for measuring the quality of interventions have to be at multiple levels. Often we’re looking at the specific policy, but other meaningful indicators are organizing measures – did it build an organization that is now set up lead other racial justice fights? Did the campaign support the development of leaders of color and white allies?

**Do you think there is increasing awareness among grantee groups of wanting to look at it that way, and movement in the foundations toward recognizing those indicators?**

**KK:** I think the core racial justice funders have long supported organizing and so I think they get that piece. Numbers are very important – but in terms of this kind of evaluation it’s next to meaningless. In evaluating the impact on structural racism – it’s a totally different methodology. And yet because that’s in vogue and it’s a field where people can produce numbers, there’s a push to measure that backwards and forwards.

**DP:** Here’s one question that I would throw back on funders: How in the past you have used the information that you have gathered from evaluations to change how you do your work? Give us places where you have used that info, studies, grant reports in ways that have changed the kinds of grants you are actually making. From the standpoint of evaluatees it goes into a void. Some of it can be useful if it gets you to think about your work intentionally – but I think people don’t have a clue on where the information goes and how it’s being used.

I see cases where rigorous evaluation can contribute to a group’s tactical and strategic success. Separate from that, I’ve found that evaluation is such a fetish among funders but it’s unclear to me what the payoff is other than employing consultants and steering money into it.

I'm not clear on the real benefits of it and in fact there may be harm if all the money starts going into evaluation.

**KK:** Our movement has to do a better job of doing local case studies that explain how this looks at a local level and show how this kind of framework actually advances the kind of solutions that are achievable for local organizations. Foundations need to understand that there are different roles that different organizations play around structural racism.

*Evaluation tools need to be developed with an eye toward core questions of constituency and leadership.*

I think for some of the organizations that have gone through a transformational process – that have been perceived of as primarily white – there's a different kind of support that needs to go to them. They need support in developing an analysis of the issues they work on in ways that are connected – not just structurally framed, but actually connected – to communities of color. That's a different kind of work than the work that needs to happen to support organizations based in communities of color doing structural racism and racial justice work who may be seen as “playing the race card.” And it is a different kettle of fish for an organization of color to hold an elected official of color accountable than for a primarily white or multiracial organization to do that.

We need to have ways that our evaluations understand that who the organization's base is, what their history of working on issues is, and what their historic analysis on race is really impacts how those organizations can take a structural racism approach. Some of our evaluation tools need to be developed with an eye toward these core questions of constituency and leadership in a way that they're not now doing a very good job of capturing.

Western States Center is trying to do a better job of framing racial equity and structural racism goals within all of our programs, not just our “race” ones. We're asking groups to look at their civic engagement work with a racial equity lens. We're looking at our leadership development programs closely to understand how we engage organizers in talking about race and organizing around it.

Another evaluation question is: Do we have reasonable expectations of the types of change that can be observed at

different points in the transformative change process? We need a series of benchmarks that can be observed if an organization is going to successfully transition to looking at race in a way that's useful to them:

- ▲ Is there a willingness of leadership to engage in the conversation?
- ▲ Is the whole organization able to articulate why racial justice and structural racism matter to the issues that they work on? Can they then translate it into the solutions they're proposing?
- ▲ Do they consistently track, evaluate and monitor those wins and the ways in which the outcomes are shifting in their communities around racial disparities?

There are markers in the transformative change process and we need to a better job of identifying what those markers are so that they can see themselves on a path.



Dan Petegorsky has been executive director of Western States Center since 1996, and previously worked for eight years as Western regional director for the Peace Development Fund in Seattle. He has worked in social justice organizations on a wide variety of domestic and foreign policy issues since the late 1960s.



Kalpana Krishnamurthy directs the Western States Center's Gender Justice and RACE programs. From 2002 to 2005, she was the director of the Third Wave Foundation, and she has also worked extensively on issues of reproductive health and justice and young women's empowerment. She is a PRE Advisory Board member.

[www.westernstatescenter.org](http://www.westernstatescenter.org)

# ***We Need Tools, Capacity and Partnership***

## ***Interview with National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights***

Since 1986 the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) has served as a forum to share information and analysis, build community capacity, raise awareness, strategize and coordinate national efforts toward securing healthy, safe and peaceful lives for all. With its members among local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists, NNIRR has advocated and organized for the human rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. PRE interviewed NNIRR executive director Cathi Tactaquin.

### ***PRE: How do you incorporate a structural racism analysis into your work?***

We try to connect our work to a deeper and broader analysis of structural racism, and in the education work and training that we do, we try to utilize a racial lens throughout that work.

What we hope will be an outcome of that investment is an awareness of structural racism for our main constituency of immigrant organizations and that people will begin to apply that in their organizing, analysis work and their own educational work. We recognize that addressing structural racism includes concerns of immigrant communities; they're not two separate issues.

### ***When you think about your goals for your work, what do you think are some meaningful indicators for measuring progress within that struggle?***

For the work of National Network and work with immigrant communities, at this stage a meaningful indicator of progress could mean the openness to including education and training on questions of race and the inclusion of a racial lens in local, state and national organizing initiatives, communications, education.

At a very basic level, we're not looking at direct outcomes, but for now, positive indicators are the awareness and understanding and willingness to include that perspective in the various kinds of education and advocacy work that they're doing.

### ***Do you have tools to actually measure that?***

We monitor their publications and activities, we engage together, we bring various organizations together under our umbrella and to our activities, and we attend many of their

activities. We have an opportunity to monitor that work, but we don't have a set of tools that we use to do that.

### ***Do you find challenges with the way that work is often evaluated as successful or not by allies, funders or others? Are there assumed measures of progress that are aligned or not aligned with where you're trying to go?***

Certainly. Because the crisis in immigration is often one of legislation, a significant remedy or resolution rests within that realm, so political compromise is an issue.

Looking at short-term wins that could have long-term deficits is a constant challenge. The 1986 immigration reform is an example. It was a major immigration bill that was seen as a win, but it included compromises that contributed to long-term deficits and in particular had racial consequences. For example, it included an employer sanctions provision which was acknowledged at that time to have potential to contribute to increased racial discrimination against "foreign-looking" people. The legislation provided legalization for over 4 million undocumented immigrants, but it set into place a program and mechanisms that have contributed to deepening structural racism, particularly applied to immigrants of color.

Also, the arena of legislation, which requires the development of campaigns as opposed to movement building, produces short-term and pragmatic alliances that are sometimes built on very tenuous ground. In fact, it often rejects deeper analysis and stronger alliances that are looking for more long-term, durable solutions. It sets into motion methodologies and immediate, short-term gains over the longer-term benefits.

**Do you feel there are starting to be more conversations about how we measure progress, giving movement building the kind of credibility that the legislative campaign piece has had?**

At this point there's a great deal of concern that we are not at that place and don't have those tools with which we can codify the steps or the measures for movement building, which could strengthen our positioning with foundations. It's particularly challenging in this economic downturn, where there seems to be more of a drive from foundations to be more pragmatic and rely more on tangible outcomes and arenas where those tools are more defined, instead of supporting movement building. I don't think we are that well equipped at this very critical stage to challenge that and to interact with that process.

**What do you feel would need to happen to build the capacity to evaluate efforts in this way?**

I don't think we have any key organizations that are effectively doing this kind of evaluation. We would need to have our own level of training about how to incorporate this – and that's coupled, of course, with capacity. There is an openness – with an ounce of cynicism – to get more training. But even if we were better equipped to do that evaluation, how effective would that be given the broader political challenges, especially in our arena?

I feel there can't be the same set of assumptions for all groups – the questions are cookie-cutter and don't allow for organizations to make an assessment. They want the bottom line, and what would you consider to be progress based on that bottom line?

For example, in addressing structural racism in immigration, we have such a high curve based on the standards set by the foundations that even when we make progress we aren't able to adequately convey that.

Based on what we're attempting to achieve, we try to address some of the quantitative elements. One indicator is where we find in our own or members' work a racial analysis, measuring whether that analysis is evident in their communications, education, conferences and events. We try to identify where we know certain sets of organizations that are utilizing educational tools to say that at least these are the organizations that have been exposed to a racial analysis.

**Could you share more about what you do and don't find useful in current foundation evaluations?**

There are qualitative questions which I do appreciate. Some questions allow you to be frank and give an explanation that may have some depth and analysis so grantees don't think "We

can't return to this foundation because we couldn't meet these objectives but we have no way of explaining why." An answer that shows that you fell short isn't necessarily an indicator of failure. The useful questions allow you to be transparent and set up the ongoing relationship – questions like: What conditions changed during this last period that may or may not have resulted in a change of tactics or goals? What were challenges that you faced? What were weaknesses that you found in your plan? How did you address those or did you?

How transparent grantees can be has to do with the foundation and your relationship with the foundation's staff. In doing that sometimes I feel that we are compelled to overreach to meet some foundations' standards. With other foundations, it's more of a partnership with grantees and an acknowledgment that we're working through this together to make progress and there's not an artificial standard.



Cathi Tactaquin is executive director and one of the founders of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. She has also been involved in grassroots organizing and advocacy in the Filipino community on issues of discrimination and foreign policy, and helped to found Migrant Rights International in 1994.

[www.nnirr.org](http://www.nnirr.org)

# Rigorous Self-Assessment Helps Keep Us on Track

## Interview with Miami Workers Center

**Gihan Perera (GP)** and **Badili Jones (BJ)** of the Miami Workers Center (MWC) reflected on evaluation of their organization's work in relationship to its deep neighborhood and community organizing over the last 10 years and how evaluation will fit into plans to organize statewide with the "Build a Fair Florida" campaign. MWC is a strategy and action center that builds the collective strength of working class and poor black and Latino communities. They work to increase the power and self-determination of these communities by initiating and supporting community-led grassroots organizations that confront poverty, racism and gender oppression.

**PRE: How are you able to measure and assess whether your work is having an impact, especially in view of the many barriers our communities face?**

**BJ:** First of all, I think these are long-range strategies. What's needed in the long term includes questions such as: Has there been a change in the public discourse and debate? Is the issue of targeted resourcing being discussed more in the media? Are people taking up those issues? Are policy demands being brought forth on a local level that impact the community in a positive way?

