DIVERSE PARTNERS IN PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

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Few complex issues are resolved in today's world without concerted efforts of citizens and community institutions. Indeed, according to Kretzmann & McKnight (1993), "All the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort" (p.5).

The most successful community-based efforts draw upon the talents and gifts of a diverse group of residents. Strong communities identify, value, and utilize the capacities of local residents. Weak communities are places that fail, for whatever reason, to mobilize the skills, capacities, and talents of their residents or members (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Institutions tend to focus on needs and deficits of communities and the people in them, rather than capacities and assets. As a result, community members are often assigned labels (for example, gang member, welfare recipient, ex-convict, pregnant teenager) that exclude them from opportunities to contribute. They are dismissed as being part of the problem, not the solution.

The first step in moving toward Kretzmann and McKnight's vision of strong communities occurs when institutions begin to redefine those they serve, viewing them as citizens rather than "clients." The second step is institutional recognition of community members as partners in planning and decision making. Successful partnerships are grounded in seeking out and valuing community members with diverse strengths.

"I. FOR ONE, BELIEVE THAT IF YOU GIVE PEOPLE A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT IS THAT CONFRONTS THEM, AND THE BASIC CAUSES THAT PRODUCE IT, THEY'LL CREATE THEIR OWN PROGRAM; AND WHEN THE PEOPLE CREATE A PROGRAM, YOU GET ACTION. WHEN THEIR 'LEADERS' CREATE PROGRAMS, YOU GET NO ACTION."

Malcolm X
Recognizing and welcoming diversity requires a broad perspective on differences among people. Dimensions of diversity include: age, educational background, ethnicity, family status, gender, income, military experience, national/regional areas of origin, ownership of property and assets, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, social class, spiritual practice, and work experience (The Ohio Center for Action on Coalition Development, 1992).

Considering these dimensions is helpful in assessing how successful your program or community effort is in attracting and involving a diverse group of participants. To assess your efforts, consider the following questions:

- Do participants represent all aspects of diversity in the community served by the program or impacted by the policy?
- Does the program involve diverse participants on an ongoing basis?

One way of conceptualizing community involvement in a program or agency is to view it as a point on a continuum. Figure 1, a Continuum of Community Involvement, illustrates a common structure for roles of community members in relation to an institution. At the far left, community involvement is limited to roles of participant or recipient with professionals retaining all power and responsibility for a program.

At the midpoint of the continuum, the institution has recognized the value of utilizing community members’ gifts and assets to improve outreach and services. However, community members are generally operating as “volunteers” for the institution which retains power over the design and delivery of programs. In some cases, community volunteers may be given limited power through placement on the institution’s advisory boards or committees. (For additional information, please consult the Community Ventures: Volunteers as Partners in Community Action, WREP0130.)

At the far right end of the continuum, community members share power with professionals in an institution to direct a program that has been defined and shaped by the community. At this level, community members serve in leadership roles on policy level boards. The institution’s role is to provide financial support and technical assistance to a community-driven program.

The purpose of this circular is to offer strategies for expanding partnerships with diverse community members toward the levels of shared planning and decision making suggested at the right side of the continuum. To do so may require more concerted efforts at recruiting and supporting community members who have not traditionally been involved in board or committee structures. Processes and structures for planning and governance may need to be examined and adapted to eliminate barriers to diverse participation. The following issues provide a starting place for assessing your organization’s current status and capacity related to building diverse partnerships. Suggestions for strengthening diverse perspectives in planning and decision making are also offered.

IN OUR MODERN CIVILIZATION, MULTITUDES OF OUR PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONDEMNED TO ANONYMITY—TO LIVING THE KIND OF LIFE WHERE MANY OF THEM NEITHER KNOW NOR CARE ABOUT THEIR OWN NEIGHBORS...THEY HAVE NO VOICE OF THEIR OWN, NO ORGANIZATION TO REPRESENT THEM, NO WAY IN WHICH THEY MAY LAY THEIR HAND AND THEIR HEART TO THE SHAPING OF THEIR OWN DESTINIES.

Saul Alinsky
Formal means of recruiting for planning meetings or board membership are often ineffective in attracting a diverse group of participants. Newspaper or radio announcements, mailed flyers, and bulletin board notices are examples of formal recruitment methods. Welcoming diverse participants often requires interpersonal contact in familiar settings. Personal invitations offered face-to-face or by telephone are one option. Another is working through established community groups that do have diverse membership as recruitment pools. For instance, you might consider making presentations about your program and inviting participation in boards or planning events at churches, parent groups, or neighborhood organizations in which economically or culturally diverse community members are active.

