Chapter Twelve

Conclusion and Recommendations

Maggie Potapchuk and Sally Leiderman

If we are optimistic about the future, we might recognize that we are in one of those moments when the country is ripe for change. We are five years into the 21st century. When it began, we were worried about technology: the potential disaster of Y2K. Remember that? But since then the wars, natural disasters, terrorism, political divisions and disparate quality of life for people around the world and in our own country—as well as our discussions about religion and moral values—are all challenging us to look at our world differently and begin to ask some new questions.

So just five years after Y2K when technology caught our collective attentions, we are back to some of our most basic human concerns: How should people with very different worldviews share our space? How can we ensure that all of our children survive to adulthood with the strengths and skills to ensure the well-being of the next generation? What do we need to do individually to thrive spiritually, intellectually, economically and in our relationships? What is our collective responsibility to each other? What can we learn from each other's histories that will help us act together with honor going forward? And what can we, and must we, know and change about the system of white privilege to give us a fighting chance to pull off any of that?

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There are, of course, no easy answers to any of those questions. But we have a chance, in our community building work, to work on solutions to these very large questions on a more manageable scale. And that is where our optimism lies. What has been suggested about things to consider? First, we start with a summary of some of the ideas offered in the previous chapters:

How does White Privilege Show Up in Foundation and Community Initiatives?

Foundations that want to be partners with communities, particularly communities of color, can:

- Work internally to identify the ways in which their policies, practices and relationships protect or privilege white people or traditionally white institutions.

- Acknowledge that there is no quick fix. It takes time for an institution to move away from its racist construct and toward becoming an anti-racist organization.

- Work in collaboration with communities. In order for an institution to transform itself by itself, the community must be part of the process.

- Include racism and white privilege as an indicator. This fear of addressing racism and white privilege has caused the mis-investment of a great deal of resources and energy from foundations and communities.

- Develop tools to identify where racism is embedded in the institution.

- Understand there will be no answers before we start the journey. White privilege dictates that we must know exactly what we will end up with and when it will happen.

- Prepare to fund processes—not just projects—and concepts (even ones that an "expert" known to the foundation has not yet proven to work).

- Be open to hearing and feeling what communities are saying, as well as their actions and reactions to the process.

- Participate, along with communities, in a mutual examination process.

- Recognize that community building work needs to respect where the community is in its process of change, and not hijack the process or maneuver it to follow the foundation's agenda.

Intervention: Goals, Processes and Strategies

As we design and implement interventions (goals, processes and strategies) of community building work, we can:

- Name the reduction or elimination of white privilege as an explicit goal of community building work.

- Pay special attention to cultural racism – all of the ways in which traditional European and white views dominate our thinking about what is considered "best," "normal" or "appropriate." Be diligent in surfacing the assumptions in our goals, theories of change, strategies and practices that promote these worldviews unthinkingly or uncritically.

- Make sure that people with different worldviews have at least equal decision-making power in selecting, implementing and assessing community building interventions, and are leading whenever possible.

- Use inclusive processes to do community building work, but also recognize the limitations of inclusive processes. Inclusion does not ensure that white privilege has been surfaced or reduced or eliminated.

- Make theories of change focus on the community and its processes, assumptions, assets and needs ("community-centric") not just the particular intervention ("initiative-centric").

- Consider the timeframe in which change is expected, the range of strategies that are considered useful, including whether or not confrontational or "hardball" strategies are considered okay.

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- Look at all of these things in light of the tenacity of systems that maintain white privilege and resistance to eliminating or reducing the power of these systems.

- Incorporate strategies that are used by the most racially conscious and successful efforts we know about (for example, political education and community organizing).

- Recognize that white privileged power arrangements and worldviews are embedded throughout our institutions and internalized within us as individuals, so they are always present in our community building work. Consider how to address these issues, remembering that even if the discussions are avoided, the mechanics still play out.