**GP:** My starting point would be: The best example of structural racism we've addressed has been the welfare reform attacks that happened in the mid-1990s. The attacks on welfare were explicitly racial and structural – explicitly racialized against black women in particular and explicitly structural and multi-issued in the sense that they were against Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) – but the impact was on every public institution that there was. In our public housing reform work in the late 1990s we were in the direct aftermath and continued impact of attacks on poor black people that came out of welfare reform. We were trying to see three things as successful:

- ▲ Moving the public debate and shifting consciousness around the right for people to be able to get public support. There was a strong prevailing ideology in favor of privatization [of federal programs] and a line that said that people receiving AFDC were "welfare queens." We were trying to shift the public debate to the structural reasons people need support, to historical causes for people's predicaments, rather than focusing on the

individual. Our indicator was the degree to which we were able to get communities allied and media support of that position.

- ▲ Halting the destruction of public institutions and policies that supported low-income or black folks – maintaining public housing and public commitment to welfare. We were successful in that time. For example, one of our earliest successes was to be able to stop the destruction of 850 units of public housing that were at the center of the African American community. It was a huge victory in terms of consciousness and in policy terms.
- ▲ Putting representatives of impacted communities at the center of the debate to speak in their own voices and turning around a cultural, structural view that people either had no agency or didn't deserve to have agency or weren't smart enough. The indicators there were the degree to which impacted people were their own spokespeople; whether other initiatives gave more democratic rights to people for them to speak and advocate on their own behalf in public institutions and settings, and policy gains.

**Your first indicator about influencing the broader thinking around the structural approach – do you have any ways of measuring that?**

**GP:** It shifted, it evolved. Even as we talk about it going forward we're still learning. Initially we thought it was successful – we almost measured success by the number of media hits and were saying if we're able to get this voice out there and this becomes a central public issue then that was an indicator that we were being successful and shifting the consciousness around that.



The second iteration was to say: “No, if we’re getting in media, but always from a framework of being positioned as progress stoppers, victims, or the opposition, that isn’t the same as successful moving.” We began shifting to: “Was our viewpoint being presented in the media? To what degree have opinion makers visibly sided with our side of the argument? Does the Miami Herald put out an opinion piece that supports our analysis and policy recommendations?”

### **What caused you to spend the time to reflect on this and then make the change in how you determined what was success?**

**GP:** We – the staff, our leaders and our constituents – always had a practice internally of reflection. We went to the reflection and said, “Yes we got media hits, but we are still losing – we’re getting more exposure and more alienation – so what explains that? Is the media exposure winning over enough allies to be able to actively have enough power to win on the policy outcomes?”

We recognized that the way that we were being framed in the media hits was alienating rather than building. We began reaching out to different communications consultants to help us. We did a media audit.

We both recognized through that process how racialized media and media framing was. But in some ways we felt that the consultants almost chose to avoid explicit race demands and campaigns because of how disadvantaged the terms of the debate were within traditional media. We learned a lot from the analysis and how it worked, but had a difference with the consultants about naming either gentrification or race in our messages.

We recognized that we were painting ourselves into a corner while the opposition was painting themselves as the future and progress, so we started a real process of trying to figure our communication front out on our own – which transformed our view of our organizing. We understood that we were organizing within a particular political context but also within a geography, ethnicity and so forth – and that our frame had to be bigger than that.

### **What do you feel are some of the barriers and challenges that you’ve had in measuring and reporting on these different indicators?**

**BJ:** Overall there still is a lack of common language or discourse – when you say “structural racism,” not everyone’s on the same page. That’s a real barrier in measuring what’s going on.

**GP:** Similarly, what we’re trying to measure versus what other people consider indicators is sometimes incongruent. The indicators were which policies you’d won, or what material

gains – we were driven a ton by funders to figure out how we claim progress in the work.

But you asked earlier, “How much of the win is stopping more bad from happening?” We’ve been in a deteriorating material condition instead of an improving one but we’ve always had to report that things keep getting better as a result of what we did.

### **Have you seen any change in funders’ understanding around that? What’s the challenge for any organization that believes its work to be in partnership or coalition? How do you attribute it to your role versus your collective?**

**GP:** If we’re really honest – us and most organizations – the truth would be when we got material wins it happened because we were in the right place at the right time. Almost no organization was in place that had enough independent power in relationship to all the bad things that were happening.

All around people were trying to claim whatever they could and in some ways it moved a lot of people’s work towards what they claim they could win, rather than what was strategic.

We’ve always been good at saying who our coalition partners are. What affected us more was that we almost misstated how much the work had to do with all of the other dynamics that were at play. It wasn’t that it was lies – it was distortion that didn’t help the field find out what was really happening and more than anything could have really thrown off people’s internal assessments of what was working and not working.

### **What do you feel helped you to keep from getting sucked into that trap?**

**GP:** We just had a ritualistic commitment to our internal process. We saw reporting to the funders as a necessary evil. As my relationship with funders got better, I felt less pressure, less concerned that reporting was what dictated the relationship. We could talk about what was really important.

### **Are funders more open to changing?**

**GP:** Yeah, I just don’t think it’s as cut and dry – not so much: “You said you would win this. Did you win this?” as a measure of whether you were successful. It feels much more complicated – not in a bad way, but in a way of: “Describe what happened. What did you learn?” We’ve turned the corner to a new metric, to a new common language.



The other thing that was really challenging was having a really good internal analysis of race and how it relates to your messaging, to policy outcomes and so forth. Most of the really good advanced racial justice work had a really strong explicit analysis on race and strategy to deal with race that guides our work within the group. But when it came to messaging and demands – our external work – almost all of it was implicit.

Most of our reporting was all about external, implicit outcomes. These indicators weren't connected to our strategies on race internally. And there was never the choice of why and when to have implicit strategies versus explicit ones and how to message those. That never has been that clear.

***Are you saying that often you use an implicit strategy, but then your measures weren't looking at the difference between that approach as opposed to a more explicit approach? Were you still looking at explicit racial outcomes and trying to assess the progress on those?***

**GP:** When we were measuring the results of our demands, we were measuring them against our internally explicit expectations. For example, in the welfare system and public housing: What we wanted were 850 homes for 850 black families – our external demand was “equal affordability and some return rights” which we understood given the context was all about rights for African American families.

At the end of the day we never compared the two, all of our work and the success of it ended up revolving around our external implicit demands. We never really were that deliberate or had the measurements of how many of those were black families. We assumed that by the nature of the constituency that they'd all be black and that it was automatically checked.

***You don't really know if the implicit strategies have the affect for the constituency that you wanted, because you stopped measuring that?***

**GP:** It may have been correct to have the implicit demand, but our evaluation and benchmark as we went through these demands never brought along our internal evaluation. We went with the external benchmark.

Going forward we'd start with our internal analysis and goal. We can then choose how to explicitly make demands on those externally.

For example: a big myth or reality that we're trying to figure out is to what degree legally we can demand race-based job placement through government contracting or funding. We

know internally we have an explicit goal of both minority contracting and particularly even more for African American males. We understand there's a racial justice outcome we want out of that. To get to the policy outcome the best way might not be to say we want to set aside programs for African American males for government funding. A number of different reasons might make that untenable or impossible. We may decide we can message explicitly but the policy can't be explicit. Either way we want to get to the same outcome.

Moving forward we'd want our explicit outcomes to be clear to us regardless of how we chose to move that in the work.

***Are there particular things that could help – tools, resources that would make it easier or more likely that you'd be able to come back to those explicit outcomes – or is it just a matter of making the decision that you've got to remember to do that?***

**BJ:** What's been helpful in terms of the work around stimulus and recovery is that we have people who are skilled in analyzing the data in terms of what's happening on the ground so we can get down to what the concrete numbers are. We can look at that in terms of what jobs are reaching communities of color? What levels of resources are reaching people of color? Has our message really come forth in terms of concrete results in the community?

**GP:** That's exactly right – and part of the reason that we hadn't done that before wasn't that we hadn't chosen it. We have very limited resources, the two things we thought we could put our resources into were figuring out how to communicate and figuring out what we were demanding and whether we would win the policy.

***What do you feel needs to happen to build foundation and organization capacity to evaluate efforts aimed at reducing structural racism?***

**GP:** What we've been unique about is understanding that we needed help and support and to utilize other skills besides just our own. Foundations, when they've done it well, have been able to put those resources under our control rather than vice versa. We were able to reach out to them, rather than us having to go to one of their trainings or have them come in with some mandate that was outside of our own initiative.

Our collaboration with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity has been the breakthrough. We're really focusing on outcomes. That relationship and understanding happened because we were able to have the grant money come through us and contract with Kirwan, which really changed the relationship dynamic.



Most recently we've been starting to work with Center for Civic Participation – we're sending all of our annual plans to them to be able to figure out how we can run test and control experiments on all of those benchmarks.

It's an iterative thing. We've built a lot of relationships and impacts on the organizations that work with us by doing that. I think people are used to walking into a relationship largely as an intermediary and then walking away – we have ended up building much longer term relationships.

**Any last things that you want to share?**

**GP:** The learning curve has been messy – hasn't been linear or even a nice curve – the process of learning leading to evaluation has had lots of twists and turns. What's been consistent is a culture of reflection and evaluation – making sense of it all has been less consistent. We're clearer and have some intention, but it's not complete.

**BJ:** That's part of the human terrain. We didn't expect, for example, the Citizens United decision [on corporate political advertising] coming out of the Supreme Court. What does all that mean for example? It's important to have some way to accommodate quick changes in the terrain as well.

A lot of times when people talk about evaluation there's sometimes a fixation on the technical – this tool versus that – when I think for us we've shapeshifted quite a bit as we've learned. The absorption rate of organizations really has to do with their cultural aptitude to create the space and to take reflection seriously.

