



Working Across Differences in Race, Class, and Power

BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY PROGRAM PRACTICE BRIEF



Building Neighborhood
Capacity Program

buildingcommunitycapacity.org



The Center for the Study of Social Policy would like to thank CSSP Senior Associate Carla Taylor, who wrote this brief with assistance from BNCP Learning Coach Prudence Brown, CSSP Senior Program Analyst Lauren Wechsler, and CSSP Program and Research Assistant Michael Bochnovic.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2011-MU-BX-K147 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, the Community Capacity Development Office, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



What is the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program?

The Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP) catalyzed community-driven change in neighborhoods that have historically faced barriers to revitalization. BNCP focused on building community capacity: the knowledge, skills, relationships, processes and resources that neighborhood residents, partner organizations and city-level stakeholders need to work together to achieve better results in public safety, education, housing, employment and other key areas. BNCP was launched in 2012 in eight neighborhoods in four cities – Flint, MI; Fresno, CA; Memphis, TN; and Milwaukee, WI. In 2014, the program was extended, providing each city with two years of additional support to expand to a third neighborhood.

BNCP represented a federal interagency partnership, with funding from the U.S. Departments of Justice, Education, Housing and Urban Development; additional partnership from the Department of Health and Human Services; and technical assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Introduction

The Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP) brings together residents, neighborhood organizations and city-level stakeholders to advance community-driven priorities in neighborhoods that have been historically disconnected from resources and power. Central to BNCP's focus on resources and power is the idea that increasing funding alone is not enough to sustain better results in disinvested neighborhoods. Residents must also have opportunities to participate in influencing the decisions that affect their lives.

In the United States, where people live affects everything from the quality of their schools and housing to their access to jobs and health care. Differences in outcomes rooted in place are closely tied to generations of racial and economic segregation that have limited where people can live and work. Bringing together people to tackle these disparities and create neighborhoods of opportunity requires engaging residents and partners to communicate and collaborate across differences in race, class, and power.¹

In exploring what it takes to work across these differences, this brief is based on two simple ideas. The first is that race, class, and power interact in complex ways across neighborhoods and are influenced by broader city, state, and national trends. The second is that these dynamics inevitably shape a neighborhood revitalization initiative like BNCP. No community change effort - regardless of how well-intentioned - is likely to succeed without attending to the underlying issues that create and reproduce unequal outcomes.

Our interviews with stakeholders and technical assistance (TA) providers working in the BNCP cities of Flint, Memphis, Fresno, and Milwaukee reveal myriad ways that race, class, and power show up in their work. Residents and stakeholders in each city described the tensions and barriers they face, strategies that have been helpful, and learnings from the process. This brief offers the following reflections on how the BNCP experience can help inform your own efforts to address race, class, and power in the context of a community change process:



From the onset, analyze historical race, class, and power dynamics and their impact on current conditions to help inform the nature and timing of capacity-building strategies.



Use coaching models that help individuals to recognize and address race, class, and power dynamics in interpersonal interactions and group processes.



Establish spaces where residents and stakeholders with different backgrounds and perspectives can learn and work together in service of shared results.



Make targeted investments in neighborhoods where residents have been negatively impacted by a history of disinvestment.

¹Race is "a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups." Source: Racial Equity Resource Guide. (2012). American Healing. W. K Kellogg Foundation. Class is "a group of people with similar levels of wealth, influence, and status." Power is "the ability to control others, events, or resources." Source: Manza, J., & Sauder, M. (2009). Inequality and society: social science perspectives on social stratification. New York, NY: Norton.

From the onset, analyze historical race, class, and power dynamics and their impact on current conditions to help inform the nature and timing of capacity-building strategies

The BNCP capacity-building process was organized around four activities: forming a local team of residents and partners; learning about past and present neighborhood assets and challenges; planning and implementing “learn by doing” projects; and developing a neighborhood revitalization plan. This process, by design, was meant to encourage stakeholders to work across race, class, and power divides.