In identifying groups or individuals to recruit, consider contacting both formal and informal community leaders for ideas. Formal leaders may be ministers, school personnel, elected officials or officers of community-based organizations with diverse membership. However, don’t overlook informal leaders. For example, owners and employees of small neighborhood businesses like beauty shops and restaurants may be excellent resources for identifying community members with potential interest in your program.

Be careful about recruiting only those community members who are highly visible or readily accessible. The people who are most anxious to become involved are not necessarily the best choices. Learn more about their motives for involvement. Make sure they are trusted and respected by the community by asking your formal and informal contacts about them. Keep in mind the people who are often most accessible to a newcomer or outsider may in fact relate better to outsiders than to their own communities or cultural groups (Gonzalez et al., 1991).

If your program already attracts a diverse audience as participants/recipients, offer them opportunities for involvement at other levels. Hold board meetings or planning activities at times and locations where participants can easily observe or contribute. Consider inventorying the skills and special interests of participants so you can then match volunteer opportunities with reported skills. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) offer an extensive “capacity inventory” that could be adapted for this purpose.

"Organizations often try to build their recruitment around meetings. This is probably the least effective method for drawing people in...By recruiting to an activity, you get action-oriented people rather than professional meeting goers.”

— Bobo et al., 1991

If your program is relatively disconnected from diverse communities, a first step may be to build preliminary interest and ownership in the work you are doing, or attempting to do. Case Study One illustrates the use of focus groups as a preliminary step in involving a diverse group of parents in planning a school-based program. (For more information on focus groups, see Community Ventures: Focus Groups—A Tool for Understanding Community Perceptions and Experiences, WREP0128.) It is unlikely you can build sustained partnerships with community members in a project that has been designed without their input.
An elementary school counselor (Kathy) in a central Washington town worked extensively with children from single-parent and blended families. She noted that levels of parent involvement in their children’s lives at school were constrained by a number of factors: high stress levels, cost and availability of child care, social isolation, and fears of being harshly judged by school personnel. Many were families of color with low incomes. She was interested in beginning a parenting program to meet their needs, but was doubtful they would attend traditional classes.

Rather than planning the program herself based on her perceptions of their needs, Kathy personally invited a small group of parents (7 to 10) to an informal focus group. She prepared a series of questions that helped parents share their perspectives on how the school could improve their relationships with families, and what it would take to get them to participate in a parent program. She also asked about barriers to participation.

Based on the focus group feedback, Kathy began by holding “Family Fun Nights” designed strictly for parents and kids to have a good time together at the school setting. The format was an hour of playing in the gym, followed by making and eating banana splits together. Eventually she offered child care for an hour following these activities and met separately with parents to talk about pulling together a “Banana Splits Group” that would be available for their families on an ongoing basis.

Because more parents now knew and trusted her, the prospect of parenting meetings was less threatening. Kathy offered a 6- to 8-week series, every other week, with parent participants determining each meeting topic. Although she had a canned curriculum on hand, her primary role was to guide discussion and offer resources related to the topic.

During the parent meeting series, the school continued to offer activities for the children while parents met in the evening. Food remained an important component of the program, with parents bringing ingredients for a group potluck (often pizza, spaghetti, or tacos). Offering dinner gave families one more incentive to attend, and created a context for socializing with other parents and children in the community.

A commitment to diverse partnerships requires more than identifying and recruiting members who represent diverse populations. It also calls for recruiting general members with attitudes and skills that qualify them to serve on a diverse board or planning group. Without attention to creating a total team that values diversity, participation of diverse members will not be maintained.

A common rationalization for not having diverse participation or membership goes something like this, "We want them, but we just can’t find anyone qualified (or interested)." Examine any existing criteria for membership in planning or governing groups to be sure they don’t exclude diverse partners by requiring previous experience, education, or an unrealistic time commitment. Be honest about how much time and energy the organization has actually devoted to finding interested and qualified members from diverse communities, and reprioritize if efforts have been weak. Finally, give attention to whether adequate support for participation has been offered as part of the recruitment strategy.