**Do you see more of our peers going down that path in recognizing that?**

**GP:** People are starting to create evaluation and reflection – but the form and consistency widely varies. There's overall a much deeper sense of its meaning and of taking the time to do it.



Gihan Perera is Miami Workers Center's cofounder and executive director and one of the cofounders of Right to the City – a national alliance of over 30 grassroots organizations, legal service providers, academics and policy groups. He is a member of the PRE Advisory Board.



Badili Jones is the Miami Workers Center political and alliance officer. He has worked within the labor, gay rights, immigrant rights and black liberation movements throughout his life.  
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# Foundations Share Approaches to Evaluating Racial Justice Work

by Soya Jung

To learn more about how foundations are evaluating racial justice work, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) convened a day-long discussion meeting of program officers and an informal conversation with funders from the Seattle region in 2009. As a consultant to PRE, author Soya Jung also reviewed written materials and conducted follow-up interviews (see Appendix) to develop this article.

Conversations with several foundation program officers whose institutions are designing racial justice evaluation methods show significant challenges in developing these methods, but also reveal commitment and potential for moving forward. Through these discussions, three critical components in evaluating racial justice efforts surfaced: shared racial justice language and definitions, a clear theory of change based on movement-building principles and a way to capture and disseminate the stories of racial justice.

None of the foundations that PRE consulted for this article had yet established a comprehensive evaluation approach for racial justice work, and few had fully adopted a structural understanding of race in the U.S. Still, all foundations were somewhere in the process of formulating racial justice evaluation methods and had important concerns and promising ideas to share. The most well-defined efforts have been explicitly grounded in structural racism language and definitions, and have yielded examples of how to understand, support and lift up strategies to uproot the underlying causes of racism.

## The Challenges

### What Do We Mean by Racial Justice?

Among foundations there is little agreement on what racial justice is and how to achieve it. For foundations committed to supporting racial justice work, this is perhaps the single greatest challenge for evaluating the impact of their racial justice grantmaking. Without consensus on what racial justice work is, the prospect of measuring progress becomes murky.

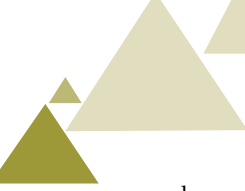
“Part of the challenge is defining racial justice,” said Jocelyn Sargent, program officer at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. “How do you know when the work you’re supporting effectively contributes to racial justice? How do you know when you’re done?”

In order to define what racial justice is, foundations first need to establish a shared understanding of how race operates in the U.S. – one that takes into account how racism has been embedded into U.S. institutions, systems and culture such that its dimensions reach far beyond individual intent or behavior. This is particularly critical now, in an allegedly “post-racial” era when public discourse presumes that race no longer matters. But the reality is that within most foundations, staff members operate without a shared understanding of race, and hence, without common terms and definitions for talking about racism.

To help address this challenge, the Akonadi Foundation recently published *From the Roots: Building the Power of Communities of Color to Challenge Structural Racism*, which lays out the foundation’s basic understanding of the relationship between race and social change. The report states, “Real and lasting progress – in jobs, education, housing, immigration and health care – requires the rooting out of racism that is structured into every facet of American life. Without a conscious and sustained focus on structural racism, the impact of social justice will always be limited and short-lived.” The foundation’s view of how race operates in U.S. institutions, systems and culture assumes that no social change effort will be successful without an intentional focus on racism. This perspective is consistent across its programs, regardless of what issues a particular grant is addressing.

Melanie Cervantes, Akonadi program officer, offers this explanation of how the foundation defines racial justice:

Akonadi sees racial justice as the ability of communities that have been locked into segregated spaces to self-determine their futures, to have basic human rights in terms of food, housing, shelter, education, etc., and the ability to live in a way that is sustainable and healthy... Racial justice should not



only repair the damage that the legacy of racism has created, but should also dismantle the current structuring of racism in to our laws, policies and culture.

Using a structural racism lens allows funders to address the historical, cultural and systemic forces that hold racism in place. It involves the need to create new bases of power within communities of color, to build new relationships across institutions and sectors and to transform language and forge new cultural narratives to talk about race in the U.S.

However, such a structural understanding of race is rare in the foundation world. Most racial justice funders use a disparities- or equality-based approach to addressing racism. While these can yield useful and measurable results – for example, increasing high school graduation rates among students of color, or expanding civil rights protections – they can do so while falling short of achieving broader systemic change. This is because rather than questioning and transforming the systems and institutions that affect people’s lives, efforts to achieve equity or equality often presume that the logic behind these systems and institutions is sound, that one need only eliminate the barriers to equal access and opportunity.

### How Do We Measure Over the Long Term?

The challenge is that social justice organizations in general, and racial justice groups in particular, face slow, uphill battles on multiple fronts to achieve their goals, while being severely under-resourced. While evaluation tools in the nonprofit sector have proliferated, relatively few have been adopted by social or racial justice organizations.

Many see achievement of racial justice as inextricable from the building of broad social movements. “The big challenge in evaluating movement-building work is that there’s no formula for it,” Sargent says. “I think about the work in sociology that looked at how the civil rights movement happened. Scholars vary in their accounts of this story and about what components you add together to build a movement.”

Not all racial justice funders use a structural racism approach. And not all explicitly talk about movement building. However, most are clearly working toward some kind of long-term change.

At the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), the emphasis is on eliminating racial disparities in particular systems – for example, reducing the overrepresentation of youth of color in juvenile detention. The foundation does not use movement building as an explicit racial justice strategy. However, it

recognizes that changing outcomes in areas like child welfare, health, criminal justice and education takes a long time. The work AECF has done to define a theory of change may offer useful lessons for movement-building organizations.

Program Officer Delia Carmen explained, “Seeing the needle move is a very long-term process. The big result that we’re aiming for is a target that’s hard to reach, because you’re dealing with years and years of inequity. Our challenge is coming up with measurements that would let us know that we’re going in the right direction, and allow us to see when we’ve turned the curve.”

AECF employs place-based strategies, involving investments into various institutions, issue areas and constituencies in given geographic areas over several years. Carmen explained that while it was challenging to evaluate progress in such a complex system, the foundation was able to at least create a framework for understanding how it expected change to take place.

“We came up with a theory of change frame that included many components, all of which were part of a large, complex system – the foundation’s Community Change initiative. We now have a very detailed diagram of all of the actors on the ground, the activities and interventions that were being initiated, and what results we were looking for from each component of the system,” she said. “Addressing racial disparities and structural racism was viewed as cutting across all components of the initiative. The frame also has a timeline for short-term, mid-term and ultimate result, which is that kids and families – primarily families of color – are doing better.”

Gauging progress on closing racial gaps in a given set of issue areas is one thing; to the extent that data is available, it is largely a matter of documenting measurable changes in indicators like employment rates or rates of incarceration. But measuring progress on eliminating or reducing structural racism is an entirely different animal. It requires an understanding of what movement building is and how to tell if it is taking place effectively.

Cervantes explained, “There hasn’t really been an effort to come up with shared markers to say, ‘These are the things we’re looking at in movement building’... although I really feel like it’s bubbling up. There are grantee partners that are talking about it and other foundations that are talking about it.” Akonadi embraces specific definitions of social movements and movement building, taken from the Movement Strategy Center, a San Francisco Bay Area-based intermediary

organization. However, it had never mapped out what its role was in relationship to movement building. What was the foundation doing and how was it contributing to the changes it wanted to see? Much like AECF, Akonadi realized that having a theory of change – a clear sense of what strategies were needed to achieve a set of outcomes – was essential for creating a sound evaluation approach.

Over the last year, Akonadi worked with a consultant to develop a graphic representation of its theory of change, beginning to articulate the contributions that the foundation and its grantee partners made, and the related immediate, interim and longer-term changes that it sought to achieve. These changes fall into three categories:

- ▲ Improvements in people’s lives, including the power of self-determination, the realization of expanded benefits from changed policies and practices, and fewer negative outcomes in areas like health, education, safety and opportunity.
- ▲ The reduction of structural racism, as illustrated by changes in cultural narratives, policies and practices such that systems and cultural representations promote racial equity, rather than create or maintain racial inequities.
- ▲ More people and organizations working effectively to elevate racial equity, to reduce structural racism and to promote racial justice, with sufficient infrastructure and resources to sustain racial justice efforts against resistance and retrenchment.

### How Are We Getting There? Showing Cause and Effect

Foundations often feel compelled to try to state definitively which interventions led to which outcomes. In the case of social change work, this is a particularly dubious exercise given the poorly controlled laboratory that is the real world.

The drive to identify causality may be rooted in a history of foundations using evaluation to determine what to fund – or more importantly, what not to fund. Some program officers argue that the inability to show how social change takes place is a key barrier to securing sufficient resources to support the work. However, Sargent argues for the need to let go of the desire to pin down causality altogether and to focus instead on creating the conditions that make social change more likely to take place.

“I think that causality is a problem,” she said. “There are several factors that we know, when combined together, are likely to produce an outcome. But there’s also a probability that it won’t happen and you just have to be prepared for

that. You want to improve the odds that a certain event will happen, and that’s the best you can do. You can’t cause it.”

### Going Beyond the Numbers

Still, there is a need to show how racial justice funders and practitioners are achieving impact – not only to argue for resources, but also to build more popular understanding of the value of racial justice.

Nicole Gallant, program officer at the Atlantic Philanthropies, said, “The question is how best to effectively communicate that a series of racial equity investments contributed to a desired outcome, whether through a causal or correlative lens.”

Within foundations, program officers often feel pressured to provide hard and compelling quantitative evidence to their boards that grantees are making a difference. Many trustees want to cut to the chase,” said Carmen. “They want to know more of the quantitative, and maybe some qualitative stories behind the data that we’re sharing. But for the most part, at their level, they want to know what are our targets and how are our results measuring up to those targets. They want a one-page document... ‘dashboards’ are the latest way that they want to see the data. We are still working on making the dashboards meaningful, because we know that our targets are long term.”