Over the course of BNCP, local teams have observed that this kind of boundary-crossing calls for intentional and structured efforts to analyze and address existing dynamics. While many BNCP teams had several opportunities to practice this kind of “working across differences” in their projects and planning processes including sessions at one cross-site convening, they expressed that an earlier and more explicit focus would have been useful. For example, as Community LIFT President Eric Robertson stated: “I think it would have been beneficial to have someone come in, in the early stages of the program, to have a conversation around race, class, and power and this larger understanding of institutions and systems.”² In reflecting on revitalization programs in general, Bob Brown, associate director of University-Community Partnerships at Michigan State University in Flint and a BNCP partner, was equally clear about the need to discuss race and privilege: “I’ve seen over and over that we don’t name white power and privilege; we don’t talk in specifics about what’s occurring. We talk in general terms – and that doesn’t work at all.”³

BNCP TA providers reflected on their work and offered insights about how to ensure that considerations of race, class, and power are included during the early stages of an initiative. TA provider Audrey Jordan put it this way: “One of the things I’d say is really important is knowing the racial history of a place and its legacy. You also have to get out, meet people, and have them share stories about their lived experience. The other thing to do is look at the policy context. What are the political decisions that relate to the physical redevelopment of the neighborhood? The third piece would be digging into the data:



see if you can get disaggregated data and look at what the numbers and gaps are for different groups of folks, so you’re working from a place of knowing exactly what we’re working with and what we’re trying to undo.” The following profiles of Flint, Michigan and Memphis, Tennessee illustrate how local and national trends shaped the context for revitalization and why it is important to build a shared understanding of how and why things came to be.

²Community LIFT (Leveraging Investments for Transformation) is the community development organization that served as lead agency for BNCP in Memphis.

³White privilege is “the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.” Source: <http://www.raciaequitytools.org/glossary/#white-privilege>; McIntosh, P. (1988). White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women Studies.

Flint, Michigan

When people talk about the impact of globalized trade on the lives of American workers, it is nearly impossible to avoid talking about Flint, Michigan. As larger macroeconomic forces in the auto industry led to plant closures and layoffs, Flint's economy deteriorated rapidly. Flint's neighborhood revitalization plan from the first phase of BNCP noted that, "In 1978, General Motors employed over 80,000 people in Flint, but by 2006, employment totaled 8,000. The exodus of jobs was compounded by white flight to surrounding suburbs in Genesee County, and racist housing policies like redlining caused even more distress to communities and residents in Flint."⁴ The once mighty manufacturing city that supported a robust working class economy suffered from a declining population and massive disinvestment. Flint's population fell by almost one-third in the past fifty years, shrinking from 163,143 in 1950 to 112,524 in 2000.⁵ As of the most recent census, Flint had a population of 100,569, with 41.6 percent of residents living below the poverty line.⁶

In addition to the obstacles the city has faced as a whole, the BNCP neighborhoods in Flint face even more stark challenges. For instance, compared to a city-wide unemployment rate of 26.3 percent, unemployment rates in the BNCP neighborhoods range from 28.1 to 46 percent.⁷ The lack of adequate schools and employment limits opportunities for out-of-work adults and disconnected youth alike. Getting to the bottom of these disparities requires understanding how the city as a whole is affected by national and global trends *and* examining how residents of the BNCP neighborhoods are affected by local policy and resource decisions, including recent closures of neighborhood schools and grocery stores.

Most recently, the water crisis thrust Flint into the national spotlight, revealing it as a place where issues of race, class, and power collide in ways that threaten the wellbeing of its population. Given this context, Patrick McNeal, BNCP program director in Flint, noted that it is not uncommon to hear residents in the predominantly African-American BNCP neighborhoods levy an accusation like "they do what they want to do" against individuals, groups, or institutions who seem to be using their power to advance narrow or competing interests. In any given conversation, "they" may refer to the local, state, and federal government; individuals with economic wealth; people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds; and even members of the clergy. Patrick describes what this pervasive climate of distrust means in the context of an initiative like BNCP: "If I don't trust you and if I don't think you have my vested interest at heart, I don't care what you say. I'm not going to believe nothing, and we do nothing. And then we're paralyzed." Given this history, BNCP's emphasis on engaging residents in a data-driven process was particularly important in Flint as it helped to shift the prevailing narrative. Using data, including understanding the story *behind* the data, as the basis for goal-setting established a more objective and transparent way to negotiate interests and establish shared priorities.

⁴Redlining "refers to lending (or insurance) discrimination that bases credit decisions on the location of a property to the exclusion of characteristics of the borrower or property." See Hillier (2003): Redlining and the Home Owner's Loan Corporation. Journal of Urban History.

⁵See Hollander (2010): Moving Toward a Shrinking Cities Metric: Analyzing Land Use Changes Associated with Depopulation in Flint, Michigan. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscpe/vol12num1/ch5.pdf>

⁶U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey 5-Year Summary File, 2010-2014.

⁷Ibid.