- Stay the course. Consider the consequences to communities of creating community building relationships, making commitments and creating expectations and not meeting them as promised.

Doing Evaluation Differently

In the process of assessing our community building work, we can:

- Value multiple ways of understanding: storytelling, quantitative data from multiple sources, shared wisdom from long-time community residents or elders, actions ("voting with our feet") and other information as evidence.

- Avoid "initiative-centric" evaluation models whenever possible.

- Consider what would need to be different about evaluation if we envisioned it as one of the tools to eliminate or reduce white privilege.

- Work to highlight culturally racist assumptions in evaluations, and, if that is not possible, refuse to participate in them.

- Anticipate, identify and address resistance in the theory of change that guides evaluation.

- Track and measure progress toward elimination of white privilege more directly.

- Shift the power dynamics in evaluation away from privileged institutions and experts and toward groups of color and individual communities.

- Present evaluation findings in ways that make it easy for people to see our analysis of why community conditions are as they are, and difficult to "blame the victim."

- Make clear where data come from, including any culturally racist assumptions built into the algorithms by which statistics are computed or the data produced.

> Make theories of change focus on the community and its processes, assumptions, assets and needs ("community-centric") not just the particular intervention ("initiative-centric").

- Use evaluation to help set reasonable expectations about change—in terms of difficulty, timing and sustainability—given what is known about the prevalence of structural racism.

Creating Multi-Racial Partnerships and Coalitions

When we create multi-racial partnerships and coalitions in our work in communities, we can:

- Ensure community residents most affected by the issue(s) being addressed are the majority in the governance structure.

- Establish the mechanisms through which local control will be created, sustained, and then passed down to future generations.[1]

- Work to make sure norms of predominately white institutions do not take precedence over cultural practices and community processes.

- Create an accountability system between the foundation and the community residents and between the coalition and the community residents.

- Discuss how to leverage different organizations' assets and to catalyze an issue in a community.

- Provide opportunities and time for leaders from different communities to develop relationships.

- Be aware of how whites' participation is impacting the formation and sustainability of a multi-racial coalition.

- Create time for same race/ethnicity caucus meetings within the context of a coalition or partnership.

- Make the decision-making process transparent. Consistently check to see whose voices are dominating decision-making processes, and make sure that the people most accustomed to controlling these processes are not dominating the processes.

- Understand that the TA provider is accountable to the foundation and the community residents. The foundation's first responsibility is to the community—not to the consultant.

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[1] Stone and Butler, *Core Issues in Comprehensive Community-Building Initiatives: Exploring Power and Race,* p. 120-1.

Some Final Thoughts: Recommendations for the Field

Just as we said at the beginning, there are no easy answers to fully address white privilege and structural racism. We believe this monograph is a "living" publication. That is, we hope the content will be discussed, debated, updated and added to as each of us becomes clearer and more experienced at seeing and reducing the privilege or racism in our work. Below we offer some final thoughts. These are recommendations to the community building field, in the hopes that we can work together differently.

We must create equitable organizations and commit to ongoing internal organizational work.

For some organizations, their mission and vision statements declare their commitment to creating equitable communities and a just society. Other organizations have created programs or portfolios that focus on racial or justice issues, and in some cases on appreciating and promoting diversity. Our visions, missions, and programmatic goals must be aligned with our policies, practices, and the culture of our organizations. Very simply, we must walk our talk.

Within many organizations, diversifying staff, offering diversity training and advertising positions in diverse networks are typically the three basic steps taken. But becoming inclusive and equitable organizations goes *significantly* deeper. Those deeper steps include: assessing policies, practices, and procedures with a white privilege and racial equity lens; examining how decisions are made; identifying not just the diversity of the organizational leadership but also assessing its level of influence within the organization; and noting whether these are staff-driven activities or if they are being discussed by the Board and eventually led by the Board. California Tomorrow and the Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth reported their learnings from their community foundation partners in *Leading By Example: Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Community Foundations,* which also applies to other types of organizations:

> *"Efforts to address diversity, inclusion, and equity cannot be separated from other foundation processes. They cannot be add-ons. They cannot be the work of just a few people, or even a few departments. Instead, these efforts must be integrated into everything people are doing, thus becoming a set of values, policies, practices, and habits that make organizational work more effective. … Across the foundation, decisions— large and small— must be viewed through a diversity and equity lens."[2]*

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[2] California Tomorrow and Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, *Leading by Example: Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Community Foundations.* (Oakland, CA: 2004), p. 24. To download a copy of the report, see www.californiatomorrow.org.