From recruitment on, the support needs of participants from diverse communities must be addressed. Financial support may include reimbursement for child care, travel, or expenses such as postage and photocopying. Other forms of support might be providing transportation, offering access to office space or equipment, providing assistance with applications or written reports, and offering translation or signing at meetings.

Support for participation also requires insuring adequate access to your program’s activities and meetings. Meeting locations and times are particularly important. Location issues include attention to physical accessibility (ramps for wheelchairs, proximity to public transportation lines) and considering where community members feel relaxed and safe. For example, courthouses and schools may be comfortable meeting places for many middle-class people, but stressful for those whose experiences in these settings have not been positive. Case Study Two provides an example of encouraging diverse participation through the selection of a welcoming community site.
As part of its educational outreach to families with limited financial resources, a county extension program trained community volunteers to provide money management counseling and education.

However, in its first two years of operation, the program had limited success in recruiting a culturally diverse group of volunteers to serve families in the community.

Volunteers were required to attend twenty hours of training prior to teaching and counseling families. Training sessions were held at low-cost and convenient community sites. Location of the training was prominently featured in volunteer recruitment materials. Early sites were located outside the central city to avoid complaints about traffic and parking costs, most often in predominantly middle-class neighborhoods within the city limits.

In the third year of operation, program planners changed the location of the training to a church serving African-American families in the central area of the city. As a result, one-third of the volunteers responding to the recruitment materials were African-American. None were from the immediate neighborhood of the church; in fact, they came from diverse neighborhoods across the county. But, their reasons for responding positively to the appeal for volunteers all traced back to the perception that the program was serious about serving African-American families, a commitment they saw reflected in the choice of a training location.

Meeting time flexibility can also be important. Many organizations schedule planning and governance meetings convenient for the professional staff involved in their programs. To support participation of community members, meetings must often be held on weekends or in the evening. In setting times, consider when churches or other key groups in the neighborhood have regularly scheduled services or study groups. Be sensitive to cultural norms related to family time, or when it is appropriate to be out of the home. In some cultures, for instance, it may be considered unsafe or inappropriate for women to attend evening meetings without a male escort.

Table 1 summarizes factors that may impact meaningful involvement of citizens in community efforts. This table was adapted from an assessment tool written by staff at the Washington State Children’s Alliance. The tool was used to assess opportunities for diverse interests to participate in the decentralization of family services in the state, a process involving formation of community networks comprised of citizens and professionals working together.

Finally, consider alternative ways to involve community members without their having to attend meetings. Some may prefer to participate in a short-term project, contribute skills to a specific task, or help plan a program-related event in the community rather than commit to a board or committee that schedules meetings on an ongoing basis. Be sure your program offers a diversity of opportunities for involvement as broad as the interests of the diverse community partners it seeks to attract.
TABLE 1.

ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY MEETINGS.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Consumer Involvement</th>
<th>Group Dynamics</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Language Barriers</th>
<th>Decision Making</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
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<tr>
<td>Are consumers of services adequately represented at the meetings? Are they participating in the discussions? Are there things that you or the convenor/facilitator could do to encourage and ensure consumer participation?</td>
<td>Does there appear to be a willingness to allow everyone to speak? Are all ideas being heard and respected? Is there an effort to come to consensus on issues, or are decisions being made by majority vote or in some other manner?</td>
<td>Is there strong representation from communities and people of color at the meetings? What attempts were made to reach out to diverse communities? What can you and others do to ensure that people of color are aware of and participating in the meetings? Are there cultural issues that have not been addressed that are or could be impacting participation?</td>
<td>Are the meetings being translated and/or signed? Were attempts made to have signers or interpreters at the meetings? Are people being left out of the discussions because of language barriers? What can you and others do to ensure that language barriers do not exist at future meetings?</td>
<td>Do you feel that you are part of the decision-making process? Does it appear some decisions have already been made, prior to the community-wide meetings? What can you do and others do to ensure all interested parties can participate in all levels of decision making?</td>
<td>What is the general attitude in your community about this effort? What are your personal feelings about it? Are there things that you or others can do to encourage a positive attitude or approach without minimizing the questions/concerns/ anxieties being raised?</td>
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- Governing bodies or planning groups that mix professionals and citizens need to give special attention to creating a level playing field for participation. Research and experience with diverse groups document a tendency for professionals to dominate decision making. This is often attributable to professionals having more technical expertise, being less intimidated by technical language, and having more experience with group decision-making processes in formal settings (Cnaan, 1991; Hardina & Malott, 1994).

