

Culturally-Based Capacity Building

An Approach to Working in Communities of Color for Social Change

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Introduction

In 2003, the National Community Development Institute (NCDI) published an article entitled *Through the Lens of Culture: Building Capacity for Social Change and Sustainable Communities*,¹ which described a culturally-based approach to building capacity for social change.² The article broadly defined “culture” and its multiple dimensions to include *race, language, gender, socioeconomic status, age, religion, sexual identity, disability*, and other aspects of human life. It described the difference between “culturally competent” and “culturally-based” approaches to working in communities of color.³ It discussed the social context in which we do our work – communities of color that are culturally different in a society where the norm is to adulate the dominant white culture. It summarized our core values, our capacity building approach, and our basic strategies for delivering technical support and training services in communities of color.

In this article, supported by The California Endowment, we expand on our earlier analysis by sharing a summary of findings from a literature search and key informant interviews conducted with several client organizations, delving deeper into the definition of culturally-based capacity building and NCDI’s methodology, and putting forth a set of learning questions to foster more dialogue about this topic in the community building field.

1 Patricia St. Onge, Breonna Cole, and Sheryl Petty. (2003). *Through the Lens of Culture: Building Capacity for Social Change and Sustainable Communities*. National Community Development Institute, web-published article, pp. 1-10. Website: www.ncdinet.org

2 NCDI defines social change as “fundamentally transforming social conditions, social relationships, social norms, and social practices in communities of color and how they relate to mainstream society.” In this article, the terms “social change” and “social transformation” are used interchangeably.

3 Cultural competency means providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health and social services to diverse populations. To be culturally-based, the capacity building or service delivery process must not only be “culturally competent,” but also focused on social transformation. Our definition of culturally-based capacity building is further explained in another section of this article.

Literature Review

NCDI utilized the Community Development Institute (CDI)⁴ to conduct a review of the literature on culturally-based capacity building in communities of color. The guiding research question was *What are the best interdisciplinary approaches to cross-cultural competency that can inform NCDI's capacity building work in communities of color?*

CDI's interdisciplinary literature search reviewed scholarly journals, books, and magazine articles using spider software and other Internet search engines. The main findings were

- There are many definitions of "culture" in the literature. By and large, authors define culture as *the common history, beliefs, experiences, language, geography, customs, social norms, life-styles and/or artistic forms that are transmitted from generation to generation by a people.*⁵

Culturally-competent capacity building should enhance the quality of life, create equal access to necessary resources, and...foster strategic and progressive social change resulting in a just society.

- Although the concept of "cultural competence" has origins dating back to the late 1800s, it was not until the 1980s that a concerted effort emerged in the social science field to promote cultural competence as a best practice in the delivery of health and social services. Cultural competency is commonly defined as having the knowledge, skills, and values to work effectively with diverse populations and to adapt institutional policies and professional practices to meet the unique needs of client populations.⁶ The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) has adopted a conceptual framework and model for developing cultural competence in organizations. The guiding principles are 1) value diversity, 2) conduct self-assessment, 3) manage the dynamics of difference, 4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and 5) adapt to the diversity and cultural contexts of individuals and communities served.⁷

4 The Community Development Institute (CDI) is a nonprofit organization with an Empowerment Research! Division that provides community-based research and evaluation services in communities of color.

5 See references for various publications with definitions of the term "culture."

6 National Center for Cultural Competence, Definition and Conceptual Framework for Cultural Competence. Website: <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/index.html>

7 National Center for Cultural Competence, section on Self-Assessment. Website: www.gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/selfassessment.html

- There are three main dimensions to successful cross-cultural service and technical assistance provision with diverse organizations and communities. They are (1) having the "organizational capital" or infrastructure (people, philosophy, and reputation) that enable an organization to successfully work in diverse communities; (2) having the "client support systems" (policies, processes, and practices) that enable an organization to work in the right way; and (3) having genuine qualities that enable an organization to build lasting and trusting relationships with diverse stakeholder groups.⁸
- The Alliance for Nonprofit Management's People of Color Affinity Group defines "culturally-competent capacity building" as a community-centered process that begins with an understanding of historical realities and an appreciation of the community's assets in its own cultural context. The (capacity building) process *should enhance the quality of life, create equal access to necessary resources, and...foster strategic and progressive social change resulting in a just society.*⁹ CDI concluded that this definition is similar to NCDI's framework because of its emphasis on "three C's" – community, context, and change.