Within the context of comprehensive community initiatives and place-based strategies discussed in this monograph, foundations and other organizations will continue to lose credibility or will have difficulty building authentic relationships with community residents if their organizational practices do not align with their values. It is important to assess an organization's readiness and commitment—at all levels of the organization—so the process designed will be supportive, consistently challenging and include indicators of success.

We must be willing to act collectively, hold each other accountable, and share what we learn— especially the mistakes.

Though sometimes organizations talk about working collaboratively, our behavior resembles being more defensive and protective. This leads to resistance to sharing our best practices and lessons learned. While sometimes there is openness to showing our best side, we definitely are wary about revealing our vulnerabilities, flaws, and areas in which we are still growing. We have a grand vision of creating just and equitable communities, yet we typically discuss our strategic plans with our partners only after the plans have been established. We must work to become a learning community and act collectively.

There are some organizations that are just beginning their internal conversations about white privilege, and some are just starting discussions on racial equity. What is our responsibility to provide support to these organizations, as well as peer pressure to initiate these conversations? When we look at different annual conferences and meetings, how can we ensure there are several opportunities for this discussion to happen and action to be taken collectively?

A clearinghouse is needed so we can better identify, collect, and share lessons learned, and convene forums of activists, academics, funders, residents and practitioners to learn about trends in places across the country. We must also be willing to hold up a mirror to each other's practices and process, share feedback on how to be more effective, and not marginalize those whose intent is aligned with equity values but whose tactics may be inappropriate.

Part of our responsibility is to continue to hold our anti-racism work to a high standard. We should expect our work to be rigorous, use research and data to make our case, and know how to share information in ways that make our analysis apparent. But we must also defend our ways of knowing and methods, the assumptions embedded in our research—and be willing and able to counter unreasonable expectations, research that is flawed and assumptions based on privileged worldviews.

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We must talk about race and white privilege and not suppress it or hide from it.

We no longer operate from the viewpoint, "If we don't talk about it, it doesn't exist." Hopefully this monograph and other publications have made it clear that we swim in structural racism and white privilege every day. We need to support the ability of people to be competent in understanding these issues, having the hard conversations with others about them, and applying anti-racist and anti-privileged concepts to their work. We need to help our colleagues consistently have these issues on their radar screens. Organizations need to invest in providing the training and coaching for all staff members to have the needed knowledge and skills—as well as the confidence that comes from knowing that the institution is backing them up as they address these issues firmly and directly.

We also need to be ready to bring resources to the table as these issues surface in the community. We suspect that some foundations may prefer to walk away from place-based strategies because of their concern about not addressing these issues well, or their belief that their Boards are not ready. We have found that sometimes that is only a perception about a Board's readiness to address the issues. We need to remember it is worth taking the risk to see if this is an accurate perception. If the Board is not ready, instead of walking away from the issues, we need to create a strategy to increase their readiness.

> If we are to take seriously the implications of white privilege in our work, then we must make ourselves and our institutions the targets for change.

Everything we do needs racial analysis with a white privilege filter.

We need to use the toughest political analysis possible, and bring it to discuss with everyone at the table. We need to always make sure the community tells us what it really thinks is going on and leads the effort. A foundation or other type of organization never should impose its own theory of change or strategies on a community; we need to support the community's leadership, priorities and how they think change happens in their community. As we do grantmaking, change work and community partnerships, we must examine our assumptions and theories against a rigorous analysis with significant attention to racism, power and privilege.

