Philanthropic
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A BEGINNING DIALOGUE

Marking Progress: Movement Toward Racial Justice
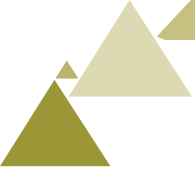
Marking Progress:
Movement Toward Racial Justice

by Lori Villarosa

Measuring any form of social change is a challenge; measuring change on issues that many see as intractable is even more difficult. Multisectoral and multi-issue solutions complicate matters further. Throw race into the mix and it's not hard to see why less progress has been made in "evaluating racial justice work" than in some other important and related evaluation issues.

Convening stakeholders within the racial justice field and philanthropy, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) has embarked on a year-long project to spark discussion that can build on best practices within evaluation and outline critical components of a structural racism approach to evaluation.

Participants in this project agree that it is imperative that evaluation efforts establish meaningful goals and outcomes that truly reflect and measure progress. These determinations must be made collectively, incorporating perspectives from a trio of contributors: those who have advanced the structural racism analysis and practice; the many who knew and lived this analysis and practice before they put those words on their efforts, and those who've supported such efforts.

In the social justice realm, the push for evaluation is not without controversy. Some within philanthropy are pushing for more metrics, while others are making the case that too much evaluation is a waste of resources. Both points of view have validity, depending on how "evaluation" is defined and conducted. We are quite mindful of the limitations of evaluation — but also know that philanthropists and community workers increasingly seek accurate assessment to shed light on the most effective – and ineffective – approaches to achieving racial justice.

The past two decades have seen some great cutting edge work within the evaluation and philanthropy fields to better understand the importance of cultural competency, participatory evaluation, and more recently, addressing evaluation of advocacy and other social justice efforts. Considerable work has been done to make evaluation a shared and programmatically meaningful process (as opposed to a burdensome or punitive funder-mandated exercise). Still, PRE's undertaking is at least in part in response to the many remaining arenas of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector where even reframing evaluation to consider these approaches would be a considerable change and improvement. PRE recognizes that many of these best practices still have a long way to go before being fully institutionalized throughout philanthropy. Nonetheless, we would hope to build on them with new approaches that should at least incorporate lessons already learned.

To kick off this project, PRE invited structural racism advocates, researchers, evaluators and practitioners/ activists in August 2009 to ask: "Are we having an

Critical Issues Forum

Don't miss *Critical Issues Forum III*, a Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity journal in which nine authors tackle, in depth, the problems and prospects of evaluating racial justice work. Available in June 2010 at www.racialequity.org

impact in our work against structural racism? How might activist nonprofits and foundations think about, frame and support evaluation of this work?" The rich, day-long dialogue built on themes and statements drawn from one-hour interviews with each of the participants. The discussions covered a complex set of issues and questions with sophistication, prompting some modifications in thinking. As a beginning discourse among allies, the talks sparked participants' shared interest in digging further. Several of them are among the authors that will be featured in the upcoming third volume of the PRE journal, *Critical Issues Forum*.

Roundtable participants began by discussing some of the conceptual questions that people focusing on structural racism confront when assessing whether they are making progress. They spoke especially of how approaches to and analyses of work for racial justice necessarily call for an understanding of the differences between transactional and transformational change (*see sidebar*). From that, the dialogue moved to the question of how long it takes to achieve transformational change in racial dynamics and particular challenges in evaluating initiatives whose full results may not be felt for decades.

Finally, longevity goes hand in hand with complexity, and complexity implies fragility. "If a change strategy has not been institutionalized," argued Kien Lee of Community Science, "it is very vulnerable to all kinds of internal and external forces. Capturing those forces is important."

We hope that the following highlights from the August gathering spur your own thinking and interactions. Join us as PRE delves into this topic more extensively in the upcoming *Critical Issues Forum* volume on evaluating structural racism initiatives and in follow-up forums and discussions.