Culturally-Based Capacity Building

NCDI defines "culturally-based" capacity building as *providing transformational technical support and training services for individuals, organizations, and communities in their unique cultural contexts based on knowledge, experience, and sensitivity to the issues of race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and religion.* In our practice, we are conscientious about addressing race, culture, and power issues in the organizations and communities that we serve. We intentionally link the capacity building process to a broader social change agenda with the vision of bringing about social transformation in communities of color.

Social Change Work

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Culturally-Based Capacity Building

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Social Transformation

8 *Culturally-Based Capacity Building Research Project.* (2005, November). Community Development Institute, unpublished report, pp. 16.

9 Gitin, M. and B. Rouson. (2004, August 13). *Beyond Diversity: Cultural Competency in Capacity Building.* Presentation at the 2004 Alliance for Nonprofit Management Meeting. Website: www.allianceonline.org

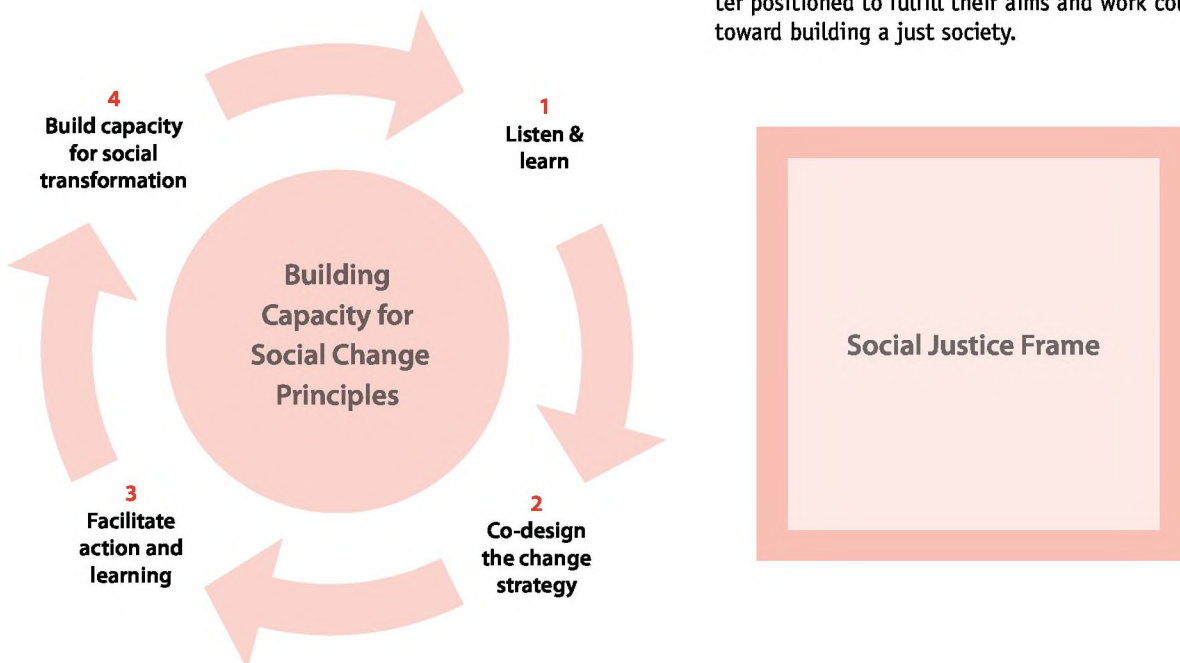
The Way We Work

There is a unique and special way that NCDI works in communities of color. The four guiding principles of culturally-based capacity building are as follows:

- 1. We work from the community by listening and learning.** Communities of color and other justice-seeking communities have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that is largely unacknowledged and untapped. We build capacity by listening to, learning about, and building trust with each community that we serve. Culturally-based capacity builders look to the community to develop a deeper understanding of the social conditions, power relationships, cultural dynamics, and complex challenging issues. We seek out the community's wisdom and apply what we learn. As much as possible, we use project teams that reflect the communities that we serve and who employ culturally-based capacity building methods. By working in this way, we have found that communities are empowered to be agents of their own social change process.
- 2. We work with the community by co-designing the change strategy.** For our work to be effective and sustainable, we must form genuine partnerships in communities. By co-designing the work with the community, we customize the capacity building process taking into consideration local conditions, cultural context, resources available, languages spoken, leadership assets, and other important factors. We see culturally-based capacity builders working as peers – not experts – who are facilitators, catalysts, resources, cheerleaders and critical friends in the capacity building process. By working in this way, we have found that communities are more likely to own and take charge of their own social change process.