Providing training for community members with fewer technical skills or less board experience than others in the group can help equalize participation. Ideally, training would be provided to both prospective and currently committed community volunteers. It would include both technical training on the issues or policies related to the specific program and leadership skills training that addresses topics such as decision-making processes, effective communication, conflict management, power issues, and leadership styles. The process training is particularly important in order to move diverse partners into positions of group leadership in the future.

While institutions may recognize the need to orient and train community "newcomers," they may fail to see that professionals and/or experienced board members also require training as board structures change. These experienced members need to learn about new tools for sharing power and being more inclusive in planning and decision-making processes. Lacking such training, boards tend to rely on traditional methods for conducting their business and full participation of community members may be compromised.

It is likely that more diverse partnerships have been destroyed at the hands of exclusionary decision making than by any other factor (Cnaan, 1991). Consider the following examples of exclusionary decision making:

Adapted from: The Children's Alliance (May 1994). Special insert to The Catalyst newsletter.
The staff of experts presents "The Plan" to a board for rubber stamping.

A parent or citizen arrives at the planning meeting only to discover that the professionals made several key decisions in a closed meeting they held last week.

The group uses parliamentary procedure to manage their meetings, but none of the community partners have been trained in how it works.

When decision-making processes are designed or practiced to exclude, diverse interests are treated as tokens or manipulated, rather than having status as true partners (Arntzen, 1969). Decision-making processes should be chosen to allow for maximum and equal participation of all group members. Fiske (1993) recommends using consensus for decisions that require a high level of cooperation for implementation, and when stakes are high. A less demanding level of decision making, such as a majority vote or recommendation by a committee or expert, may suffice when full cooperation or long-term implications are not critical concerns. Perhaps the most straightforward yardstick for measuring the equity of decision-making processes is offered by Wolff (1993). He suggests that, "the bottom line in assessing a coalition's commitment to empowered decision making is whether those most affected by the decisions are the key architects of the decisions" (p. 8).

Equal influence in decision making is difficult to achieve when group members have unequal power bases. The voices of professionals in planning and decision making are often reinforced by their institutions, affiliations, and power to give (or withhold) services to members of the community. Group members should be bound to ethical agreements that limit the temptation to influence plans or decisions by unfairly using institutional or personal power against those in the community. One way to achieve a greater balance of power is to appoint or elect diverse partners as representatives of constituent groups in the neighborhood, rather than as individuals. Hardina and Malott (1994) reported that consumers who had the backing of a community-based constituency were more successful in influencing the decisions of family service planning boards in Canada. When the consumer's voice was ignored, a group of community supporters was available to leverage power in the board's decision-making processes. Another advantage of such an arrangement is that representatives of diverse communities are accountable to a larger constituency, and are therefore less likely to make decisions based on self-interest alone.

### Table 2

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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Is the humanity, intelligence, sensitivity, and contribution of each person respected?*</td>
<td>* Are differences minimized or is pride encouraged in each of our ethnicities and struggles?*</td>
<td>* Am I taking up more or less time than others?*</td>
<td>* Are decisions about the use of resources shared?*</td>
<td>* Do I interrupt others?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Do I censor myself?*</td>
<td>* Is there an awareness of the differences in our access to resources?*</td>
<td>* Is information available to everyone?*</td>
<td>* Does the atmosphere promote a generosity of spirit, as opposed to feelings of guilt and blame?*</td>
<td>* Are people dismissed for making mistakes or supported in changing?*</td>
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Source: Adair & Howell (1993)

According to Adair and Howell (1993), individuals develop patterns of exercising power based on whether they have spent their lives as members of dominant or oppressed groups. Planning and decision making in diverse groups require special sensitivity to how we as individuals use power in relation to others. Table 2 offers a series of questions that can help individuals and groups recognize and modify their "power patterns" in the interest of community building with diverse partners.
LEADING DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

The leader of a diverse planning or decision-making group must rise to what Block (1991) terms "empowering" leadership. He suggests that a leader's role is to create a culture where all members of the group feel responsible for building an organization they personally believe in. The first task in leading a group of diverse partners is in facilitating the identification of a shared vision for the program and the community it serves. This common agenda can serve as the group's touchstone and can be revisited when conflicts in short-term goals and priorities surface.