Memphis, Tennessee

The Civil Rights movement undeniably epitomizes the struggle for real equality across race, class, and power in the United States. After Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in 1955, African-Americans and allies around the nation rallied together to demand the end of Jim Crow segregation and usher in a new age of truly equal protection of the law guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. As a result, two major pieces of legislation were achieved: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, despite these incredible achievements, new barriers were instituted to prevent black voters from participating fully in elections including, "at-large election systems, gerrymanders, majority vote requirements, and other measures [that] were implemented to dilute the black vote."⁸

Memphis, Tennessee is a city with a past and present that speak to such challenges with striking clarity. Throughout its history, the disenfranchisement of black residents has allowed whites to maintain positions of decision-making authority and economic power. One example is the annexation of land that was used to help maintain the white majority voting base. In 1950, Memphis had nearly 400,000 residents located in 104 square miles. By 1970, the population was over 600,000, and the city had sprawled to 217 square miles. Officially, the city cited taxing potential and threats of annexation by other surrounding towns as the reasons for this accelerated land acquisition. The result was a "recapture" of white residents that began to exit to the Memphis suburbs as the black population grew during the 1950s and 1960s, increasing the percentage of white votes, which stymied black residents' efforts to elect their own leaders.⁹

Today, in a city that is almost 63 percent African-American, business and civic leadership is still predominantly white and male.¹⁰ Understanding the historical roots of this dynamic helps to contextualize the barriers that people of color and women may face as they seek to generate resources and step into positions of power. It also reinforces the importance of the collective leadership structures that BNCP tried to create. The decision to start with an existing neighborhood association as the vehicle for activities in Soulsville USA, for example, strengthened feelings of empowerment among residents by recognizing community leadership and respectfully building on this asset.

Use coaching models that help individuals to recognize and address race, class, and power dynamics in interpersonal interactions and group processes

Metcalfe Park, Milwaukee

Because race, class, and power dynamics are rooted in history and hardwired into systems, they shape our interactions in ways that are not always explicit. The growing science on implicit bias also shows that the human brain has a natural tendency to harbor attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. Changing these dynamics calls for intentionality that can interrupt patterns of thinking and acting.

Danell Cross, Milwaukee resident, and Linda Bowen, Director of the Institute for Community Peace, explored this work through their respective roles as site coordinator for Metcalfe Park and BNCP technical assistance provider. A longtime resident leader with a history of community work, Danell was hired to facilitate resident engagement and partnership development in the BNCP neighborhood of Metcalfe Park. She is careful to describe her role as "bridging" versus

⁸See Wright (2003): *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*. Routledge.

⁹See Pohlmann and Kirby (1996): *Racial politics at the crossroads: Memphis elects Dr. WW Herenton*. University of Tennessee Press.

¹⁰U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey 5-Year Summary File, 2010-2014.

¹¹Empowerment is "when target group members refuse to accept the dominant ideology and their subordinate status and take actions to redistribute social power more equitably." Source: Racial Equity Resource Guide. (2012). American Healing. W. K Kellogg Foundation.

¹²Implicit bias is "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. It can be activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control, and can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible." Source: Staats, C., Capatosto, K., & Jackson, V. W. (2016). *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review*. Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University. For further detail, see the Kirwan Institute's website at: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

“gatekeeping,” noting that the latter can undermine authentic partnership: “What I really want is to have partners and residents together. I don’t want to be the person that’s speaking for residents to partners and then speaking for partners to residents. I want them to meet in the middle and work together.”

Danell quickly realized that this role placed her squarely in the middle of multiple – and sometimes conflicting – points of view. For example, while some organizational partners saw value in going after “low-hanging fruit” when identifying revitalization projects and strategies, there were community members, including Danell herself, who felt they should start by addressing bigger problems in the community. According to the latter point of view, short-term activities and projects focused on bringing neighbors together—such as clean-ups and ice cream socials—were important steps but only if they were understood to be in the service of longer-term goals like building a diverse base of residents committed to working on a larger vision for Metcalfe Park.



Danell also faced another tension stemming from her new job: “As I started to take on the responsibility, and to take on the language, and to do the work, then I started losing my credibility as a resident.” In a neighborhood when many residents lacked employment opportunities and were not compensated for community work, assuming a leadership role that came with access to resources and decision-makers at times undermined residents’ trust in Danell’s ability to represent their collective interests. This phenomenon, as Linda observed, is not unique to BNCP: “When people work with residents, they tend to do two things: they anoint the residents that they work with as *leaders*, whether the residents want that designation or not, and then they take away the ability for those leaders to be fellow residents and spokespersons for the community.”