We need to accept the consequences of doing our work differently:

- The individual and institutional discomfort;

- The visibility;

- The possible risk of failure; and

- The possible economic loss from refusing to participate in community building as it is currently done.

Many of us who do community building work are familiar with the adage, "Everybody likes reform so long as nothing has to change." We talk with our community building partners about "flying the plane while we are building it" and we have lots of tricks of the trade to help people change their individual attitudes and behaviors, or to stimulate changes in community governance, resource allocation, decision-making processes and so on.

If we are to take seriously the implications of white privilege in our work, then we must make ourselves and our institutions the targets for change. And, if we do that, we will surely react with the same kinds of acting out, resistance, anxiety and retrenchment we observe in our community building work when we are not the targets for change but the 'change agents.' In addition, institutions and individuals with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo will devalue our methods, question the accuracy of our assumptions, resist and sabotage our strategies, and divide us from our allies. That is the price of change and, as a field of work, we have to be willing to pay it.

> What will help us as individuals and, probably more importantly, as institutions and a field of work? For one thing, we don't have to do this work alone. The more we make visible the changes we want to contribute to, the more allies can gravitate toward us, and the more we can be allies to others.

The same is true of us as individuals. We must live with the discomfort of change—the self-consciousness about everything we say, the acceptance of different ways of knowing, the feeling that we are not the experts—while we are in the process of changing our worldviews. If we are willing, we can also accept discomfort as a very useful learning tool. Can we feel the confusion when what we were taught and what we now see and experience don't line up? Can we use that new understanding about what it is like to always have to second guess our gut instincts in our community building work? (That is how many people of color describe being a student in school, or an immigrant or refugee from Central America to the United States, or an intern in a foundation, or many situations where they need to operate in privileged institutions that may not validate or respect their worldviews.)

What will help us as individuals and, probably more importantly, as institutions and a field of work? For one thing, we don't have to do this work alone. The more we make visible the changes we want to contribute to, the more allies can gravitate toward us, and the more we can be allies to others. The foundations, technical assistance providers, community organizations, academic institutions, evaluators, anti-racism advocates and training groups that stand up to say they are working on white privilege internally can form the strongest kind of support group to each other, and will eventually influence the field as a whole. If we are honest about our struggles (we are all learners), we are likely also to attract organizations of color to help us, or at least to wait for us to catch up.

In addition, we can work hard to understand each other's worldviews and assumptions. As a field, we can challenge each other, work to reconcile differences where possible and appropriate and agree to disagree. We can acknowledge our different understandings of how the world works, and stop trying to smooth them over. If we are white, we can take leadership from people of color in this work—even if, as white people, we don't follow their reasoning or ideas. We can suspend our individual judgment long enough to consider if there really is a different way of looking at things based on the lived experience of

people of color. We can find out if we can see what they see before we jump to our own conclusions.

We can also put more effort into knowing our own institutional and group histories, and the history of other institutions and groups from their own perspectives. What does resistance and retrenchment look like and how are they best countered? What strategies have helped groups survive and thrive (Native Americans, Africans)? Our work as a field to know the specific experiences of different national, racial, ethnic and cultural groups (internally and in relationship to others groups, and to the dominant culture in the United States) can be a powerful part of healing and reconciliation as well as a source of ideas and strategies to survive and thrive.

We can collectively develop a positive vision of where we are heading. What would a just or equitable community look like, and how can our work contribute? All of those strategies can take our community building work forward – with humility and humanity.

"Any attempt to change a situation either politically or otherwise should be based on the transformation of our own consciousness … You have to understand yourself to some extent, and to the people in the communities, to their deepest desires, their suffering. That kind of deep looking will bring about more understanding of self and of the community … You learn to look not with individual eyes, but with the community eyes. Because the collective insight is always deeper than individual insight."

– Thich Nhat Hanh, internationally renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk