Racial Equity Technical Assistance Project

REPORT

CONTENT

BACKGROUND

The Seattle Metro area is becoming increasingly diverse.[1] Whites comprised 88% of the population in 1980 compared to 68% in 2010. By 2040, Whites are projected to become the minority group compared to people of color, making up 45% of the population, with the fastest growth occurring among youth of color (Manuel Pastor 2013).

Concomitant with the growth of communities of color, especially among youth, persistent disparities remain in education for a number of racial/ethnic groups. For the 2016 – 2017 school year, Kindergarten readiness was lower than for King County as a whole for Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Natives, Hispanic and Pacific Islanders.

Graduation rates have remained alarmingly low for some populations. Graduation rates have been in the 50-60% range for students of color for the ten year period from 2006 – 2016.

It is critical to move the needle on improving academic outcomes for what will soon be the majority youth of color population. We know that culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations are especially effective and that such culturally-specific practices improve academic success for students of color[2]. We sought to strengthen services for low income children/youth of color to address persistent disparities in educational outcomes.

[1] M Pastor
[2] United Way Columbia Willamette Race & Place

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Racial Equity Technical Assistance (RE TA) project was a six year project from 2012–2018 developed and funded by United Way of King County (UWKC) providing sustained, focused technical assistance to enhance the capacity of organizations to deliver effective services to communities of color. The RE TA project was split into two 3-year phases. The first 3 years (Phase 1) focused on enhancing racial equity within mainstream organizations and increasing organizational stability of culturally-specific organizations. The second 3 years (Phase 2) focused solely on increasing organizational stability of culturally-specific organizations.

The six organizations involved in the project were: Atlantic Street Center, Children's Home Society of Washington, Chinese Information and Service Center, Coalition for Refugees from Burma (CRB), Kindering and Para Los Ninos (PLN). The two technical assistance providers were the Nonprofit Assistance Center, providing technical assistance to culturally-specific organizations and the Minority Executive Directors Coalition/Benita Horn, providing technical assistance to mainstream organizations. Quarterly to bi-monthly Learning Community meetings were held to bring participating organizations together.

"If you're about equity, you need to equitably fund communities of color based organizations"

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the course of six years, accomplishments related to increased resources, relationship building, and developing an action plan for undoing racism.

Increased resources for communities of color based organizations

Resource development occurred for both Phase 2 communities of color-based organizations, not only in terms of people and dollars and also the quality and strength of relationships.
Organizations:

- Increased organizational budget. CRB more than tripled and PLN more than doubled their organizational annual budget from 2015 to 2018.
- Increased staffing. Both organizations were able to increase their staffing, with CRB hiring a full-time Youth Program Coordinator and PLN hiring a full-time Program Director. In addition, organizations strengthened their capacity to use volunteers by updating Volunteer handbook and successfully growing the number of volunteers.
- Expanded Board membership. Organizations were able to increase board membership as well as representation in needed areas of expertise.
- Implemented new fundraising strategies. Creating a fund development plan led to implementing new strategies, such as individual donor campaign.

- Engaged in strategic planning. Organizations engaged in and created a multi-year strategic plan.
- Enhanced community voice. Honoring the wisdom of their communities, organizations strengthened ways to ensure community-driven programming, such as creating a Youth Advisory Council and having the community co-lead strategic planning process.
- Developed strong supportive relationships. A key resource was developing strong and supportive relationships among communities of color based organizations, a network that will have ongoing and lasting impact.
- Engaged in collaborative partnerships. Recognizing the expertise and trust they hold in their communities, organizations served as lead conveners in major regional collaborative partnerships.

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Relationship building

The Learning Community gatherings that occurred over the course of the six year period of time increased trust among participants to allow for open and honest conversations. The gatherings served to bridge the divide among communities of color-based organizations and between communities of color-based organizations and mainstream, easing tensions to enable the real work of undoing institutionalized racism. Communities-of-color-based organizations observed that historical relationships with larger mainstream organizations have been transactional, whereas the gatherings provided a forum for co-learning.

Increased support among communities of color

In addition to building trust between mainstream and communities of color, the project resulted in strong and supportive relationships among communities of color-based organizations. This grew out of recognition that communities of color-based organizations face similar challenges, despite differences in age, community, or size and differ from mainstream organizations in resources and capacity. Challenges faced by communities of color based organizations include lack of recognition and compensation by funders and mainstream for their community expertise, leading to partnerships where mainstream organizations receive the bulk of funding while communities of color-based organizations are doing the work. This support network has resulted in sharing of resources and partnership building. As shared by Mona Han, Executive Director of CRB "Anything that's mine is hers [referring to other Executive Director]."

Undoing racism strategy

Recognizing the persistent and common struggle among communities of color, the group developed a strategy for undoing institutionalized racism. The group identified continued relationship-building among communities of color as an immediate goal with the ultimate goal of multicultural organizing led by people of color to undo institutional racism.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Through our collective work, there were several lessons learned. These included the importance of prioritizing racial equity, recognition of the unique challenges faced by communities of color based organizations and the expertise of communities of color.

Prioritizing racial equity

While communities of color-based organizations made strides in increasing resources, attempts to increase racial equity within mainstream organizations were largely ineffective in absence of prioritization of racial equity, as demonstrated through leadership support and putting their own resources towards efforts. For organizations where this wasn't the case, the racial equity work stopped as soon as funding ended without producing lasting results. In contrast, for communities of color based organizations, racial equity is not just work, and is something that directly impacts their personal life and the future of their children, friends and community. Whereas it is optional for mainstream organizations to consider racial equity, it is front and center for communities of color.

Unique challenges faced by communities of color based organizations

Many communities of color have shared experiences of historical trauma, war-induced trauma, the current assault on communities of color and experience of trauma in their daily lives, and ongoing systemic and institutionalized racism resulting in internalized racial inferiority. A manifestation of these challenges for communities of color based organizations, including participants and TA providers, is the constant reality of staff absences, turnover and organizational instability.

Communities of color ARE the experts on racial equity

It takes a long time to help mainstream organizations to understand racial equity, and it may be too much to ever expect a mainstream organization to fully understand something that is outside their area of experience. Communities of color – based organizations arise from a community leader/advocate that identified and wanted to address an unmet need. They are uniquely poised with the expertise and relationships needed to address issues facing their community, and it is far more efficient to support communities of color-based organizations who have this understanding.

"People can learn language, but the culture is in your DNA. It cannot be learned"

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations emerged based on learnings from the project. These included sharing resources held by mainstream organizations, funding communities of color based organizations, establishing partnerships and increasing the capacity of mainstream organizations to address racial equity.

Sharing resources

Mainstream organizations have resources that can be shared with communities of color based organizations. These might include meeting space, relationships, or offer of their grantwriter to write a joint grant with funding equitably distributed to communities of color.

Prioritize funding for communities of color based organizations

Throughout the project, it became apparent that it is far more efficient and impactful to fund communities of color based organizations to meet the needs of people of color. If a community of color based organization exists to serve a specific cultural group, funding should be prioritized for these organizations that have the expertise and relationships in the community.

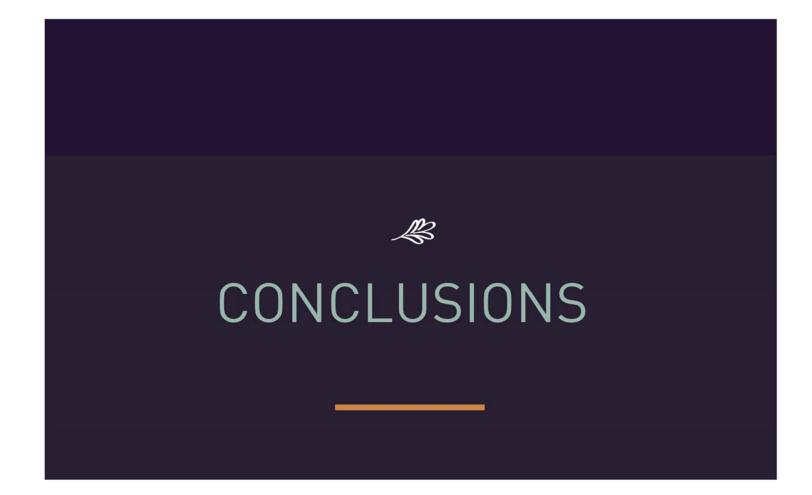## Establish partnerships within communities of color

Recognizing the persistent and common struggle among communities of color, continued relationship-building among communities of color is needed to build a strong and supportive network to serve as buffer against systemic racism and build resiliency. Such a support system will serve to strengthen communities of color and the ability to engage in multicultural organizing focused on systems change.

Establish partnerships with mainstream organizations

If a specific cultural community does not have any organization to serve their needs, a trusted mainstream partner is critical to fill service gaps. Additionally a community of color based organization may not provide the entire array of services needed by families/community. Trusting relationships need to be established between communities of color and mainstream organizations before communities of color based organizations would feel comfortable referring their families/clients. We can support authentic partnerships and trust building between communities of color and mainstream organizations. Partnerships should be reciprocal, with roles and funding equitably distributed between communities of color and mainstream organizations.

Increasing capacity of mainstream organizations to address racial equity

Mainstream organizations should hire a critical mass of people of color in decision-making positions to elevate racial equity as a priority and to gain the credentials and expertise necessary to develop trusting relationships and better serve communities of color.

CONCLUSIONS

Communities of color-based organizations play a vital role in serving their specific cultural community in a respectful and impactful manner, and are uniquely equipped to address issues facing their communities. It is far more efficient to fund communities of color-based organizations that hold the expertise and relationships necessary to address disparities. We can provide resources to communities of color to solve their own issues. Partnerships may be nurtured through long-term, authentic and trusting relationships among communities of color and between communities of color and mainstream organizations.

Thank you to the project partners who helped
to prepare this report