A series of conflicts related to supervision and compensation made this position even more challenging for Danell. Over time, it became clear that partners, residents and Danell did not always have a shared understanding of a BNCP site coordinator’s roles and responsibilities, or the support required to fulfill them. At times, “I wanted to quit,” Danell admitted. “I would have quit if Linda had not coached me through it.” Linda drew on her knowledge of structural violence to help Danell

make sense of what was happening. She defines structural violence as the enactment of historic and deeply embedded values, policies, laws, and strategies that were intentionally developed to diminish or eliminate a community's power to control its fate. Over time, these values and policies operate without conscious intent, resulting in constraints on behavior and options, exclusion, marginalization, and social disparities. As she recalls, "When this stuff started to surface, Danell and I started having these long discussions about race and power and the ways in which the African-American community is locked into this space around race and power and the ways that we could help her to navigate all of that."

The concept of structural violence resonated immediately with Danell because it offered a way to name what she was experiencing and process how harmful it was: "The things people were saying – what I learned later they call microaggressions – had been affecting me, and I didn't even have a way to describe how it was affecting me."¹³ While this realization was important and cathartic, Linda also challenged Danell to look closely at her own responses to other people's assumptions and behaviors and consider what she might do differently to interrupt patterns that perpetuated misunderstandings and conflict. As Linda pointed out: "We are *all* caught in this frame around race and violence. And unfortunately, the only way to start to get out of it is to examine what your own sense of self is, within that dynamic, what your own biases are, and then try not to fall into them."

Using this approach, Danell worked hard to identify and root out any assumptions that she held but had not examined. For example, she initially believed that organizational partners had "all this power" and were simply choosing not to use it on behalf of the neighborhood. Her willingness to question this assumption allowed Danell to have conversations that

deepened her appreciation for the limitations that partners faced in their own roles. Danell also agreed to meet with each partner, as she had with residents, to ask for feedback on BNCP's progress in Metcalfe Park. Armed with an understanding of structural violence, Danell was prepared to think critically about what she heard in these conversations; she remained open to constructive criticism without internalizing damaging stereotypes or judgments.

Despite inevitable bumps in the road, there are promising signs that Danell's original vision of resident and partners working together in new ways is taking shape. For example, she recalled a recent conversation with one partner who proactively approached her to ask for advice on

how he could support residents working in another neighborhood: "What I said to him is, 'Listen to her [the resident leader]. Value her opinion, because people in our communities, people don't listen to them. They're just there.' And I said, 'If you could encourage her to offer her opinions, and if you could really listen to her, that would be helpful.' And he understood that, so I think that's one of the things that is changing, that partners are listening with a different set of ears."

In reflecting on her experience, Danell is unequivocally clear about what she learned and how she uses it to create truly supportive leadership opportunities that build on residents' strengths and experiences. "The biggest thing that I took from



"We are *all* caught in this frame around race and violence. And unfortunately, the only way to start to get out of it is to examine what your own sense of self is, within that dynamic, what your own biases are, and then try not to fall into them."

¹³Microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities." Source: Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American psychologist*, 62(4), 271.

this is that we [residents] need more than just professional development. We need some coaching, some mentoring, some building up, and so that's what I do in hiring people from the community. If I hadn't been going through it with Linda and really understanding my own struggle, I wouldn't be here to do that. I believe that's the way to sustain the work, is to invest in the people that live there, teach them how to do the work, and mentor them and coach them.”

Danell's experience illustrates how residents can take advantage of a coaching relationship that introduces concepts such as structural violence. This work is equally important for stakeholders who have traditionally benefitted from the distribution of power and privilege; the structural violence framework emphasizes that we are all contributing to current conditions – whether we know it or not – and the act of rethinking our own beliefs and actions is an important starting point for change.

Establish spaces where residents and stakeholders with different backgrounds and perspectives can learn and work together in service of shared results

Another critical component of BNCP relates to establishing spaces that provide structured time and support for dialogue, joint decision-making, and collaboration. Spaces that build capacity for diverse participants to work together can be operated as formal groups, with bylaws that specify membership rules and decision-making procedures, or they can be run as informal networks and relationships which establish more fluid and open approaches to collaboration. What they share are commitments by diverse parties to engage in inclusive and participatory processes that help to identify areas of agreement on which to base collective learning and action. Examples of how these spaces can help facilitate negotiation and problem-solving come from Fresno, where BNCP stakeholders worked to build bridges between residents and partners in El Dorado Park and between residents of different cultures, races, and backgrounds in Kirk.



El Dorado Park, Fresno

Neighborhood organizations committed to community development often seek ways to solicit input on resident priorities. However, input is only helpful when it is connected to deeper partnerships with residents that involve not only focusing on *what* residents want to see happen but also on *how* the change should be implemented. Sometimes that means that community building and relationship development precedes more formal input and data collection from residents and partners.