Lori Villarosa is the executive director of Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE), a multiyear initiative intended to increase 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. For further information about PRE, including links to many related resources and organizations, please visit our website www.racialequity.org

Transformative, Not Transactional Solutions

By transformative we mean 1) we must rethink societal structures and their relationships, 2) we need to acknowledge that people are "differently situated" and that their access to various opportunity structures varies as a result of this difference, and 3) a single-issue (or "universal") solution to disparity and inequality is not enough. In contrast, a transactional solution is one that helps individuals negotiate existing structures. The analysis is that the individual is not adequately handling a properly functioning structure, whereas the structure may be insensitive at best (and hostile at worst) to the varying circumstances of peoples' lives. Consider the subprime foreclosure fiasco. Bringing underserved borrowers into a short-term, profit-driven and largely unregulated market is an example of a transactional (and failed) solution. A thoughtful re-examination of the various pathways to homeownership and other means of equity building … would be an alternative transformational approach.

Reece, Jason and Rogers, 2008. Christy. Opportunity for All: Inequity, Linked Fate and Social Justice in Detroit and Michigan. Columbus: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. p. 10.

Dialogue Highlights

compiled by Maggie Potapchuk

What are some of the specific dynamics we need to focus on to determine progress against structural racism?

To start we need to address some of the difference between transactional and transformational efforts. All social change happens in increments; transactional and transformational politics both take a long time and; it's not exactly clear in my mind that going transactionally actually speeds things up, although that's often the argument that's made. I think that the way to tell the difference between transactional and transformational is by examining message framing and the level of constituency engagement. If you do not have a structural racism framing to the issue and the proposed change, this is one sign that you will end up with a transactional situation.

Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center

The analysis must be multidimensional — in terms of institutions and communities — and deeply relational — looking at the relationships between these institutions and communities. In terms of success, implicit in the whole theory of structural racialization is different bodies working together to produce negative racialization outcomes, so we need to change the dynamic of these different bodies. Which means thinking of leverage points, with multiple relationships — and conversely, what you are likely to end up losing if you change only one body. Summarily if we attempt to integrate the schools without considering housing, we are likely to fail.

john powell, Kirwan Institute

Structural racism not only challenges the prevailing ways that we understand racism, but it also foregrounds the need to rethink how interventions should be evaluated. For example, structural racism warns that racial disempowerment and exclusion are constituted by social forces that stretch across institutions and across time. Yet most evaluative practices measure interventions in a context specific and temporally discrete manner. Obviously if the nature of the problem is intersectional and intergenerational, then evaluative measures that are not attuned to this reality will likely undervalue the long-term potential of certain approaches.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, African American Policy Forum

First, what is the unit of analysis — individuals? collectives? groups? Secondly, we need measures that tackle unintended consequences. Third, young people never want us to document outcomes by race without pairing that with opportunity.

Michelle Fine, Graduate Center at the City University of New York

I do not think transformational change always takes more time, I think that is a myth. If we think of a crisis — the New Deal, the Civil War — during that period of time things are changing incredibly fast — and that is why we have the saying "never let a good crisis go to waste." It would useful to capture examples of the dynamics of other manifestations of structural oppression that have changed through history. There was a time when the system was held together by a different set of mechanisms, a different set of outcomes – intentional racism – and that changed. We can start to identify where there have been these huge structural shifts and then actually almost work backwards.

john powell, Kirwan Institute

Structural Racism/Racialization

Structural racism/racialization refers to a system of social structures that produces cumulative, durable, race-based inequalities. It is also a method of analysis that is used to examine how historical legacies, individuals, structures, and institutions work interactively to distribute material and symbolic advantages and disadvantages along racial lines.

Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity
http://kirwaninstitute.org/research/structural-racism.php

Perhaps the most difficult challenge we face in developing a protocol for evaluation is that we are operating in an environment in which the status quo is widely viewed as benign. When existing practices and expectations that form the status quo are taken as a given, then even productive interventions may appear to be too modest to justify continued support. What is missing, of course, is an assessment of the costs associated with the racial status quo itself. Given the entrenched nature of inequality in America, what has to be quantified prior to evaluating any intervention is the cost and consequences of nonintervention, of doing nothing.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, African American Policy Forum

How do we ensure the work and the measures have meaning for communities?

Who gets to define what success means? How do we help the community groups define what success means to them so that measurement flows from that definition of success? How does what we are doing on the ground as a community get back into the theory and research so that it can inform the larger group of communities?