Numbers fail to tell the full story behind social change work. Beyond showing how many people secured quality, affordable housing in a given year, for example, social change advocates must illustrate a set of broad impacts that rely on a myriad of factors. For this reason, gathering convincing, real-life stories that paint a more holistic picture of racial justice work on the ground has surfaced as perhaps the most useful of evaluation tools.

At the Ford Foundation, Program Officer Todd Cox emphasized the importance of lifting up such stories, saying, “The challenge for those of us in the social justice and racial justice field is to make sure that we are appropriately qualitative in our analysis and assessment – no less rigorous, but appropriately qualitative – so that we don’t push grantees to being just bean-counters.”

In *From the Roots*, the Akonadi Foundation report that describes the foundation’s understanding of structural racism, there are examples of how foundations can help tell the stories of racial justice work. While the report is by no means a roadmap for evaluation, it does offer compelling accounts of efforts on the ground to address specific racial justice challenges and



opportunities. “Collectively, these stories inspire and also instruct,” the report states. “In them we find ‘raw material’ that can help to develop definitions of progress and impact that are both accurate and transformational.”

## Impact of Shrinking Resources

No matter what tools are used, general concerns about evaluation become amplified in the racial justice field because of how overworked and under-resourced organizations are. For example, conducting evaluation in order to reorganize funding priorities without consulting with grantees could be the death knell for racial justice groups without the capacity to communicate effectively about their work. Racial justice funders need to be particularly thoughtful about designing their evaluation processes in partnership with their grantees.

“One of the biggest challenges is thinking through why you’re doing evaluation, and being honest with yourself and with those you’re evaluating about what the goals are,” said Cox. “There can be mismanagement of expectations and I think that can be harmful... Everyone needs to start with the field. It’s important to include grantees in that conversation to help shape reasonable expectations, tools and outcomes that are aligned with reality.”

On a related note, Sargent cited the need to enhance the capacity of grantee organizations to do evaluation, so that they can help set the right expectations. “To the extent that the field is not able to help us with this, we’re not able to do it,” she said. “It’s great that we care about evaluation, but we’re really not going to understand what’s happening on the ground, until the people on the ground can help us understand that better.”

At Akonadi, the failing economy has brought looming concerns over the impact of evaluation on grantee organizations. “What is it going to take for this to be done in a manner that is actually helpful for everyone? Especially at this moment, I’m wondering what we’re going to ask of heavily impacted organizations in order to do this evaluation,” said Cervantes.

## Moving Forward: Fertile Ground for the Future

Several foundations are now grappling with these and other challenges in creating effective approaches to evaluating racial justice work, and their efforts will provide important lessons to build upon. Questions abound, not just about racial justice work in the field, but also related to grantmaking tools and procedures. How does a foundation use a structural understanding of race to craft an effective grantmaking program? How does it then evaluate the success

of its grantmaking – from its funding criteria to its grants management system?

“I want to know how the decisions we’re making, from beginning to end, are contributing toward the outcomes and impacts that we want to see,” said Cervantes.

As various foundations move forward in this work, coordination will become an important strategy for maximizing learning opportunities and minimizing negative impacts in the field. Sharing examples of promising tools, establishing a set of shared evaluation principles and creating standardized forms where appropriate will help foundations, informed by their grantees, assess and communicate the outcomes of their racial justice efforts, while minimizing the burden on an already stressed racial justice sector. At a minimum, foundations undertaking this work would do well to:

- ▲ initiate dialogues within their institutions to develop common language and a shared understanding of structural racism;
- ▲ encourage and support the use of narrative forms when evaluating structural racism projects;
- ▲ provide additional support to enhance grantees’ evaluation capacity; and
- ▲ collaborate with their colleagues in other foundations to create tools and materials that have enough standardization to streamline processes for racial justice organizations reporting to multiple funders for the same work, (but enough retain flexibility so that grantees can adapt the tools to their particular approach).

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## How Do We Know It When We See It?

by Sally Leiderman

People engaged in racial justice work face considerable pressure to provide evidence that their organization's particular approach makes a tangible difference in people's lives. The pressure comes from their own sense of urgency, from their constituents and from funders. Many people who fund this work are under similar pressure, sharing that sense of urgency, having to account for their decisions, and, like practitioners, wanting to structure future decisions based on evidence that the work is creating improvements. Evaluation sits right at the nexus of these similar and sometimes competing pressures.

While many organizations are working explicitly to reduce the historical or contemporary consequences of structural racism (even if they don't call it that), any group working on, for example, improving housing, education or health and well-being of children, youth, families or older adults in the U.S. is working on reducing structural racism or its impacts. That is because they must find ways to acknowledge, diagnose and redress inequitable outcomes by race as part of that work. And because outcomes in these areas are influenced by multiple system and institutional policies and practices and by cultural ideas about what is "normal" or "valued," these groups are always working on reducing structural racism or its impacts, named or not.

How might these organizations and their funders measure progress, particularly before large-scale population changes are evident? As a field, can we begin to develop evaluation measures based on more accurate understanding of what it takes to reduce structural racism's impact across groups and issues? Are there common shorter term changes that predict long-term success at improving life expectancy for all racial groups? Increasing educational achievement for all racial groups? Wealth accumulation for all racial groups? Are there common steps or markers of progress across these topical areas or systems? How would we know them when we see them?

### Evaluating Work With Racialized Goals

Evaluations of work undertaken to address structural racism often examine time periods when the goal has not yet been attained

(for example – rates of incarceration by race haven't changed substantially, rates of entry and graduation from college by race/ethnicity remain wide apart). So the evaluation is looking at work "in the middle," trying to draw conclusions about whether work in the short run is going to make any difference in the long run. To see how tough this is, it's useful to ask, "If I were evaluating the civil rights movement, what conclusions might I have drawn about its long-term effectiveness in 1958? In 1964? Now?"

In addition, there is little consensus among practitioners, funders and evaluators about what progress towards reduced structural racism looks like, making evaluation efforts particularly challenging. For example, evaluation that focuses on "reducing the achievement gap" as an issue of teacher training and student preparation only, without considering the allocation of resources across schools or the influence of public violence on cognitive development of children in persistently under-policed neighborhoods, may contribute to setting unreasonable expectations or fail to capture important interim successes.

### Logic Models and Theories of Change

Logic models lay out a measurable set of short-, intermediate- and long-term outcomes to which a group wants to hold itself accountable. Social scientists developed this tool specifically to help work out a negotiated understanding of what results are important to look at in that "middle" stage before the big, obvious changes can be observed, and as a process for building consensus on the combination of factors to be considered.

Theories of change are most often pictures that describe how the various parts of an effort are expected to contribute to the outcomes specified in the logic model. Like logic models, they provide an opportunity for all parties to understand each other's perspectives and worldviews about how change happens, what success looks like and expectations about reasonable accomplishments. The more the assumptions that underlie these issues surface (see sidebar) and are discussed, the more useful these tools will be for planning and evaluation.

The utility of these tools for evaluation of efforts with racially specific goals depends in large part on the extent to which all parties have, and are willing to apply, a racialized lens in their construction and application. This would include attention to various decision points – supplemented with very specific information about what is known from research or experience about what it takes to accomplish and sustain the goals. One important aspect is to understand this for each racial/ethnic group of interest – that is, incorporating what we know about how to improve school readiness, increase life-expectancy, support collective leadership, or increase community well-being for particular groups with particular historical and contemporary institutional, cultural and legal contexts. What is not yet known? How will we reconcile different beliefs about how change happens and is sustained based on what we know and what we don't? These questions should be negotiated collectively in order to create a more fully racialized theory of change or logic model.

*It seems obvious that we would turn this lens inward to the theories of change and logic models that we use to evaluate work with racial goals. But our experience as evaluators suggests this takes real intention and some courage on everyone's part.*

It seems obvious that we would turn this lens inward to the theories of change and logic models that we use to evaluate work with racial goals. But our experience as evaluators suggests this takes real intention and some courage on everyone's part. The challenges are both political and technical. For one, we need to accept that some things cannot be measured, or are not worth the expense to measure, even though they are important to do. For example, we know that very young children need to feel secure and cared for by capable adults, even if it is very expensive to capture the extent to which that occurs in a large population. That doesn't mean we shouldn't invest in strategies likely to up the number of children receiving such attention on a daily basis. We also need to be willing to separate documentation of changes from attribution of those changes to a particular strategy, organization or set of actions. In some instances, it may be enough to know that change is occurring in a positive

and important direction, and that a group is implementing its own strategies very well – so that we can make a reasonable case that they are contributing in some way to the improvements. Accepting these limitations on what evaluation can and can't do, while unsatisfying, would demonstrate some new understandings of the limits of a dominant cultural frame on our practice.

## Outcomes

All of these issues also apply to defining outcomes for evaluation. Theories of change and logic models make sense as tools for evaluating work with racial goals when we can develop a set of genuinely relevant outcomes.

Because we have never achieved social or racial justice in the U.S. on any of the major indicators we care about (education, income, health, access to employment, etc.), we really do not know what it will take. Absent that experience, one way to develop meaningful outcomes would be from retrospective documentation of what worked in places or among issues where racial equity, reductions in structural racism or privilege or their consequences have occurred, particularly if those changes have endured for some period of time.

Another approach is to begin to gather the wisdom of people who can answer the question "How would you know it when you see it?" This might be a start of a common set of outcomes and indicators for evaluation of these kinds of efforts. Together, we could look for outcomes with the following properties:

- ▲ They meet certain technical considerations – for example, they are actionable (the work you are doing could affect the outcome), reliable (different people observing the same behavior would measure it as the same behavior), universal (they cover the population of interest, or the extent to which populations of interest are excluded is known) and so on.<sup>1</sup>
- ▲ They hold a particular group or organization accountable to a reasonable contribution to a larger issue, not the whole. Or, they focus on collective contributions rather than individual ones, without necessarily assuming that a particular result must be attributed in a cause/effect fashion to any given source.
- ▲ They are easy to measure, or if not, they are worth the investment – the measuring effort might itself be part of a structural change worth pursuing (for example, tracking cognitive and emotional development of children of every racial group at ages one and three in a community; or tracking the differential impacts of employer-focused

## Privilege and Racism in Evaluation

While the language of evaluation is often “race-neutral,” in many ways its methods and consequences are not.