For instance, when resident leaders in the El Dorado Park neighborhood of Fresno expressed interest in hosting a Family Fun Night for the community, leaders from the El Dorado Park Community Development Corporation (CDC) saw an opportunity to use the event for “data mining” to help determine priorities for their community work. The event would draw a much larger group of residents than the regular meetings of the El Dorado Community Leaders and offered the opportunity to generate new insights

on what residents wanted to see happen in the community. When raising the idea with the El Dorado Community Leaders, CDC Board Chair David Otero recalled that “initially, that goal created some hesitancy among resident leaders planning the event because they were like, ‘You’re not going to give these people a five-page questionnaire, ask them to fill it out, and expect to see them ever again. You’ve got to build trust. You’ve got to earn trust through respectful interaction.’”

To help work through this issue, CDC leadership began showing up at the weekly meetings held by community leaders. They listened carefully to resident leaders’ point of view, took the time to work through the goals of the event together, and agreed to hold off on formal data collection until they had established more relationships in the community. The first event was deemed a success, and the resident leaders now host a Family Fun Night every other month. According to David, “We’ve had some fun, we’ve gotten some useful information, and I think there are opportunities to do both now that we’re on the same page about what the actual goals of the Family Fun Night are.” The CDC has since created a new board position that officially serves as a liaison between resident leaders and its own board members.

Ta-She-Ra Manning, a resident leader, recalled this process as respectful and supportive: “I feel like [CDC leaders] are listening to us, and they’re on our team. They came to us and asked us, ‘What do we need to do to help you guys?’ They gave us funding for the Family Fun Night to bring children and their parents together to have fun during the week and do different activities with each other. I completely understand that they want to see where the money is going, what we’re using it for, but they gave us the money and said, ‘Okay. Here is the money. You guys organize it and get it together, and let us know what you’re doing. And we’ll volunteer at this event, so people know our faces.’ I think they definitely are listening to us, answering us, and participating in what we believe will help the community.”



There is always this struggle of a power dynamic between residents and organizations and who should be playing what role and what’s right. We can get something done, but did we do it honorably? I mean, did we do it in a way that honors our relationship? Did we cause any harm in what we attempted to do here, or are we doing okay?”

Phil Skei, Former BNCP Director in Fresno and current Manager for Neighborhood Revitalization, City of Fresno

Kirk, Fresno

The Kirk neighborhood in Southwest Fresno, like so many other communities, showcases the racial and ethnic diversity that is part of the American experience. German-Russians, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and more recent immigrants have all, at some point, called it home. The neighborhood also reflects another all-too-familiar pattern: over time, discriminatory housing and lending policies fueled segregation, poverty, poor planning, and a lack of investment.¹⁴ Kirk resident Michaelynn Lewis, for example, used to walk through the neighborhood with her childhood friends, “looking at all the flowers and just enjoying it.” When she returned to the area as an adult, after more than two decades, it had completely changed: “Some of the houses that you would pick out and say, ‘Oh when I grow up, I want that house,’ they were almost unrecognizable. It was a really hard pill to swallow.”

Michaelynn started attending BNCP meetings because she was concerned about the community and curious about whether BNCP might be a way to make a difference. It wasn’t long before she started trying to organize African-American residents. While this effort was still taking shape, she met *Acción y Cambio*, a group of parents who were already tackling community issues such as public safety. This group of Spanish-speaking residents, led by María Lizalde, had been operational for about a year and focused primarily on the Latino community. “We met the African-American group in a meeting, and they invited us to dinner,” María recalled. “They thought that we were working well, so we decided to join forces.” Once this happened, Latino and African-American residents rebranded the expanded group in both Spanish and English: *Acción y Cambio/Action and Change*.

Acción y Cambio/Action and Change has six to eight regular members, the majority of whom are Spanish-speaking. María and Michaelynn serve as co-leaders and take turns leading monthly meetings. Developing clarity about what the group hopes to achieve together has been key to driving effective collaboration among members. Early on, they faced the challenge of building new working relationships that respected each group’s differing history and interests while forging a shared path forward. An early goal-setting activity where they “put up a list of everybody’s priorities” revealed two primary concerns: Spanish-speaking residents were still invested in neighborhood safety and their African-American counterparts cared deeply about economic development.

Today, members are encouraged to propose – and lead – projects that support either or both of these goals, with the full group serving as a project committee. This approach is practical due to the group’s small size, but it is also intended to help build leadership capacity. As María explained: “The other members of the group take over when we can’t be there. They are leaders too.”

Part of the group’s success has stemmed from building on a foundation of local knowledge about community assets and needs. For instance, the original *Acción y Cambio* group had experienced positive results with a project aimed at replacing streetlights. Group members walked around the neighborhood at night, compiled information about which streetlights were out, and sent this report to the City of Fresno – which led to streetlights being repaired.