Successful leaders ultimately empower others. To inspire others to leadership, empowering leaders rely on participatory strategies that move beyond informing and educating followers to delegating and distributing power throughout the group. Examples of participatory leadership strategies that model shared power include:

- a meeting facilitation style that insures input from each member of the group
- establishing meeting ground rules that encourage self-expression, honest feedback, and no blaming (see WREP0129, Community Ventures: Ground Rules Equalize Power as Governmental Agencies Manage Citizen Involvement).

The challenge for a leader with diverse partners is to fully recognize and utilize the strengths, interests, and gifts of each group member. Citizens must be acknowledged as experts about their own communities. At the same time, leaders must take care not to marginalize the power and influence of community members by viewing them only as spokespersons for the diverse interest they most obviously represent. For example, expecting a teenaged board member to be responsible only for voicing the "youth perspective" may overlook other valuable skills that she/he would be willing and able to contribute to board operations.

Diverse participation in program planning and decision making rarely happens by chance or because of good intentions. Modification of governance structures and planning processes can ensure diverse representation. For instance, bylaws can be structured to require board representation on selected dimensions of diversity that reflect the community served by the program. An alternative (or addition) would be to designate board slots for appointed or elected representatives of community-based constituencies (discussed in previous section on Decision Making). Criteria for diverse representation may also be established for advisory committees or other planning groups. In any case where diverse representation is mandated, be sure the represen-
tatives in designated slots are valued and recognized for the full range of skills they bring to the group. Be sure diverse members don’t become “token representatives” (Arnstien, 1969).

Case Study Three highlights the work of Fair Budget Action Campaign (FBAC), a community organization whose board structure mandates strong participation of low-income citizens. One mechanism used by FBAC is bylaws provisions that specify income and geographic requirements for board membership. The mandates insure the majority of members represent low-income families, and that both urban and rural community members participate in the work of the statewide organization.

The Fair Budget Action Campaign (FBAC) is a statewide non-profit organization that works on legislative issues affecting low-income citizens. Their activities include public education to dispel stereotypes surrounding poverty, organizing low-income citizens to testify at legislative hearings and community meetings, and registering voters in low-income neighborhoods. The Fair Budget network includes over 5,000 supporters statewide. Membership is open to everyone, with minimum yearly dues of $1, so as not to exclude anyone on the basis of income.

In order to effectively impact the legislative process, FBAC relies on supporters across income levels and organizational affiliations working together. They strive to ensure that the composition of their board of directors reflects the diversity of their membership. To this end, they have instituted a number of policies.

First, the organization’s bylaws include specific requirements for board composition. They specify that “at least 51% of the directors shall be persons having an income not more than 150% of the most current Washington State Standard of Need ($1 dollar

threshold established by the state as a minimal living standard), and at least 51% of the directors shall reside outside of Pierce or King Counties (urban counties around Seattle and Tacoma). At least 25% of the directors shall reside in eastern Washington (which includes the most rural areas in the state). In addition, the bylaws specify criteria to be utilized in developing a list of nominees for board membership. They include:

1. Affirmative Action, including representation of People of Color;
2. Geographic balance;
3. Representation of Local Chapters;
4. Representation of groups and organizations which actively support the purposes of the Corporation."

To support active involvement of low-income board members in the organization, FBAC has also established written policies regarding reimbursement of child care and transportation costs incurred by board members attending quarterly meetings. Up to $2.00 per hour per child is provided for child care, with maximum reimbursement levels established for parents who must obtain overnight care to participate in meetings. Policies regarding group child care are also established in the event that parents prefer to bring their children to the meeting site and have the organization pay a provider directly. Mileage is also reimbursed for those board members who have private vehicles. However, it is often necessary to provide carpools or cover the cost of car rental to insure that members with unreliable transportation can still attend. In some cases, the organization pays airfare for eastern Washington members to travel to Seattle for meetings. While these costs can be substantial, the organization commits a significant proportion of its operating budget to insure that low-income members can fully participate in decision making and leadership roles.