While there are evaluators who are white and evaluators of color, the practice of evaluation itself – its fundamental assumptions about what is knowable and what is possible – draws substantially from dominant Western cultural worldviews, particularly in the U.S.

Further, evaluation is almost always applied in relationships of unequal power. Foundation staff members have power to distribute resources, but often only to the extent they can justify those decisions based on their organizations’ assumptions about what “good investments” look like. Practitioners have power to turn those investments into effective work and benefits for constituencies, but often only if they can demonstrate success against measures agreed to by others.

Evaluators can help negotiate these power differentials, but are often depending on the parties to this negotiation for some or all of their livelihood. Vastly different worldviews and power dynamics are not easily addressed in these types of relationships – including issues of privilege and racism in the work, and in the practice of evaluation itself. Unexamined assumptions about how the world works or what is important can be reflected in the evaluation timeline, as well as in what constitutes acceptable or compelling evidence of progress or success. Cultural racism and white privilege in particular can affect whose and which type of data are considered valid, or even which parties first see findings (before anyone has a chance to correct the evaluator’s errors of fact).

Generally, neither white evaluators nor evaluators of color are trained to apply a lens of privilege in evaluation to our work, though our own life experiences may bring them to the fore. And, like everyone else, we don’t know what we don’t know. Absent that, we may contribute to setting unreasonable expectations for what a group should accomplish in a given

timeframe – by, for example, failing to recognize the urgency a group feels to create a small, tangible short-term “win” before tackling a more systemic one or by discounting organizing, leadership development or other “relationship building process” goals early in a community’s work. We may also continue to assess the effectiveness of actions in the longer term using data that systematically miscounts certain racial/ethnic groups, including many kinds of census, health department, Bureau of Labor Statistics and other public data sets. Sometimes there are incentives and disincentives to accurately report information. Examples include reports on the incidence of domestic violence or nonpayment of child support where the consequences of reporting differ for people of varying legal status or racial/ethnic group.

One way to reduce unintended white privilege and racism in the practice of evaluation is for evaluators, funders, practitioners and constituents to take time together to apply a structural racism analysis to the work in which they are collectively engaged.

But even when evaluators and the other parties to evaluation believe deeper learning would be an important investment, the work to create common understandings often gets short shrift. The parties may fail to discuss or agree on reasonable timeframes for showing progress, or what types of changes in the short term are likely to predict longer-term successes, particularly in regard to multi-system structural and institutional issues. The consequences for raising these issues in unequal power relationships may make also make evaluators, practitioners or funders feel the fight isn’t worth it given other more pressing disagreements. Sometimes just the pressure to get an evaluation up and running overrides good intentions. But without these negotiations, evaluation can thoughtlessly reproduce dominant culture assumptions, make specious links among short-term observations and the likelihood of longer-term change and thus applaud effort rather than results – colluding in maintaining structural racism.

— Sally Leiderman

immigration enforcement versus worker-focused immigration enforcement in a given community).

- ▲ They are closely tied to what we know about how to achieve a particular goal, based on credible and racially explicit research or experience.
- ▲ They incorporate the most important values and defining features of the theory of change for the work being evaluated – or at a minimum, they are consistent with those values and defining features (with attention to

reconciling different theories of change among parties to the work).

- ▲ Collectively, and where possible, they represent our best understanding of the necessary and sufficient set of short-term results that predicts long-term success.
- ▲ They are strategic for a community, organization, constituent group and funder to measure (given scarce evaluation resources); accomplishing them is intrinsically important, and documenting their accomplishment will

## Indicators of Weakening Structural Racism

### TYPES OF OUTCOMES

#### Racial Equity

If progress toward racial equity were occurring, data would show that, for example:

### INDICATORS (EVIDENCE): HOW WOULD WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT?

- ▲ The average life expectancy of individuals is no longer related to their racial/ethnic identity or the statistical relationship is less strong
- ▲ Rates of graduation from a four-year college or university are equal across racial/ethnic groups or moving in that direction
- ▲ The strong statistical association between family wealth and racial/ethnic identity declines

#### Transformative Public Policy Changes

If public policies were changing in ways that were transformative, we would see, for example:

- ▲ There would be revenue sharing among majority white and wealthy communities and majority people of color, lower-income communities in the same region for education, public safety, transit and other essential supports
- ▲ Every citizen would retain their vote, including incarcerated individuals

#### Transformative Changes in Narratives About Race

If people were more accurately understanding systems of structural racism, we would see, for example:

- ▲ School curricula, faith-based materials, popular media, museum exhibits, arts materials across a range of races, ethnicities and spaces reflect an understanding of the existence of white privilege, structural racism and their historical and contemporary consequences
- ▲ Everyday people speak up when public figures deny the existence of racism or privilege
- ▲ Increased system- or institution-based efforts to identify ways to reduce structural racism by that name – the idea is not taboo within public institutions

#### Strategies Having Their Intended Effects

If the strategies of organizations and movements were meeting their goals, we would see, for example:

- ▲ Insider strategies (changes in regulations governing actions of financial institutions, system-wide changes in standards for hiring and distributing teachers, etc.) creating some of the intended changes in policies, practices and outcomes of targeted institutions or systems
- ▲ Advocacy or other outsider strategies (economic boycotts, voter registration, public education or campaigns) garnering positive public attention, additional supporters, early “wins” of the kind intended

#### Collective Sufficiency of Intended Strategies

If communities or movements were putting in place everything needed to achieve their goals, we would see, for example:

- ▲ As a group, the implemented strategies work together to address system, institutional, organizational, group and individual change
- ▲ Each implemented strategy is based on research/evidence about improving outcomes for each racial/ethnic group as well as the total population
- ▲ Intensity and duration of strategies, taken as a whole, consistent with research findings on high-quality changes following best practice standards so that proven efforts are not diluted when they are replicated



| TYPES OF OUTCOMES  | INDICATORS (EVIDENCE):<br>HOW WOULD WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT?   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Mechanisms to Anticipate Efforts to Undo Policy and Practice Changes</b></p> <p>If we were able to get ahead of retrenchment and resistance, we would see, for example:</p>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Sustained or endowed resources support tracking and sharing of outcomes at regular intervals over time. Data are collected that allow for racially disaggregated as well as aggregated results</li> <li>▲ Vocal constituency can call for continued tracking and to hold leadership accountable for results</li> <li>▲ Functions required to maintain these efforts are embedded in law or policy, or supported through line-item funding in appropriate budgets</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Collective Capacities of Organizations and Coalitions</b></p> <p>If what seem to be the core elements of effective movements were being implemented, those involved would together exhibit, for example:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Mix of seasoned and emerging leadership; effective ways of supporting current and emerging leaders to strengthen their networks and capacities</li> <li>▲ Each organization/coalition has an articulated analysis of structural racism and privilege, and continually shares and strengthens its analysis throughout the leadership and the base</li> <li>▲ Decisions substantially driven by people of color; a large, multiracial base supports the work</li> </ul>       |

motivate continued action, encourage new people to join an effort, or serve as an additional strategy for positive and transformative change.

Creating outcomes that meet these criteria sets a high, but valuable, standard.

The table above offers a range of ideas, based on various answers to the question, “How do you know that structural racism is being reduced when you see it?”, recast as potential short- or intermediate-type outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The first column describes categories of outcomes. Most are intended to signal that the work is on a path of change, before the hoped-for benefits could be observed. The second column lists some examples of characteristics or states of being that could serve as indications that those short-term outcomes are being achieved. The language is broad; we assume that people would use more specific language for an outcome based on the actual work being measured.

### Conclusions and Next Steps

Evaluation practice can be improved generally, and particularly to support evaluations of efforts with racialized goals. But if we are

going to “teach to the test,” it is important to set up tests worth working towards. We do not yet know what it will take to create and maintain social or racial justice, or even racial equity of many kinds for large groups of people (at scale). It may be some time in the future before we do know. In the moment, however, we can do more, working collectively, to develop a base on which to build more useful evaluations.

One step is to rigorously review our own evaluation practices to reduce white privilege and racism in evaluation design, power dynamics, methods and consequences. Another is collectively to create a structural racism analysis of the issue being addressed with all parties (practitioners, constituents, funders and evaluators) and to use that analysis to set expectations, create outcomes and indicators and make meaning of findings.

In addition, we can all help define “how we know it when we see it” as a basis for developing more nuanced and useful outcomes and indicators to measure progress towards reduction in structural racism or its consequences. I hope that readers will consider whether they can contribute to this knowledge, by asking themselves, in hindsight:

- ▲ What “turned the corner” on an aspect of racial justice work?
- ▲ What combinations of such things seem to be the necessary and sufficient bundle of components or results that mattered?
- ▲ How did we know them when we saw them?
- ▲ What does this imply about useful short-term outcomes that predict long-term progress and achievement of the racial equity and social justice goals we strive for?

For evaluators, I hope we will bring a deeper understanding of structural racism and what reduction in structural racism would look like to theories of change, logic models, outcomes and indicators. I also hope we will bring a fully racialized lens to the practice of evaluation as it is currently constructed – helping to negotiate appropriate timelines, expectations, ways of knowing and more equitable consequences for evaluation results based on deep and collective review of the assumptions and worldviews being privileged in the work and the evaluation. For evaluators who are white, like me, this includes deeper knowledge and willingness to confront our own white privilege. Together, all of these steps might help all of us increase the effectiveness of our work and the usefulness of our evaluations.