Since the streets were still not well lit due to overgrown trees, *Acción y Cambio/Action and Change* hosted a “night walk” with another group called *Faith in Community* to bring attention to this problem. Their efforts attracted media coverage and were instrumental in the city’s decision to allocate additional resources for tree trimming.



¹⁴See Aguilar (2015): Rare Maps Reveal Fresno’s Overlooked History of Segregation. <http://kvpr.org/post/rare-maps-reveal-fresnos-overlooked-history-segregation>.

The group has helped to orchestrate other positive changes, including neighborhood clean-up efforts and the demolition or repair of buildings with code violations. They see a link between these neighborhood improvement projects and their overarching safety and economic development goals. According to Michaelynn: “We feel if we improve the neighborhood and get people to come out and really start participating, then that would help with neighborhood safety. And if we beautify the neighborhood, it would not only bring pride of ownership back, it may start to attract businesses to come back in and open up. And now you’ve got people who might be hired to work in those businesses living there in the neighborhood.”

One of the things that laid the groundwork for partnership was that group members took the time to get to know each other. It was not coincidental, for example, that their first meeting took place over a meal. “At that point, there were a lot more African-Americans in the group,” Michaelynn recalled, “and so we really tried to kind of cross those bridges of trying to get to know each other’s culture – they gave us Spanish nicknames and things of that nature.” On another occasion, Michaelynn and a Latina group member paired up to conduct a community survey. “As we went around [the community] and talked and kind of shared stories with each other, I could see her relaxing a little bit,” said Michaelynn, “and then by the next time that we got together, our other site director told me that she was just totally happy to have worked with me. And I was happy to work with her as well.” Michaelynn has also been intentional about making the time to attend social events like parties or get-togethers with fellow group members, even when she is the only English speaker in the room.

María and Michaelynn agree that dealing with the language barrier has been one of their biggest challenges. Sometimes, the group is able to access equipment that allows for translation in real time. When that equipment is not available, meetings can be time consuming and difficult for everyone involved. “You have to speak slowly and wait for the translation,” Michaelynn noted, “and that becomes frustrating because now you’re losing your train of thought or your momentum.” According to María, it’s equally problematic “when you’re in a meeting and only understand about half of what is being said – it’s frustrating because you have things you want to say, but you can’t.” As a workaround, the Spanish-speaking members usually meet at María’s house before Acción y Cambio/Action and Change meetings to go over meeting details, discuss their points of view, and identify issues they’d like to raise. In the future, they hope to invest in the equipment that will make it easier to communicate. In the meantime, patience, tolerance, and respect on both sides have been critically important.

The Acción y Cambio/Action and Change co-leaders point to other underlying tensions that, at times, have threatened their partnership. Michaelynn, for example, regrets that the group was not intentional about drawing on the expertise of African-American residents who knew how to approach city government and could have helped their Latino neighbors who were still learning how to navigate these systems or were hesitant to do so. “It became a source of frustration for the African-American people, and a lot of them dropped out. A lot of people who started out are just not there anymore. They’ve gone on to do other things.” Also, as Acción y Cambio/Action and Change became more visible, Latino residents felt that African-American members were often singled out for recognition and considered leaving the group. As María put it: “We feel like, ‘Hey we are here too. Why are you not seeing us?’” After a candid conversation between the co-leaders, María encouraged her peers not to abandon the multiracial group, reminding them that “together we can do so much more than apart.”

So far, this belief – that both groups have more to gain by working together – has been compelling enough to hold Acción y Cambio/Action and Change together. At the same time, the challenges they face are real: the group is small, building a truly multiracial coalition requires constant effort, and, as Michaelynn is acutely aware, their partnership is playing out in the context of a longer history: “We not only have to get the confidence of the Spanish-speaking people, we’ve got to deal with the English-speaking people who are still untrusting because of the long history of the city saying, ‘We’re going to do this, this, and this,’ and it doesn’t happen. I don’t want to leave the impression that it’s easy. It’s rewarding but it’s not easy. The only way we’re going to get anything done is if we continue to work together and trust one another.”

Make targeted investments in neighborhoods where residents have been negatively impacted by a history of disinvestment

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

One of the purposes of BNCP was to increase the visibility of isolated and disconnected neighborhoods and, in turn, expand investments in these areas. The BNCP experience in Milwaukee illustrates how patterns of funding have shifted and yields several lessons about what it takes to attract and sustain new investments. Susan Lloyd, Executive Director of the Zilber Family Foundation authored the original and renewal applications for BNCP and has been integrally involved in the program since BNCP's inception. From her vantage point, she has seen how new dollars – both philanthropic and public – have moved into neighborhoods as a result of this work.