Martha McCoy, Everyday Democracy

It is about helping to make sure we are placing bets on folks who are thinking in a structural way, that we are providing incentives for galvanizing and getting input from the community. If we are incentivizing collective thinking with some premium on analysis and evaluation, out of that, we should get some ideas of what the appropriate authentic indicators are.

Ricardo Millett, Community Science

We need to be thinking about how progress can be sustained. What kind of national infrastructure needs to be in place? A response network? A community of practice network? One idea is to work with professional associations so racial equity is a part of their mission, principles and analyses. It is important to think of ways to strengthen our alliances with other fields to build traction on the ground for racial justice.

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

What are some clear indicators we can begin to measure in assessing movement toward racial justice?

We need to measure the reframing process. We need some way to measure how explicit the effort is – that is, is there an expanded adoption of explicit language of structural racism? Who are the earlier adopters of new language in the community? How many? Where are they?

Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center

It is also about shifting the power dynamic — the way power is exercised right now. The way power is meted out — who gets elected, how they govern, who votes. I wonder what it would look like once you restructuralize. And how do you guard it once it happens? What kind of stewardship can you put in place?

Linda Bowen, Institute for Community Peace

We need to first think deeply about the key assumptions underlying what we are measuring. What assumptions contribute to the problem? Are we asking the right questions? What are the implications of the potential findings? More often than not, evaluators are too focused on the measures and instruments. It's all in the approach.

Kien Lee, Community Science

Just as a starting place, we might be able to agree on some categories of indicators based on what seem to be promising practices. There are several things we need to look at simultaneously: for example, we can document the results of outsider strategies of large numbers of people demanding changes and the results of insider policy and institutional strategies, and how both of those contribute to or are influenced by cultural changes in media and language.

Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development

It is hard for me to sort out what indicators would look like because we haven't defined good practice. I think it is little premature because the practice is not there to yield much structural change.

Linda Bowen, Institute for Community Peace

Are there phenomena that can be seen as proxies when we assess changed structures? Such as people living longer? Quality of life starting to shift? Start by being willing to articulate what a racially appropriate and just society would look like. If we start having a more racially inclusive and just society what would it mean for whites, not just African Americans and Latinos?

john powell, Kirwan Institute

Either by design or default, our economic system is inequitable and disproportionate. A system built upon privatization rarely will encompass the common good; so unless we are willing to at least engage ourselves in discussions about our economic structure, we will continue to have the same conversations.

Carolyne Abdullah, Everyday Democracy

How do these conversations become empowering? How does our thinking connect and resonate with generations that have understood structural racism with different words, ways and strategies? Measuring has to help that connection and make that feel more powerful and possible, otherwise we're perpetuating structural racism rather than challenging it.

Julie Quiroz-Martinez, Movement Strategy Center

What should foundations in particular consider in evaluating structural racism?

Foundations have a huge perspective because they have a relationship with all the grantees, and the grantees don't have a relationship with each other. How do we build relationships between grantees? Has to be more than an episodic relationship to really share knowledge and experience. It is also important be clear about which project one is focusing on. For example, diversity is not the same as structural racialization.

john powell, Kirwan Institute

One of the things that has to happen is a collective assessment of racial justice infrastructure. I do not think I would want the foundations to do it, but I would also be concerned about some of the people they may pick to do it if those people are more steeped in evaluation but have less understanding of racial equity.

Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center

What would it mean for those foundations that are interested in structural racism to get their grantees together and build an evaluation scheme that took the particulars of each program seriously? Are there some indicators that cut across grantees' work? It's powerful to bring grantees together and then you can see what's structural and what's idiosyncratic.

Michelle Fine, Graduate Center at the City University of New York

Many institutions want a rigorous evaluation to answer questions that are not answerable when there are many unknowns – for example, "Will success in the short term lead to success in the long term?" Using rigorous and

expensive evaluation methods to try to answer unanswerable questions is a bad use of resources. Looking for tangible short-term changes that people of color say are important precursors of longer-term change is one possibility. We could also use report cards that track how particular racial/ethnic identity groups are doing over time. Then we could combine both with stories that illustrate connections between the strategy and later actions.

Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development

There is a lot of potential opportunity to think about how other large-scale institutions might help to hold each other accountable and make sure that those resources are going to folks on the ground.

Glenn Harris, City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative

Our efforts today to disrupt the narrow conceptualization of racism that grounds so much law, policy and advocacy is not new. Structural racism has been articulated by certain scholars throughout the 20th century. However, key actors in philanthropy gravitated toward viewpoints that framed racial subordination in terms of prejudice, ignorance and intolerance. We are playing catch-up to where we might have been had philanthropy been as open to the early architects of structural racism frame as they were to those who foregrounded today's individualized focus on racial discrimination and personal responsibility.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, African American Policy Forum

Next Steps

This undertaking remains in its nascent stage. People engaged in this work must first create evaluation tools and practices that will help strengthen efforts against structural racism. Some next steps include:

- ▲ Ensuring that racial justice advocates, researchers and funders build upon promising frameworks for advocacy and social justice evaluations, as well as upon the best participatory and culturally competent evaluation practices;

- ▲ Increasing knowledge about structural racism strategies, conceptual applications, systems thinking an principles of practice among evaluators, practitioners/activists, foundations and researchers, and

- ▲ Creating indicators of racial justice progress that can accommodate different units of analysis, regional differences and unintended consequences.

Dialogue Participants

Meeting on Evaluation and Structural Racism
Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity
August 2009, Washington, DC

- ▲ Carolyne Abdullah, Everyday Democracy
- ▲ Linda Bowen, Institute for Community Peace
- ▲ Kimberlé Crenshaw, African American Policy Forum
- ▲ Michele Fine, Graduate Center at the City University of New York
- ▲ Glenn Harris, City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative
- ▲ Kien Lee, Community Science

- ▲ Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development
- ▲ Martha McCoy, Everyday Democracy
- ▲ Ricardo Millett, Community Science
- ▲ Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates
- ▲ john a. powell, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
- ▲ Julie Quiroz-Martinez, Movement Strategy Center
- ▲ Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center
- ▲ Lori Villarosa, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity

Critical Issues Forum III

To deepen exploration of these issues and inform the discourse we hope will continue in the racial justice, philanthropic and evaluation communities, PRE's next *Critical Issues Forum* will feature a foreword from Akonadi Foundation founder and president Quinn Delaney, along with articles by scholars, advocates and evaluators addressing structural racism, including:

Michelle Fine, Graduate Center at the City University New York
Fine's short essay suggests participatory evaluation is a critical tool to hold institutions accountable for racial justice and research validity.

Soya Jung, PRE Consultant
Jung's article discusses the challenges that funders face in evaluating racial justice work and shares some of the ways they are addressing them.

Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development
Leiderman explores ways in which the application of seemingly "race-neutral" processes of evaluation can themselves exacerbate or reduce the effects of white privilege and structural racism. Separately, it also suggests some principles and ways of measuring progress and results of work with racialized goals.

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates
Potapchuk shares ideas about what we can learn from evaluation that would help community organizations work more effectively on reducing the effects of structural racism at the organizational level and collectively.

john a. powell, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Powell asserts that a systems approach to evaluation is needed, acknowledging that a history of inadequate and failed policy interventions shows that 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 that even policies far removed from traditional concerns of racial justice advocates can either ameliorate or exacerbate racial disparities.

Rinku Sen, Applied Research Center
Sen argues that as the work for racial justice moves forward, we need to actually measure the impact, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The evaluation then needs to enable the players to assess and address the gap between the long-term transformation and the short-term transaction.

Lori Villarosa, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity
Villarosa's overview helps frame some of the questions about indicators of progress toward racial justice as heard directly from the field. An additional Q & A with several key movement builders will allow them to share some of their experiences and struggles in determining what has and hasn't been effective in their racial justice efforts.

Maya Wiley, Center for Social Inclusion
Wiley writes that funders and grantees taking on structural racism confront a healthy but challenging tension when trying to answer the questions "What are we trying to accomplish and have we done it?"

A Beginning Dialogue

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