- 3. We work in the community by facilitating action and learning.** We value learning for action. On the one hand, NCDI assists communities to develop viable strategies and action plans to solve community problems. On the other, we help communities to learn about viable methods of doing effective community building work. We approach capacity building with the understanding that *praxis* – the interplay of reflection and action – is critical for community and individual growth. Therefore, capacity builders should be active participants in the learning and doing process, from conducting community-driven research and developing action plans to connecting organizations and/or communities through peer learning activities. One of our key roles as capacity builders is to document and disseminate information on what is being learned during the capacity building process so that communities can use this knowledge to have greater impact. By working in this way, we have found that communities are able to address deeper issues and formulate solutions to the “root causes” of problems.

- 4. We work for the community to build capacity for social transformation.** Social transformation occurs when a critical mass of community stakeholders come together to define and implement social change strategies with a single sense of purpose. Capacity builders contribute by bringing together the diverse voices of a community to develop a common agenda for social change. We foster capacity building through concrete community engagement, organizational development, and relationship building strategies. We foster community building through results-oriented community development and advocacy activities. Social change is a long journey; beyond the service relationship, we maintain our ties with an organization and/or community as a peer, resource, and friend. Supported in this way, communities are better positioned to fulfill their aims and work collectively toward building a just society.



Below is a matrix that presents a bird's eye view of NCDI's culturally-based capacity building principles in action.

Overview of Culturally-Based Capacity-Building

Core Principles	The Ways We Do The Work
We work from the community by listening and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to community voices Learn from community wisdom Build trust with community members Use project teams who understand the culturally-based capacity building process
We work with the community by co-designing the change strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form genuine partnerships with organizations and/or communities Co-design the capacity building process Adapt methods based on community input Work as a peer, not as an expert
We work in the community by facilitating action and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop viable strategies and action plans with the community Develop a learning agenda with the community that is linked to its action plans Collect and share information on best practices Utilize peer learning techniques Document and disseminate learnings throughout the community/capacity building process
We work for the community to build capacity for social transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote diverse participation Develop a shared vision and common goals Develop results-oriented organizational/ community building plans Focus on building sustainable organizations

The Work We Do

NCDI's capacity building model is called Building Capacity for Social Change (BCSC). Based on thirty years of experience working in and building the capacity of communities of color, we have identified six key areas that are essential to build capacity in communities of color and other justice-seeking communities.¹⁰

- Community Engagement:** Informing, connecting, and engaging people in the social change process.

For the past two years, NCDI has been working in Detroit with the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods Initiative, bringing together thousands of African American and immigrant residents in six culturally and linguistically diverse neighborhoods to engage in community visioning and planning together and then implement their action plans.
- Community Organizations:** Building strong organizations and networks and developing institutional capacity for social change.

Over the past two and a half decades, the NCDI team has provided capacity building services to more than one

thousand organizations in forty states and ninety cities. Each year, we work with about one hundred organizations – from grassroots groups and service providers to public agencies and funders – to deepen understanding of the role of capacity building in the social change process. In virtually every engagement, we assist organizations to become more effective in carrying out their missions and challenge them to link their work to broader social change goals.

- Community Relationships:** Building relationships and forming viable partnerships across racial, social, and cultural fault lines.

One East Palo Alto is a community-based intermediary that NCDI helped create as part of the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. It is an organization that has mastered the art of bringing together diverse populations – in this case, African Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders to work together on common goals. East Palo Alto is a city that has changed from a majority African American community to one where Latinos are now in the majority. The One East Palo Alto story offers many lessons for the field.

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a descriptive summary of how NCDI works to build the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities of color.