In the process of putting together the BNCP application, for example, Northwestern Mutual Foundation, the largest corporate foundation in Wisconsin, became a matching partner for work in Amani, Metcalfe Park, and Muskego Way and ultimately reoriented its work around a place-based focus. Public agencies have contributed as well, with an alderman directing Community Development Block Grant funds toward ongoing work in BNCP neighborhoods. Children's Hospital, which had already started putting neighborhood clinics into Amani and Metcalfe Park, became a strong partner in the BNCP effort. And the Zilber Family Foundation, which was not an original funding partner, also began investing in the BNCP neighborhoods.

In several cases, investors were drawn to BNCP because it offered a way for them to take a closer and more focused look at their neighborhood investments. Susan believes that the ability to work more directly with residents, for example, has been particularly valuable and enlightening: "I think [funders] began to understand the distance between neighborhood residents and some community organizations. While they might have thought they were funding the kinds of programs and services that people in neighborhoods would want or benefit from, they were learning that there was a way in which they could learn how to be better grantmakers or better investors by being closer to the ground."



The Community Development Alliance (CDA), a group of city-level stakeholders representing multiple sectors, has been an important forum for engaging investors in place-based work. Although the CDA was conceived prior to BNCP, its implementation was advanced, in large part, by the BNCP federal grant award and the requirement to convene a cross-sector partnership. Over time, the BNCP cross-sector partnership evolved into the CDA, as funders such as Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Zilber Family Foundation, Northwestern Mutual Foundation, and Children’s Hospital sought to align their investments in neighborhoods. The CDA’s quarterly meetings now attract about 90 representatives from the public, private, and philanthropic communities, providing a consistent vehicle for information-sharing and networking across sectors. Susan believes that BNCP and a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation grant, “happened to come at exactly the right time” to help catalyze its development. Moving forward, the CDA might serve not only as a forum for collective learning, but also as a mechanism for collective investing in Milwaukee neighborhoods.

The ongoing work among place-based funders has raised important questions about how to make thoughtful investments in places where residents have been negatively impacted by a history of disinvestment. Focusing exclusively on central downtown areas, for example, is insufficient if it neglects those neighborhoods that have been the most disconnected from resources and powers. Also, funding practices that can seem equitable, such as dividing funds equally among target neighborhoods, may in fact be limiting in a context where neighborhoods have different needs. More flexible and customized approaches where “investments follow the problem to be solved,” help allocate resources in targeted ways that take individual neighborhood differences into account – and may help ensure that new efforts do not reproduce longstanding patterns of exclusion.

Funders also have a clear opportunity to consider race, class, and power from the outset as they define – or redefine – problems. According to Susan, BNCP helped to drive this point home in her own work: “There are fundamental questions grounded in the history of this nation that are important to recall from time to time, if we are to understand the nature and context of our work today.” Taking this approach is likely to highlight the need for long-term investments that tackle complex issues. As residents in one neighborhood succinctly expressed: “We don’t just need a community garden. We need jobs.” Applying a structural racism lens can help make the case for neighborhood revitalization strategies that address root causes and seek transformative change.¹⁵



Photo by Andrea Waxman, Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service

While long-term investments are needed to change the trajectory of neighborhoods, rapid response interventions are also important for addressing community crises in real time. For instance, when an African-American police officer shot and killed 23-year-old Sylville Smith in Sherman Park, six nearby businesses were burned in the aftermath, including two businesses in the BNCP neighborhood of Amani. In this environment, as Susan recalled, “there was there was a lot of concern about what to do in a very quick way.” It was immediately apparent, for example, that many grantmaking programs were not set up to address time-sensitive concerns, such as residents’ request to provide support for peacekeepers during Smith’s funeral. The Greater

Milwaukee Foundation (GMF), however, moved quickly to coordinate an institutional response. Within a few days, GMF launched *Restore Hope*, a fund to “address immediate needs in Sherman Park as the community unites in its efforts to rebuild and heal in the aftermath of the shooting and to advance resident-led, neighborhood efforts across the city.”¹⁶ *Restore Hope* not only increased and diversified the mix of available resources, it brought resident leadership to the forefront

¹⁵The structural racism lens allows us to see that, as a society, we more or less take for granted a context of white leadership, dominance and privilege. This dominant consensus on race is the frame that shapes our attitudes and judgments about social issues. It has come about as a result of the way that historically accumulated white privilege, national values and contemporary culture have interacted so as to preserve the gaps between White Americans and Americans of color.” Source: American Healing (2012). Racial Equity Resource Guide. W.K. Kellogg Foundation. http://od.msue.msu.edu/uploads/files/Multiculturalism_Diversity/Racial_Equity_Resource_Guide1.pdf

¹⁶See: <http://www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/donors/give-online/reasonsforhopemke/>

by convening a community advisory board to review requests to the fund.

The description of *Restore Hope* shows that resident leadership, a central tenet of BNCP, is an ongoing priority for future investments. Susan reiterated why this approach is so important for place-based funders: “Residents can tell you which organizations are doing things, which ones are just not, which ones are real, which ones are not. And so, if you can actually develop those kind of trusting relationships, even though they take a long time, it is a very pragmatic way to get to the results you’re seeking.” In her experience, this work calls for an acknowledgement of “how hurt people have been and are” and a recognition that some leaders are likely to have had negative experiences with systems. Given this reality, investing in facilitative leadership, conflict mediation, and racial healing is just as important as supporting the development of technical skills such as how to write a proposal, develop a budget, or run a meeting.

Finally, while place-based investors can – and should – proactively build these considerations into their own work, there are times when advocacy by external stakeholders may be needed to raise difficult issues related to race, class, and power. Susan suggested, for example, that the local infrastructure for neighborhood revitalization should include independent advocacy organizations that can “carry forward a message to people in power” without directly jeopardizing the work and funding of individual community development organizations. This observation recognizes that community change, by definition, is an attempt to disrupt the status quo and that many different kinds of partners, including advocates, can help catalyze transformative change.

Conclusion

- **From the onset, analyze historical race, class, and power dynamics and their impact on current conditions to help inform the nature and timing of capacity-building strategies.**
- **Use coaching models that help individuals to recognize and address race, class, and power dynamics in interpersonal interactions and group processes.**
- **Establish spaces where residents and stakeholders with different backgrounds and perspectives can learn and work together in service of shared results.**
- **Make targeted investments in neighborhoods where residents have been negatively impacted by a history of disinvestment.**

The strategies described in this brief are all practical recommendations that can be built into a neighborhood revitalization initiative. An analysis of the broader history builds a more nuanced understanding of the local context. Concepts like structural violence give stakeholders a way to delve into thoughts and behaviors that reproduce inequity. Intentional spaces for collaborative work reinforce norms of collective action across groups that may not have a history of working together. And targeted funding strategies that are flexible enough to meet immediate and long-term community help to reverse patterns of disinvestment. These approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor quick-fix solutions. They are meant to operate synergistically as part of an ongoing and intentional effort to work across race, class, and power.

Selected References

[Civic Engagement: A Transformative Guide](#)

This guide from the Kirwan Institute describes how to transform the civic environment from one of exclusion and mistrust to hope and possibility. The guide pulls from several case studies and real-world examples and provides a roadmap for communities that wish to spark transformative change.

[Community Relations Service of the United States Department of Justice](#)

This web site provides information about the Department of Justice's work to promote peaceful resolution of community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability.

[Community Toolbox: Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World](#)

This resource from the Kansas University Work Group for Community Health and Development includes practical tools to help people understand other cultures, engage across those cultures, and build strong, diverse communities. It is part of the larger [Community Toolbox](#).

[National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice Resources](#)

This information clearinghouse provides research, tools, guides, best practices, and a wide variety of other resources to communities and law enforcement agencies interested in engaging in processes to reduce implicit bias, enhance procedural justice, and promote reconciliation.

[Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#)

This guide from the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) provides a framework for incorporating racial equity and inclusion at every stage of work. This tool discusses how a racial equity lens can be adopted by foundations or other organizations that work directly with systems, technical assistance providers and communities.

[Racial Equity Resource Guide](#)

This resource guide from the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) provides practical tools for community-based organizations engaged in the fields of healing, equity and inclusion, diversity and the elimination of structural racism.

[Racial Equity Tools](#)

This site offers tools, research, tips, curricula and ideas for people who want to increase their own understanding and to help those working toward justice at every level – in systems, organizations, communities and the culture at large. The site includes a useful [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#) that can inform dialogue and discourse in your community.

[State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2016](#)

This report from the Kirwan Institute distills research from the neuro-, social and cognitive sciences showing that hidden biases are distressingly pervasive, operate largely under the scope of human consciousness, and influence the ways in which we see and treat others, even when we are determined to be fair and objective.



Building Neighborhood
Capacity Program

Center for the Study of Social Policy

1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

Phone 202-371-1565

Fax 202-371-1472

Email info@cssp.org

www.cssp.org

Center
for the
Study
of
Social
Policy