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- <sup>1</sup> Center for Assessment and Policy Development. 2005. *What Is an Outcome and What is an Outcome Indicator? Evaluation Tools for Racial Equity*. Retrieved from [www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org/evaluation/tip/doc/2a01.pdf](http://www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org/evaluation/tip/doc/2a01.pdf).
  - <sup>2</sup> Sources for the table include interviews with Akonadi Foundation management, staff and grantees as part of developing their evaluation framework; evaluations of Project Change and Communities Creating Racial Equity Initiatives; development work for [www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org](http://www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org); [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org), and *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. The table is also substantially informed by Maggie Potapchuk (MP Associates), Barbara Major, Sam Stephens (CAPD) and Linda Bowen (Institute for Community Peace) – partners in much of the work just noted.
  - <sup>3</sup> Several of these indicators were suggested by grantees of the Akonadi Foundation.
  - <sup>4</sup> One way to look at racial equity is to analyze how different groups do on an outcome of interest. As an evaluator, one could say that racial equity exists when the variable of “race/ethnicity” no longer predicts (in a statistical sense) how one fares on that outcome. That is, some people do well and some people do less well, but you can’t predict those most likely to be healthier or less healthy, or paid more or paid less, or on a board of an organization or not on the board of an organization, based on the racial/ethnic group to which they have been assigned. This definition helps to explain why racial equity is a very important goal, but not the only goal for social justice work – which may be working towards a redistribution of opportunities or power, with racial equity just one piece of that.



# Structural Racism and Critical Participatory Evaluation

by Michelle Fine \*

Structural racism projects are bold, ambitious initiatives dedicated to documenting and transforming a thick overgrowth of policies, practices, traditions and ideologies that have justified and naturalized racialized injustices.<sup>1</sup> Whether implemented in government, schools, prisons, worksites or communities, such interventions are typically resisted or contained; domesticated to “fit” into existing arrangements. In the language of Rinku Sen, executive director of the Applied Research Center, most of these projects set out to be transformational and end up transactional (see page 40). Vibrant political visions too often shrink to technical solutions. This short essay advances critical participatory evaluation as an essential tool to hold institutions accountable for racial justice and research validity.

The language of randomized clinical trials and experimental designs dominates the evaluation field today. Represented as the gold standard of validity, these designs equate distance with objectivity, local context as a variable to be controlled and individual-level quantifiable outcomes as the primary form of evidence.

Participatory evaluations on structural racism challenge these assumptions theoretically and, for the purposes of this essay, scientifically. Here I want to describe critical participatory evaluation as research projects grounded in questions of racial injustice and power, informed by critical race<sup>2</sup> and feminist theory, with commitments to research validity and social change. These evaluations may be designed as experiments or quasi-experiments, surveys, interviews, ethnography, observations, focus groups and/or multiple methods. What distinguishes critical participatory evaluations is the intentional attention to four validity claims:

- ▲ harvest the *expertise* of communities of color;
- ▲ frame *questions and constructs* in terms that contest naturalized racist inequities;
- ▲ document *multiple layers* of structural racism and
- ▲ design projects that are deliberately *accountable to the goals and constituents of racial justice*.

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\* Thanks to Brett Stoudt for detailed and generous feedback.

We now turn to consider how these validity claims were addressed within an evaluation research design of a college-in-prison project, undertaken at a maximum security prison for women.

## Participatory Evaluation Behind Bars

In 1995, President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which effectively stopped the flow of federal dollars that had enabled women and men in prison to attend college. At Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF), a New York maximum security facility for women, a vibrant 15-year-old college program closed, as did more than 340 other programs nationwide. A familiar racialized trilogy – education denied, mass incarceration and cumulative disenfranchisement for African American and Latinos<sup>3,4</sup> – was reinscribed in American history.

Within months of Clinton’s act, a group of women at BHCF organized with community volunteers, local universities and the prison administration to restore college courses. Established in 1995, College Bound, the facility’s college program, has since been supported by a private, voluntary consortium of colleges and universities. More than a third of the women in the prison are enrolled in college; many others in GED and pre-college courses. In 1996, a group of prisoners recommended, and state officials approved, a participatory evaluation of college in prison.

Our evaluation team of seven from “inside” BHCF and five “outside” evaluators from the CUNY Graduate Center met monthly across four years. We read critical race and feminist theory and research methods, and crafted a multilevel/method evaluation assessing five levels of impact:

1. the politics and history of race, incarceration and higher education in New York;
2. the implementation of college within the prison environment;
3. community alliances with College Bound;
4. interpersonal dynamics within the college between faculty, officers and students, and
5. the impact of college on individual students in prison and after release, and their children.

Our methods included:

- ▲ a longitudinal analysis of College Bound records;
- ▲ focus groups with students, dropouts and adolescent children of prisoners;
- ▲ interviews with released women who had attended college while in prison;
- ▲ interviews with corrections officers, politicians, community allies and advocates;
- ▲ surveys of faculty and university administrators, and
- ▲ a longitudinal analysis of 36-month recidivism rates for women who participated in college while in prison versus a comparable sample of women who did not attend college while in prison.<sup>5</sup>

Across levels and methods, the evidence confirmed substantial positive impact of college in prison. The recidivism analysis conducted by the New York State Department of Correctional Services found that prisoners who participated in college while in prison had significantly lower recidivism rates (7.7%) than those who did not participate in college (29.9%). Exposure to college encouraged women to contribute to their communities in prison and out. College Bound lightened the state's tax burden of incarceration, supported the education of two generations, diminished reincarceration rates and contributed to post-prison public safety.

Our final report, *Changing Minds*,<sup>6</sup> was distributed to every U.S. governor and all the New York state legislators, with endorsements from the political left and right. Support for college in prison and, even more, for college as an element of re-entry programs, grows. In 2008, we launched Rebuilding Communities of Color through Higher Education After Program, a two-generation critical participatory evaluation of College Initiative, a post-prison college program at CUNY. Collaborating with Columbia University's Center on Institutional and Social Change, we are also tracking the racialized institutional impact of re-entry college programs on local communities, criminal justice policy, colleges and universities.

Our design for this evaluation parallels *Changing Minds*. In both cases, the evaluations are crafted to speak back to policy reform and to be of use to the prison reform and higher education movements. By documenting effects on institutions/policy, students and children, the research has revealed the breadth and depth of positive impact and it has exposed another layer of deeply racialized barriers to higher education for former prisoners, including financial aid forms that require applicants to "check here if you have a drug felony," challenges to the transfer of college credit from within prison, parole and curfew issues, lack of child care and so forth.

## Validity Claims

The collaborative *Changing Minds* evaluation team sought evidence of impact and obstacles at five levels:<sup>7</sup>

*Racial politics of education and mass incarceration:* The denial of higher education to prisoners was simply one more policy assault on communities of color. To understand contemporary conditions of prisons as racialized sites of state containment of black and Latino communities, we read and chronicled the track marks of federal and state criminal justice policies on communities of color.

*Prison dynamics:* Prisons are, fundamentally, inhumane institutions. The BHCF administration at the time, however, modeled an extremely complicated management strategy with elements of feminist and antiracist commitments. The longer our project survived in the contentious context of prison, the more it seemed essential to document the contradictory strands of institutional support for and resentment of College Bound expressed by state bureaucrats (who favored college because it reduces disciplinary problems by shifting prison culture) and the correctional staff.

*Tracking the relationships affected by college in prison:* Focusing within the prison, the racial, classed and gendered interpersonal dynamics among correctional officers, faculty, community members, victims' rights groups, the students and their children were crucial to demonstrating shifts in prison culture, to explain the reduction in disciplinary incidents and to capture the ironic culture of participation that defined College Bound.

*Evaluating individual impact:* We designed the project most obviously to document the two-generation impact of college in prison on the women and their children.

*Documenting the sustainability of cross-racial and cross-sector alliances:* In retrospect, the positive impact of college on prisoners, their children and the prison environment was relatively easy to document. It was more difficult to figure out enabling conditions for sustainability, a vexing question for racial justice projects. We knew that the life of the project depended largely on access and generosity of multiracial community networks of universities, civic associations, churches, synagogues and mosques and women's groups committed to education behind bars. To inform both policy and community organizing, we therefore added an analysis of these community resources, assets and alliances that held the prison accountable to education for prisoners, most of whom had been denied adequate education prior to incarceration.

Critical participatory evaluations rooted in the expertise of those most disenfranchised and accountable to these same communities, can puncture false arguments about costs, public safety, morality and “what’s good for the children”; demonstrate the racialized consequences of mass incarceration and denial of higher education, and lift up new frameworks for investing in and rebuilding urban communities.

Critical participatory evaluations, by design, kick up complex power dynamics – in prison or not. Our fruitful experience at BHCF and afterward shows, however, that meaningful inroads into structural racism can be made if evaluators identify and ask the hard questions that can get at manifestations of structural racism, all while seeking advice from – and recognizing expertise in – those most affected by their evaluations. They can work hard to identify and realize accountability by making findings known to not just funders and grantees, but to broad constituencies. By adhering to these principles, evaluators can contribute to the shaping of public policies far more responsive to communities in need.

## Possible Next Steps

Here are some steps funders might take to support critical participatory evaluations within, and across, grantees to strengthen their racial justice efforts as well as determining progress:

- ▲ Create a visiting participatory advisory board for racial justice, including scholars, activists and persons who intimately know the relevant issues, who would travel across projects, consulting with evaluators and project directors to think through design, outcomes and products of use within, and across, sites.
- ▲ Convene their racial justice projects and evaluators to ask the hard questions that may feel “delicate” within each setting but we know to be fundamental across grantees.
- ▲ Support participation-building by funding grantees to organize (formally or informally) an advisory group of those most affected by injustice, or a hybrid advisory group comprised of very differently situated persons. The group would help shape the research questions, outcomes, design and products of individual grant assessments to be sure that the work speaks to the experience of everyone in an organization/project/community, not just elites.
- ▲ Help grantees to democratize expertise and augment their racial justice impact by asking them to specify where expertise can be found and to articulate strategies to increase impact validity.
- ▲ Facilitate a workshop among grantees to identify “translation” outcomes that move between traditional outcomes that an organization may gather and more textured outcomes

that might reveal the impact of a racial justice project (e.g. between student test scores and students’ developing a sense of critical engagement in social issues).

- ▲ Encourage broadened accountability by asking grantees to build accountability practices to guide their relationships to groups and issues in the organization and also to community/organizing groups associated with the issue but not within the organization.
- ▲ Make critical participatory evaluations public so that the findings and also the process can be shared with other funders and projects working on racial justice concerns.

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- <sup>1</sup> Lawrence, Keith. “Rethinking Crime and Punishment for the 21st Century: Can We Develop a Criminal Justice Paradigm That Advances Racial Equity and Democracy?” Draft working paper presented at Open Society Institute forum, March 16, 2007. [www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/roundtable%20on%20community%20change/REFRAMING\\_CRIMINAL\\_JUSTICE\\_PAPER\\_REVISIED\\_JAN7\\_2008.pdf](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/roundtable%20on%20community%20change/REFRAMING_CRIMINAL_JUSTICE_PAPER_REVISIED_JAN7_2008.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas, eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. New York: New Press, 1996. Print.
- <sup>3</sup> Fine, Michelle and J. Ruglis. “Circuits of Dispossession: the Racialized and Classed Realignment of the Public Sphere for Youth in the U.S.,” *Transforming Anthropology*. 2008: 17, 1, 20-33. Print.
- <sup>4</sup> Woodson, Carter. *The Miseducation of the Negro*. Las Vegas: IAP, 2010 (reprint). Print.
- <sup>5</sup> Fine, Michelle, Maria Elena Torre, Kathy Boudin, Iris Bowen, Judith Clark, Donna Hylton, Migdalia Martinez, “Missy,” Rosemarie A. Roberts, Pamela Smart and Debora Upegui. *Changing Minds*. 2001. [web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changingminds.html](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changingminds.html).
- <sup>6</sup> Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Missy, Roberts, Smart and Upegui.
- <sup>7</sup> For discussion of the politics, ethics and dynamics of collaboration, see Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre. “Intimate Details: Participatory Action Research in Prison,” *Action Research*, 2006: 4, 3. <http://ARJ.sagepub.com/content/vol4/issue3>



## Critical Participatory Evaluation and Structural Racism

| VALIDITY                               | FORM OF KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS  | THREATS OF POLITICAL VISION SHRINKAGE   | DESIGN FEATURES TO ENHANCE VALIDITY   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Expert Validity</b>                 | To what extent does the research design harvest, reflect and enact the <b>critique, knowledges and expertise</b> of communities of color?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Reliance upon external “experts”</li> <li>▲ Ignoring local wisdom from elders, community leaders and youth</li> <li>▲ Colluding in the assumption that distance = objectivity</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ To cultivate and legitimate marginalized knowledges, participatory action research team of co-researchers/advisory board comprised of those most affected by structural racism <i>and/or</i></li> <li>▲ An advisory group of diverse/differently positioned constituencies where power dynamics are interrogated</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Ecological Validity</b>             | To what extent does the research track the <b>multiple levels upon which structural racism operates</b> – history, racial formations, ideology, institutions, interpersonal and personal? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Failure to document the historic forms of oppression and struggles of resistance that have shaped current conditions</li> <li>▲ Exclusive focus on one level of evidence, e.g., individual outcomes</li> <li>▲ Decoupled individual level outcomes from racialized opportunity structures, histories and ideologies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ A multilevel evaluation study focused on various routes through which structural racism saturates, and racial justice could circulate</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Construct Validity</b>              | To what extent does <b>critical race theory inform the key theoretical and empirical constructs</b> of the evaluation: both the problem and the capillaries of impact?                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Ahistoric or decontextualized definitions of the “problem”</li> <li>▲ Failure to document circuits of oppression through which racism moves across sectors</li> <li>▲ Exclusive reliance upon individualistic outcomes and language (e.g., “at risk”)</li> <li>▲ Failure to attend to intersectionality</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Work with community leaders to consider if, how and the extent to which traditional indicators can be incorporated into the design – and what other measures might be assessed to provide a thick analysis of how racism reproduces and how it can be interrupted</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Accountability/ Impact Validity</b> | To whom is the evaluation accountable? To what extent are <b>communities of color and antiracist partners primary audiences</b> for the material?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Critical decisions to be addressed early in the design: Who has access to data, interpretations? Who has veto power? The right to provide a dissenting epilogue?</li> <li>▲ Claims of institutional privacy, confidentiality and anonymity can control/limit access to the data</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Multiple products: white papers, testimony, public service announcements, spoken word performance of the data, academic texts, monographs, post card campaigns</li> <li>▲ Multiple audiences: policy makers, formerly incarcerated adults/families, advocates and the most affected communities of color</li> <li>▲ Policy research on follow-up issues, e.g., college after prison</li> </ul> |

# Communities of Practice: A Process for Evaluating Racial Justice Work?

by Maggie Potapchuk



We know that efforts to eradicate structural racism are consistently met with resistance, so that advances in one area (such as education) may result in backward movement in another (such as housing). In order to more effectively respond to the “repositioning of the color line rather than its erasure,”<sup>1</sup> collective action that crosses issue areas and communities may be far more effective than works of disparate organizations. As a practitioner, advocate and long-time consumer of evaluation, I’ve come to believe not only in the value of communities of practice (CoP) – groups of people dedicated to shared learning and practice – for action against structural racism,<sup>2</sup> but also in their potential for fostering meaningful evaluation of racial justice efforts.

To effectively create deep systemic change it’s critical to know how other organizations are contributing to the change process and analyzing sector data. It makes sense to share observations and work collectively to track long-term shifts. If we move from programmatic evaluation to collective evaluation focus, organizations can hear more observations of the changes and collectively address how racial justice work is implemented as well as attacked.

This concept is untested, but it strikes me that the use of CoPs to evaluate racial justice work might address many of the challenges of such evaluation and contribute to significantly greater understanding of how we’re doing in our quest for racial justice. Together, groups could begin to collect and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data and stories to inform whether progress is being made. These data might include, for example, assessing strategies to increase the impact in other institutions/sectors and tracking short- and long-term outcomes across organizational efforts.

Since many organizations are schooled in traditional antiracism training which typically does not include a systems thinking approach or analysis, one of the first steps for working cooperatively on strategy and collectively evaluating work requires a shared analysis of structural racism.

Evidence shows that CoP, in some ways a relatively new tool, increases knowledge management through shared learning and relationship-building.<sup>3</sup> Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave, who first coined the CoP term and concept in 1991, describe CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>4</sup> While a few CoPs in the U.S. focus on social justice,<sup>5</sup> I am aware of none evaluating structural racism work.

One emerging community to watch, however, is Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable, established by the City of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative in 2009.<sup>6</sup> The roundtable members represent community-based organizations, business, philanthropy and other public entities. Their goal is to eliminate racial disparities in all areas, while specifically focusing their efforts on educational equity. They are coordinating strategies, developing partnerships and sharing resources to increase community support for racial justice. Though roundtable participants are not explicitly evaluating their collective work, Julie Nelson, director of Seattle’s Office of Civil Rights, told me, “I believe that ultimately, our success can and should be measured by changes in community conditions. The point of convening this group is to develop aligned strategies and measure our progress towards our goals.”<sup>7</sup>

## Shared Approaches

Meanwhile, FSG Social Impact Advisors, a non-profit consulting and research group in Boston, recently reported about 20 efforts<sup>8</sup> that developed shared approaches to performance, outcome, or impact measurements involving numerous organizations. Though their work is not focused on racial justice issues, perhaps these techniques could be fruitfully adapted to the collective work of racial justice organizations. One methodology, called Adaptive Learning Systems, may hold some promise for CoPs evaluating racial justice work. It provides “a collaborative process for all participating organizations to learn, support each other’s efforts and improve over time.”<sup>9</sup> Participating organizations using this method define the measures which can address the obvious

power dynamics between funders and grantees. Any movement in this direction, however, would be challenged by shortcomings of existing evaluation tools that lack a structural racism lens or systems thinking approach and also by a shortage of capable evaluators who have a structural racism analysis.

What would foundations that may find it valuable to encourage CoPs to evaluate structural racism efforts need to consider? Evaluation related to structural racism needs to be about resident accountability, taking into account long-term outcomes collectively as well as identifying the direct impact of interventions across issues, sectors, institutions.

Any type of collective evaluation or CoP needs to be home-grown, that is, developed without foundations determining membership, process, outcomes, or strategy. Participating organizations need to cocreate these components, which may include radical strategies to create structural change.

Foundations must trust the expertise, practices and accountability of grantees and their constituents and members, refraining from limiting strategies by defining how change occurs based on their worldview. At the same time, foundation board and staff members must look inward, creating equitable and inclusive funding organizations with a structural racism analysis. As Willard Bass of the Institute for Dismantling Racism said in his survey about this topic, “It is critical for foundations to adopt an understanding of racism as institutional and systemic so that funding requirements do not create unrealistic expectations by funders. Because to have such an understanding brings with it the acknowledgment that the work of dismantling racism is the work of transformation that requires time to build and organize relationships.”

If we are to work toward a long-term outcome of racial justice — and an intermediate outcome of race/ethnicity as no longer an indicator of disparity trends — then our organizations need to be working differently together, exchanging information and data and supporting each other’s contribution to the transformative change process for racial justice. To develop such new ways of working, CoPs are one path worth exploring.

## Next Steps

Investment by funders is essential for collective evaluation effort to work. In the immediate future, grantmakers can:

- ▲ assist racial justice organizations in preparing to work in CoPs by supporting an assessment of the extent to which

they are evaluating their work, and, if they are, what their capacity is to evaluate with a structural racism analysis;

- ▲ support logistical coordination to facilitate the creation of a shared measurement collaborative or CoP, and
- ▲ address directly the tension of balancing investment in evaluation and funding experimentation with no evaluative data with grantees.

