



“Top to bottom, people understand that racial equity is an important value of the organization. People feel pride in advancing equity, they feel hopeful.”

Ben Duncan, Director of Multnomah County, Oregon
Office on Diversity and Equity

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5. PARTNER WITH OTHERS

EVEN IF LOCAL AND REGIONAL governments did all they could to address disparities, racial inequities would still exist in communities. The work of government is necessary, but not sufficient. To advance racial equity in the community, partnerships with others are necessary.

The theory of “collective impact” is informative to government’s work to advance racial equity. Collective impact refers to the commitment of organizations from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. The concept of collective impact was first articulated in the 2011 *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article “Collective Impact,” written by John Kania, Managing Director at FSG, and Mark Kramer, at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and Co-founder of FSG.

The concept of collective impact hinges on the idea that in order for organizations to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large-scale, they need to coordinate their efforts and work together around a clearly defined goal.

Kania and Kramer describe five criteria for collective impact: a common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization.

Applying collective impact theory and models to focus intentionally on racial equity is neces-

sary. Equitable collaboration with communities of color is critical to ensure that social change efforts are informed by the lived experience of the communities they seek to benefit. To use the collective impact model to advance racial equity, it is important to incorporate questions such as:

- have specific targets been set and strategies developed to advance racial equity?;
- do stakeholders engaged include grassroots communities of color?;
- how are decisions made and is power shared?;
- is there a clear and consistent understanding of racial equity?; and,
- how have communities of color influenced the design and direction of the initiative?

One of the core components of achieving collective impact is “mutually reinforcing activities, which proposes that while diverse stakeholders do not have to do the same work in the same way, if goals and metrics are shared, the work can have significant cumulative impact” (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Within each jurisdiction, many departments often oversee areas of work that intersect across issue boundaries, and thus one department cannot affect change alone but rather must work cross-institutionally within and outside the jurisdiction.

For example, for a strategy aimed at decreasing racial disproportionality in housing access, one might need to work with a Department of Housing, the Planning Office, an Economic Development Office, Human Services, and perhaps several others. Often there are concen-

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tric circles of who needs to be involved across a jurisdiction to successfully implement new policy. Further, the reality for most families is that city or even county jurisdictions are not high loyalty affiliations—that is, families move around based on a variety of life circumstances, and are not bound by living within a certain artificial line on a map. As a result, to have the greatest impact on an entire community, which might fluidly cross boundaries of city and county, governments will need to partner with their neighboring jurisdictions to share work, relationships, tools, and strategies.

GARE members have found that partnership of different kinds may be more or less important in different contexts. To effectively implement a racial equity tool, which entails involving stakeholders, community partnership is almost always necessary. At the same time, if the objective is revising internal hiring policies, for instance, partnership with community may be less of a priority and instead departments within the jurisdiction might be higher priority. Similarly, while some policy issues may clearly cross jurisdictional boundaries and require partnership with a neighboring city, county, or school district, in many cases these partnerships feel helpful but not necessary to accomplish current goals. In Minnesota, for example, Saint Paul, Ramsey County, and Saint Paul Public Schools are all working on racial equity strategies, but are in different places of the work. Staff from each jurisdiction meets regularly to learn from one another’s work, but taking on actual projects together has not yet seemed feasible or top priority given that each is at a different place in their racial equity work.

Community partnership also looks different depending on the jurisdiction and the policy context. In some cases, a partnership may take the form of an official contracting relationship. For example, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) decided to contract with a local community organization, Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ), to conduct a racial equity assessment, after 30 years of VRJ’s organizing from the outside to push for changes in park board and city policy. In Saint Paul, the mayor’s office brought in the Pacific Educational Group to lead racial equity trainings for city leadership. Other partnerships have taken shape as a hybrid inside/outside strategy, such as the

Community Advisory Committee formed by MPRB, which operates as part of the jurisdiction itself, but directly incorporates community voices through committee members.

A lesson from these experience is that some partnerships may form out of a recognition that the jurisdiction needs outside expertise that comes from community knowledge and experience.

Another form of partnering with others is to respond to pressure from community actors. This may actually appear to be something other than partnership, but rather a productive tension created out of outside organizing, leading to a shift in or catalyst for an internal strategy. In Seattle, for example, the Job Assistance Ordinance—known colloquially as “Ban the Box”—passed by the city council was initially inspired by a confluence of community pressure and internal policy analysis by the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative. This experience highlights the importance of external pressure from the community.

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