While many organizations express a desire for diversity in their membership and governance bodies, fewer develop written policies that commit to specific standards which support diverse participation. The steps that FBAC has taken to formalize ongoing diverse representation illustrate how good intentions can be translated to firm organizational commitments.
OUTCOMES OF DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

Wolti (1993) discusses indicators of successful community coalitions, those that seek to empower citizens in partnership with professionals. The following outcomes are relevant to diverse partnerships formed to address issues in a community context:

- Are community groups and individuals better able to define and resolve their own concerns?
- Is there an increase in resident participation (from diverse groups) in various aspects of community life?
- Do residents report feeling a greater sense of community?
- Do residents and the community at large have access to and control over more resources to meet their needs?
- Have more and new citizen leaders emerged?
- Has the quality of life in the community improved?

We have discussed diversity in community partnerships in broad terms up to this point. The final section focuses specifically on skills and approaches for building strong multicultural partnerships.

"WE ARE ALL ON AN OPEN HIGHWAY TOWARD WHOLENESS....TO MAKE A WHOLE LIFE WE CAN LIVE WITH, EACH OF US HAS TO BECOME EXPERT AT INTEGRATING WHAT WE HAVE TO CONTRIBUTE WITH WHAT THE OTHERS HAVE. WE MUST CULTIVATE THE MORAL IMAGINATION TO GET TOGETHER-Across LINES OF CLASS, CULTURE, GENDER, RACE, OCCUPATION, STATUS, AND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES. THE CONCEPTUAL TOOLS EXIST. OUR MOTIVATION WAS NEVER HIGHER. OUR METHODS NEED TO BE BOLDER. GETTING EVERYBODY IMPROVING WHOLE SYSTEMS IS THE NEW ROAD MAP, A LEGACY OUR GREAT GRANDCHILDREN RICHLY DESERVE. MORE TO THE POINT, IT IS THE ONLY ONE THEY ARE LIKELY TO FIND WORTH INHERITING."

(Weisbord, 1989)

STRENGTHENING CULTURALLY DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

Working with culturally diverse populations can be challenging and sometimes uncomfortable for individuals who are used to working with more homogeneous groups. One can encounter differences in language, humor, and cultural values that may be confusing. At the core of diverse partnerships are successful interpersonal relationships.

It is extremely important to enter into culturally diverse partnerships with an open mind and heart. Trust is built when people take time to know each other for who they are and what they bring to the group. In many ethnic communities the oral tradition is very strong. Honoring the oral tradition by inviting members to tell their stories is one important way to build community. Inviting members to share their visions for the group and then to blend those visions into a common purpose often is more effective than coming to the group with an agenda. Missions which grow from a shared sense of vision and purpose strengthen partnerships and people’s willingness to work toward change.

Another factor which influences development of trust is the ability of all parties to listen to one another without fear of attack or censure. It is important to establish and maintain ground rules which include showing mutual respect and honoring all beliefs to assure a level playing field for diverse group members. Maintaining high levels of confidentiality or agreeing on a “no gossip” rule may also be necessary, depending on the purpose of the group.
Many cultures have concepts of time that differ from the late 20th century professional notion. The standard for much of the time-focused majority culture is "clock time." Events start at a certain time regardless of whether the key people are in attendance and regardless of whether everyone is prepared or not. Finishing is often determined by the clock rather than the task.

In many ethnic communities, time has different meanings. Culturally diverse partners may not hold the same values for starting "on time." It is often necessary to let go of judgments that are based on "white middle-class" values about time and promptness. This is illustrated in Case Study Four in which community members offered a valuable learning experience that wasn't pre-planned into the original event schedule.

The Samoan community in Pierce County, Washington, received funding from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services—Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA) to organize and offer a family education program to parents and children in the community. On the night of the last class meeting, a graduation dinner, the training team (all of whom were members of the Samoan community) decided that they needed to show a video developed in Hawaii for Samoans to address the issue of hitting children. Guests had arrived for the dinner and over thirty children ranging from birth through 18 years of age were in the room at a local community center.

The training team delayed the dinner for two hours while they taught the group about a topic they considered vitally important. The group held a heated discussion on hitting children, a very controversial issue in the Samoan culture. Once the topic had been fully covered and group members had been allowed to make speeches (in Samoan), the dinner was held and the ceremonies commenced. Was the dinner and graduation "on time"? No. Did the leaders realize what they had set out to do? Yes. Did the community respect the leaders' decision? Yes. Were the non-Samoan group members offended? No. The invited guests had a history of working with Samoan communities and were not shocked or impatient with the change in schedule. It is likely that someone unfamiliar with Samoan culture and community norms around time would have felt very uncomfortable, and their discomfort might have lessened their ability to participate and appreciate what really happened that evening.