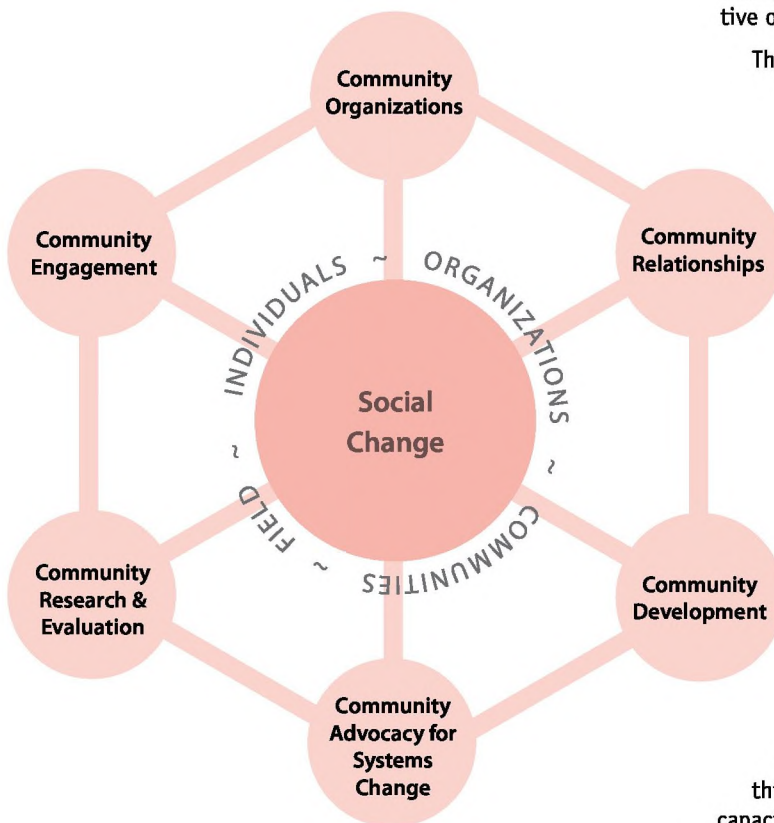
- **Community Development:** Improving the quality of life by changing material and social conditions in the areas of economics, education, health, housing, public safety, and family life.

NCDI is honored to have been invited to work with a wide array of amazing people, who, in their own ways, are moving mountains and paving uncharted paths to improve social conditions for people of color in this country and around the globe. The organizations that we serve typically engage in organizing, advocacy, service delivery, or development work at the local, regional, national, and international levels on behalf of low-income

but rather engaged thousands of community members in defining the strategic recommendations to guide his administration during a four year term of office. The Dellums Transition Team called upon NCDI to co-design this people-driven transition process.

Over a six month period, more than one thousand community members participated on forty-two task forces (such as youth development, police accountability, “greening” the city, financing universal healthcare, and affordable housing) which met weekly and developed policy recommendations on over a hundred questions that were generated through the election campaign process. The Dellums transition process is an example of mobilizing and empowering the community to effect policy change and promote institutional accountability.

SIX TRANSFORMATION AREAS



- **Community Research and Evaluation:** Documenting and telling the community building story from the perspective of the community.

The Community Development Institute is an affiliate of NCDI which has formed Empowerment Research! (ER!), a department whose mission is *to strengthen the ability of public agencies, foundations, and community-based organizations to empirically frame and address community problems and to increase the capacity of underserved communities to understand and impact public policy.* CDI offers an impressive group of knowledge services for communities of color including policy analysis, demographic analysis, transportation and land use analysis, community surveying, and environmental impact assessments – all with a focus on informing and enabling communities of color to use information as a political tool in framing and advocating for social change.

Community research and evaluation is an area where communities of color have the least capacity and where we strongly encourage community organizations and funders to invest in this often-overlooked but critically important area of capacity building work.

communities of color and other justice-seeking communities. Strengthening organizations and connecting organizations both within and across their content work areas is at the heart of the community building process.

- **Community Advocacy for Systems Change:** Changing institutional policies, practices, and modes of investment. In July, 2007, Mayor-elect Ron Dellums of Oakland, California decided to implement a different kind of electoral transition process – one where the transition team was not just comprised of a few leading experts,

In summary, BCSC is a methodology that is rooted in the racial and cultural dynamics of communities, based on social equity principles, shaped by the voice of the community and focused on social transformation. As culturally-based capacity builders, race and culture matter in all aspects of our work. For us, social equity is not only a fundamental principle, but an achievable goal. In our capacity building work, we have found that a community is able to guide its own transformation process when it has good information, adequate resources, and the right kind of technical support. When capacity building is done right, social change occurs in response to the voice of the community.

- ✓ **Race and Culture**
Race and culture matter in all aspects of our work. Therefore, one of our primary roles is to learn about the cultural dynamics and to address the racial disparities in the organizations and communities that we serve.
- ✓ **Social Equity**
Social equity is a fundamental guiding principle and an achievable goal. Consequently, another important role that we play is helping organizations and/or communities to envision an alternative and a desired future and to link their work to the broader social justice movement.
- ✓ **Community Voice**
Building capacity in the BCSC model requires that we engage communities according to their own norms and patterns. For example, if Latinos are the majority group in a community or organization, meetings should be conducted in Spanish and not just translated from and to English. If we are working in a Native community, the talking circle might be the mode of decision making. In these important ways, organizations and communities that work with us drive how we work, and have the decision-making role on their own journey and destination.
- ✓ **Social Transformation**
Finally, we believe that communities can guide their own social transformation process when they have quality information, sufficient resources, and the right kind of support. Our biggest success as capacity builders occurs when innovative things happen in communities of color and are sustained after we are gone.

Why We Do the Work

Communities of color – the people, organizations, and institutions – face enormous challenges as a result of structural racism, economic disparity, social dysfunction, and cultural domination in American society. NCDI focuses on building capacity for social change to enable communities of color to play a pivotal role in transforming the social institutions and practices that perpetuate racial injustice and inequality. We approach our work from the point of view that capacity building is part of a much larger and more purposeful journey that is beyond facilitating the next meeting or creating the best strategic plan – i.e., a journey that keeps social transformation at the center of the capacity building process.

Capacity building focused on bringing about social change goes beyond fixing a particular problem or addressing a single issue. *Working in this way means focusing on solutions and social change, not just on fixing problems.* It is the difference between letting problems define our world or setting our own agenda to be in the lead. It's how we work with organizations and communities that may feel

stuck, showing them how to think differently, dream bigger, reframe issues, ask different questions, and connect what they do day-to-day to the bigger context of influencing societal change. It's the way that we integrate our capacity building work with the social change movement to build the broadest base of engagement across the widest constituent base, whether we are working on board development or team building.

NCDI's approach to capacity building is fundamentally different from most mainstream management consulting. Profit is not our primary motive for doing this work; rather, we are working to bring about social change. Instead of seeing ourselves as experts, we see ourselves as peers with the following primary roles:

- 1. Identify and utilize indigenous wisdom**
Uncover, appreciate, and build on the innate wisdom and resources of the community and challenge community members to look at and use their collective wisdom and power to overcome problems to bring about social change.
- 2. Broker knowledge and resources**
Research and share information on best practices in the capacity building and community building fields and link community members to financial, human, and technical resources that can be used to implement feasible and tested problem-solving strategies.
- 3. Build bridges across cultural identity groups**
Strengthen relationships across cultural identity groups, especially in communities with rapidly changing demographics.
- 4. Provide technically superior capacity building support**
Provide effective technical support services for communities of color that respond to their changing needs.

Whether the capacity building work is to help develop a theory of change, to identify best practices, to design a community building process, or to improve organizational effectiveness, capacity builders need to listen to the community, broker knowledge and resources, build bridges within and across communities, and provide top-notch technical support. This is not only what's needed in communities of color, it's also the right thing to do.

Case Studies

CDI conducted a number of interviews with several organizations served by NCDI to document our methodology. The guiding research question for these interviews was *How is the culturally-based capacity building model implemented and how effective is the model?* In this article, we discuss NCDI's work with two of the organizations, linking the culturally-based capacity building methodology to what was going on at the time in these organizations. The two organizations are:

- One East Palo Alto (OEPA), a multiethnic community-based intermediary in East Palo Alto, California. Its mission is to develop resident leaders, broker resources and services, build the capacity of individuals and organizations, and advocate for significant change leading to improved social, physical, spiritual, educational and economic well being for residents of EPA. NCDI had a key role in founding the organization as part of a comprehensive community initiative sponsored by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation.
- Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), an Asian American advocacy organization in Oakland, California. Its mission is to improve the living and working conditions of low-income Asian immigrant women and their families through education, leadership development, and collective action. During the past ten years, NCDI has provided various technical support and training services to the organization.

One East Palo Alto

A Community-Based Intermediary in East Palo Alto, CA

The Community¹¹

East Palo Alto (EPA) is a small, low-income city that incorporated in 1983 after decades of political, economic, and social neglect by San Mateo County. The "incorporation movement" was led by a group of African American activists who sought self-determination and the right to self-governance for the community. The main goal of incorporation was to gain control over three main areas: land use, police, and economic resources to improve the quality of resident life.

East Palo Alto is located on the San Francisco peninsula adjacent to the cities of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. It spans an area of 2.5 square miles and has a diverse population of 33,000 residents. Over the past six decades, the population has changed from 95% majority white in the 1950s; to 62% majority Black in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; to a Black plurality in the 1990s; to 67% majority Latino in the current decade. At this time, the two other main populations are African Americans (26%) and Pacific Islanders, mostly Tongans and Samoans (7%).¹²

11 The descriptions of the City of East Palo Alto and the One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative were taken from various unpublished planning documents and program reports prepared by the organization.

12 U.S. Census Reports for 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

A wide range of economic and social challenges troubled East Palo Alto during the first ten years of cityhood from 1983-1992. In 1992, the press dubbed EPA as the nation's "murder capital" because it had the highest per capita murder rate of any city in the USA. Since that time, however, there has been steady progress in rebuilding the community, evidenced by new community development, new community-building initiatives, and a new multicultural community spirit. Silicon Valley's explosive economy spilled over into EPA in the mid-1990s, resulting in higher land values, housing and commercial development, increased tax revenues, an influx of middle- to upper-income residents and, as a by-product, more gentrification.

The Organization

The One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (OEPA) was a Hewlett Foundation-sponsored, community change initiative that began in 1999 and ended in 2006. OEPA was founded by community members on the assumption that effective, deep-rooted, and long-term solutions to poverty and disinvestment can only be achieved if the community itself has a primary role in planning its future and directing the community change process.

During the past six years, OEPA evolved through four main stages – an initial planning phase from July 1999 to December 2000; the formation of a community-based intermediary from January 2001 to December 2002; operating as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization beginning in November 2003; and, since January 2007, functioning as a freestanding nonprofit without Hewlett Foundation funding or oversight.

OEPA's vision is *to transform East Palo Alto into a community where residents celebrate their diversity and are engaged, informed, and empowered to attain the economic, social, and educational resources they need to enjoy a good quality of life. Its mission is to develop resident leaders, broker resources and services, build the capacity of individuals and organizations, and advocate for significant change leading to improved social, physical, spiritual, educational, and economic well being for residents of EPA.* OEPA is the only organization in EPA that brings together all the different ethnic groups to advance a common community agenda.

NCDI's Role

CDI played a key role in creating and developing OEPA from its inception in 1999. Omowale Satterwhite, founder and president of both CDI and NCDI, helped to launch the initiative in 1999. As the "community partner," CDI coordinated the initial community planning process and provided the first staff team for the initiative. Over the next five years, NCDI staff provided capacity building support for organizational planning, board development, human resources, and community engagement.

The Methodology

Working from the Community

As the community partner, NCDI did extensive outreach into the community in the last two quarters of 1999. NCDI capacity builders talked with residents, organizational, faith-based, and civic leaders from the three primary ethnic populations (Latinos, African Americans, and Pacific Island-

ers) and facilitated weekly community forums on key issues such as education, housing, and police/community relations to lift up the diverse voices in the community. From the thirty to forty people who consistently attended these forums, community residents formed a community advisory group to learn more about the social conditions, power relationships, cultural dynamics, and complex, challenging issues in the community.

Working with the Community

As the community partner, NCDI coordinated a year-long planning process in the year 2000. During the first nine months of the planning process, an average of one hundred and fifty residents attended the weekly community planning meetings. At each meeting, there was a greeter from each cultural community, a multilingual registration process, and multiethnic food, childcare, and written/oral translation for the participants. The meetings began and ended with community-building activities to promote a sense of community, connect residents from different ethnic groups, and build trust in the initiative. Following the advice of the community advisory body, we formed ten planning groups that met weekly for six months. Each planning group had a facilitator, recorder, researcher, and translators (as required). After each weekly meeting, a one page summary was prepared for each planning group in multiple languages and shared with the group members at the next regular weekly meeting. From time to time, the planning groups were invited to share information about their work to keep everyone informed about the entire planning process.

Working in the Community

The Haas Center for Public Services at Stanford University was selected to be the “University Partner” by the foundation. Its role was to conduct research, provide technical assistance, and engage students in the community planning process. Thus, on a weekly basis, Stanford students attended meetings, served as recorders for community planning groups, and conducted research between meetings to respond to research requests. The Haas Center compiled a demographic profile of East Palo Alto and published a directory of agencies, organizations, and businesses in the community. In addition to the research tasks undertaken by the Haas Center, NCDI, in its community partner role, hosted peer-to-peer learning dialogues with activists from several communities and sponsored periodic events to promote cross-cultural understanding among the residents.