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- <sup>1</sup> Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, *Structural Racism and Community Building*. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2004. pp. 25-28.
- <sup>2</sup> Potapchuk, Maggie. “Building Capacity and Cultivating Interdependence Among Racial Relations and Racial Equity Organizations,” unpublished document created for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, November, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> For more information: [http://cpsquare.org/wiki/Measurement\\_and\\_assessment](http://cpsquare.org/wiki/Measurement_and_assessment)
- <sup>4</sup> For more information: [www.ewenger.com/theory/](http://www.ewenger.com/theory/)
- <sup>5</sup> A few examples: Spirit in Action – [www.spiritinaction.net](http://www.spiritinaction.net), Campaign for Community Values – [www.communitychange.org/our-projects/communityvalues](http://www.communitychange.org/our-projects/communityvalues) and Movement Strategy Center – [www.movementstrategycenter.org](http://www.movementstrategycenter.org). Potapchuk provides a process to think about how to collectively work together: *Cultivating Interdependence: A Guide for Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations*. Washington: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2004.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information about City of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative: [www.seattle.gov/rsji/](http://www.seattle.gov/rsji/)
- <sup>7</sup> Nelson, Julie. Message to Maggie Potapchuk. 25 May 2010. Email.
- <sup>8</sup> Kramer, Mark, L. Vaidyanathan and M. Parkhurst. *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*. Boston, MA: FSG Social Impact Advisors, July 2009.
- <sup>9</sup> Kramer, Mark, L. Vaidyanathan and M. Parkhurst.

# Resources

The following resource list shares just a few highlights of the many publications, journal articles and websites available to learn more about structural racism generally, and others on various evaluation approaches or frameworks. As noted in several of the previous essays, few of the existing evaluation tools have focused specifically on issues of structural of racism, but we have included some resources whose lessons or tools could perhaps be culled and adapted with a racialized lens.

## Structural Racism

Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Race Matters*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, February 2006. 17 May 2010. [www.aecf.org/knowledgecenter/publicationsseries/racematters.aspx](http://www.aecf.org/knowledgecenter/publicationsseries/racematters.aspx)

Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. *Structural Racism and Community Building*. Washington: Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. 2004.

Center for Social Inclusion. *What is Structural Racism?* 17 May 2010. [www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/about-us/what-is-structural-racism/](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/about-us/what-is-structural-racism/)

Hartman, Chester, ed. Symposium: Structural Racism. Spec. issue of *Poverty and Race*, November/December, 2006, Volume 15, Number 6.

Keleher, T. *Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide*. Oakland: Applied Research Center. 2009.

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. FAQ: *Structural Racism*. n.d. Columbus: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. 17 May 2010. <http://4909e99d35cada63e7f757471b7243be73e53e14.gripelements.com/pdfs/srqa.pdf>

Quiroz-Martinez, J. *From the Roots: Building the Power of Communities of Color to Challenge Structural Racism*. Oakland: Akonadi Foundation. 2010. 17 May 2010. [www.akonadi.org](http://www.akonadi.org)

*Racial Equity Tools*. MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development. 2009. 17 May 2010. [www.racialequity-tools.org](http://www.racialequity-tools.org)

## Recent General Evaluation Resources

Foundation Center. *Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact (TRASI)*. 2010. 4 June 2010. <http://trasi.foundationcenter.org> (This online database features 150 approaches to measuring and analyzing social impact for programs and investments and is searchable by a range of criteria including issue-focus, costs, need for third-party staff and other useful factors.)

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Council on Foundations. *Evaluation in Philanthropy: Perspectives from the Field*.

Washington: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Council on Foundations. 2009.

McKinsey & Company Social Sector. *Learning for Social Impact: What Foundations Can Do*. London: McKinsey & Company. 2010. 4 June 2010. [http://lsi.mckinsey.com/en/Our\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Impact\\_Assessment/~media/Extranets/LSI/McKinsey\\_Learning\\_for\\_Social\\_Impact\\_white\\_paper.ashx](http://lsi.mckinsey.com/en/Our_Perspective_on_Impact_Assessment/~media/Extranets/LSI/McKinsey_Learning_for_Social_Impact_white_paper.ashx)

## Advocacy Evaluation

Applied Research Center. *Power, Participation, & State-Based Politics: An Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's Collaborations that Count Initiative*. New York: Applied Research Center. 2004. 4 June 2010. [www.arc.org/content/view/288/102/](http://www.arc.org/content/view/288/102/)

Coffman, Julia, ed. *Advocacy and Policy Change*. Spec. issue of *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XIII, Number 1, Spring 2007.

Guthrie, Kendall, Justin Louie, Tom David and Catherine Crystal Foster. *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Strategies for a Prospective Evaluation Approach*. Los Angeles: Blueprint Research & Design for The California Endowment. 2005. 4 June 2010. [www.blueprintrd.com/text/challenge\\_assess.pdf](http://www.blueprintrd.com/text/challenge_assess.pdf)

Guthrie, Kendall, Justin Louie, Tom David and Catherine Crystal Foster. *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Part II – Moving from Theory to Practice*. Los Angeles: Blueprint Research & Design for The California Endowment. 2006. 4 June 2010. [www.blueprintrd.com/text/challenge\\_assess.pdf](http://www.blueprintrd.com/text/challenge_assess.pdf)

Innovation Network Inc. *Speaking for Themselves: Advocates' Perspectives on Evaluation*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies, August 2008.

Morariu, Johanna and Kathleen Brennan. "Effective Advocacy Evaluation: The Role of Funders," *The Foundation Review*, p.100-108. Volume 1:3.2009. 17 May 2010. [www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/fdn\\_rev\\_morariu\\_brennan.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/fdn_rev_morariu_brennan.pdf)

Reisman, Jane, Anne Geinapp, and Sarah Stachowiak. *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy*. Organizational Research Services. 2007. 17 May 2010. [www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a\\_guide\\_to\\_measuring\\_advocacy\\_and\\_policy.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a_guide_to_measuring_advocacy_and_policy.pdf)

Reisman, Jane, Anne Geinapp, and Sarah Stachowiak. *A Handbook of Data Collection Tools - Companion to "A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy."* Organizational Research Services. n.d. 17 May 2010. [www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a\\_handbook\\_of\\_data\\_collection\\_tools.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a_handbook_of_data_collection_tools.pdf)

## Cultural Competency Evaluation

Coffman, Julia, ed. *Ten Strategies for Enhancing Multicultural Competency in Evaluation. Spec. issue of The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XI, Number 2, Summer 2005. 17 May 2010. [www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/evaluation-methodology/ten-strategies-for-enhancing-multicultural-competency-in-evaluation](http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/evaluation-methodology/ten-strategies-for-enhancing-multicultural-competency-in-evaluation)

Endo, Traci, Tina Joh and Hanh Cao Yu. *Voices from the Field: Health and Evaluation Leaders on Multicultural Evaluation*. Oakland: Social Policy Research Associates, 2003.

Kaasan, Dimitri. *Foundation Leaders' Perspectives on Culturally Competent Evaluation*. Oakland: Social Policy Research Associates. Fall 2003.

Lee, Kien. *The Importance of Culture in Evaluation*. Denver: The Colorado Trust, 2007.

Lee, Kien. *The Journey Continues: Ensuring a Cross-Culturally Competent Evaluation*. Denver: The Colorado Trust, 2010.

## Participatory Evaluation

Coffman, Julia, ed. *Democratic Evaluation, Spec. issue of The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XI, Number 3, Fall 2005. 17 May 2010. [www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/democratic-evaluation](http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/democratic-evaluation)

Kramer, Mark, L. Vaidyanathan and M. Parkhurst. *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*. Boston: FSG Social Impact Advisors, July 2009.

McGarvey, Craig. *Participatory Action Research: Involving "All the Players" in Evaluation and Change*. New York: GrantCraft, 2007. 17 May 2010. [www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=912](http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=912)

## Equity, Diversity, Social Justice Evaluation

*Evaluation Tools for Racial Equity*. Center for Assessment and Policy Development and MP Associates. [www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org](http://www.evaluationtoolsforracialequity.org).

Jung, Soya, Maggie Potapchuk, Rinku Sen and Lori Villarosa. *Catalytic Change: Lessons Learned from the Racial Justice Grantmaking Assessment*. Washington and Oakland: Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity and Applied Research Center, 2009.

Just Philanthropy. *Pathways to Progress: Moving Philanthropy Closer to Social Justice and Racial Equity*. [www.justphilanthropy.org/about-the-project/issues.html](http://www.justphilanthropy.org/about-the-project/issues.html)

Leiderman, Sally. "Doing Evaluation Differently," in *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. Silver Spring, Maryland, and Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: MP Associates and Center for Assessment and Policy Development, p. 91-101. 2005.

Millett, Ricardo. *Evaluation With A Diversity Lens: Exploring Its Functions And Utility To Inform Philanthropic Effectiveness*. New York: Diversity in Philanthropy Project, 2009.

## Systems Thinking

Hirsh, Gary B., Ralph Levine and Robin Lin Miller. "Using System Dynamics Modeling to Understand the Impact of Social Change Initiatives," *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 2007. 39:239–253.

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\* Ms. Alcantar's tenure at Akonadi Foundation concluded on November 19, 2009



## Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity

The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) is a multiyear project intended to build the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism in communities through capacity-building, education and convening of grantmakers and grantseekers. We do this primarily through the following strategies:

- ▲ Providing opportunities for grantmakers to learn and strategize about cutting-edge racial equity issues and how they apply to their work within various fields;
- ▲ Increasing grantmakers' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different racial equity efforts, and assisting them in assessing their own grantmaking;
- ▲ Engaging in internal assessments of foundations' institutional needs around racial equity, and coordinating or adapting tools to most effectively meet their needs;
- ▲ Consulting with cornerstone nonprofits that explicitly address issues of racism to strengthen their capacity, increase coordination and impact; and
- ▲ Assisting local community leaders and funders choose and sustain effective approaches to achieve racial equity, including identifying appropriate indicators of success.

Since its inception in January 2003, PRE has directly engaged hundreds of foundation representatives (including program staff, management, board members and individual donors) in discussions of racial equity and, in particular, how they can advance the mission of achieving racial equity through their own philanthropic institutions. In addition to national convenings, PRE has conducted local and regional events in the Northwest, West, Midwest, Northeast and Southeast.

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Views expressed in this document are those of its authors and should not be attributed to the Tides Center or its funders.

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