Informal leaders can be key community partners. Many ethnic communities have leadership that may be invisible to people outside the community, especially if there are differences in language.

In the case of the Samoan community in Case Study Four, the ministers were very influential. The Samoans regarded their church as their village and their ministers as one of the leaders. Identification came not from one's village of origin in Samoa, but from one's church (Samoan) affiliation in Pierce County. Consequently, having the blessing of elders and ministers was essential in making the program a success. Elders sat in the front row for each class. Each class was present at each class. Each meal was opened with a prayer and each class was closed with a prayer. An additional example of using informal leadership is featured in Case Study Five, in this case to recruit participation in a community program.

A family education program for Laotian (Mien) families in King County, Washington, was funded as part of the Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse project. In the initial phases of program development funding was awarded to an informal group that had the support of its community leadership to recruit and involve families in the program, and to find key members to be trained as facilitators in the program.

An Asian and Pacific Islander Parenting Advisory group was instrumental in contacting and informing key members of several Laotian communities of the project's intent, and in helping form an alliance with the successful community. It was also essential to have a coordinator who spoke the language and was able to work directly with community leaders.

As a result, the eight-week class was offered on Saturday afternoons, a time determined to be most convenient for Mien community members. The facilitators were community members, as was the cook. The class which included a meal was well attended. Evaluations indicated the goals of the program and the community had been reached.
The last two case studies illustrate another factor to consider when working with culturally diverse communities. It is important to bring reciprocal resources to the relationship. Valuable, “non-money” assets are often embedded in cultural groups and need to be honored and shared. For example, for people from cultures with a strong oral tradition, storytelling and value sharing are often well-developed skills. However, when asked to be a speaker or teacher, an individual may discount what they know how to do well in their cultural milieu. It is essential to help diverse partners connect the leadership opportunity with the skills they already possess.

To tap into the full range of a group’s resources, consider conducting individual skill inventories to examine the assets present within the group and the larger community. These resources will stay in the community and continue to benefit it long after outside funding has depleted. Throughout the process, all team members (those within the community and “outsiders”) should state clearly and openly what they bring to the partnership.

Providing shared training experiences in leadership and decision making skills can be very effective in motivating people to participate. Many people who are not of the dominant culture (broadly defined) have not had the opportunity to learn or exercise positive power. Most have experienced prejudice and oppression by one or more institutions in the dominant culture. It is important to give people tools by which they can assume power in ways that are mutually beneficial. Enriching the leadership skills of training team members will ultimately foster a new generation of leaders.

Financial resources can be as inspirational and motivating as shared mission. Creating ownership for decision making about how the resources are to be used is essential to a successful project.

Giving diverse groups financial control can be challenging to traditional accounting systems and agency regulations. There is no secret formula for success. Expectations must be clearly stated on all sides, and a plan for spending must be agreed upon by all parties.

Another inducement to broadening participation in the action phases of the project is to offer stipends and other incentives to “volunteers.” The people who are asked to be part of projects designed to reach traditionally underserved communities are generally members of the community. They come to the project wanting to assist the people with whom they identify in the community.

These citizen volunteers are often asked to take time off work, pay for child care, stay away from home, and a number of other costly activities. It is important to offer support in terms of a monetary stipend, child care at meetings, transportation and travel costs, and food at meetings. All of these incentives aid people in making an initial commitment to the project. They also assure a wider pool from which to recruit citizens from diverse groups to the project. (For further information, see the Community Ventures: Volunteers as Partners in Community Action, WREP01.30.)
IN SUMMARY

When seeking to involve diverse community members as partners in your program or institution, remember the following principles:

- Be genuine in your intent to involve community members as more than "tokens."
- Build trust with diverse community interests by listening to formal and informal leaders.
- Be prepared to share power in all settings and issues in which community partners are involved.
- Create enough flexibility in your program or organizational structure so that community partners have options for involvement.
- Take the time to discover the full range of your community partners' gifts and capacities.
- Make a commitment to training and supporting community partners for leadership roles.

"THERE CAN BE NO PERFECT DEMOCRACY CURTAILED BY COLOR, RACE OR POVERTY, BUT WITH ALL WE CAN ACCOMPLISH ALL, EVEN PEACE."

W.E.B. DuBois

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