Working for the Community

After the first two years of the initiative, NCDI’s role shifted to “technical assistance intermediary” (2002-2004) for the entire initiative. In this capacity, we provided technical support and training services in the areas of organizational planning, board development, human resources, and community engagement. Specifically, our role was to conduct an annual assessment, develop a technical support plan, and support OEPA in building its board, expanding its membership, hiring an Executive Director, drafting an annual plan, raising funds, and addressing other key organizational issues. Since 2005, our focus has been on helping OEPA to develop and to implement transition strategies to sustain the organization beyond 2006 after the end of the Hewlett grant.

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates

An Immigrant Rights Organization in Oakland, CA

The Population¹³

Women of color have historically suffered discrimination due to racism and sexism in this country. Immigrant women of color have also always faced another set of changes: anti-immigrant sentiment and language discrimination. This long and complex history of anti-immigrant sentiments, institutionalized discrimination, and traditional obstacles (i.e., lack of literacy, poverty) serve to prevent immigrant women and their children from fully participating in the political process and advancing their needs.

The constituents of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) are low-income, immigrant women who work in the garment, electronics, hotel, and other low wage industries in Alameda and Santa Clara counties. The garment industry has earned the reputation of being a sweatshop industry because garment jobs typically involve low wages, instability, and severe working conditions. Women working in the electronics and hotel industries also have similar workplace problems, especially lack of health insurance.

The Organization

AIWA was founded in November 1983 by workers, community activists, and union organizers. For the last twenty-four years, its mission has been to promote justice and power among low-income, limited English speaking Asian immigrant women workers and youth so that they can bring about positive changes in their workplace, community, and broader society. AIWA serves low-income Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean immigrant women between 21 and 65 years old and youth between 16 and 21 years old.

AIWA is a community-based organization that works to improve the living and working conditions of low-income Asian immigrant women and their families through education, leadership development, and collective action. The organization is committed to providing women and youth with the resources, tools, and opportunities to be their own best advocates as they work toward social and economic justice. It promotes civic engagement, giving voices to immigrant women and youth who historically have none as they work to create systemic change.

All of AIWA’s programs are designed to encourage participation and leadership development. AIWA has learned through experience that the best way to develop leadership among low-income immigrant women and youth is through replicated peer trainings. AIWA’s current program scope includes outreach activities, literacy and computer classes, leadership development and skills training programs, health and safety workshops, and campaign internships. It has found that having committees of peer leaders to work on these programs and guide the organization’s direction is the best method to develop collective grassroots leadership and remain strong while working on targeted justice campaigns.

13 The descriptions of AIWA were taken from various unpublished planning documents and program reports prepared by the organization.

AIWA had developed a specific leadership methodology called the “Community Transformational Organizing Strategy” (CTOS) to develop immigrant women and youths’ self-confidence, leadership, and active participation in the campaigns to improve their working and living conditions. The CTOS methodology was developed after many years of working with the immigrant community and observing the process that occurs as women become involved in civic engagement.

NCDI’s Role

NCDI has provided capacity building support to AIWA during the past ten years. Our initial work in the mid-1990s involved facilitating AIWA staff meetings focused on its national garment workers campaign. Since then, NCDI’s primary roles have been to assist with organizational planning, to provide leadership training in such areas as facilitating meetings, strategic planning, and board development, and to facilitate staff meetings to address key organizational issues.

The Methodology

Working from the Community

During the initial engagement period after AIWA had launched a national garment workers campaign, NCDI was invited to facilitate staff planning meetings addressing various campaign issues. At that time, the NCDI president had only a limited understanding of Asian cultures. Consequently, he gave high priority to learning about cultural norms in Asian communities and about the organizational culture at AIWA. With painstaking patience, he asked questions, read documents, observed meetings, and sought advice about how to best serve the organization. Throughout the learning process, AIWA staff worked with and guided him in deepening his knowledge of the organization and the Asian community. As a result, the president was able to establish a high level of trust and build an enduring partnership with the organization.

Working with the Community

Throughout our work with AIWA, the main strategy has been to utilize a co-design process to define NCDI’s scope of work and methodology for serving the organization. Typically, this involves conducting joint planning meetings with the entire staff and, where applicable, similar meetings with Membership Board members. In the co-design process, the president attends one or more meetings to get an orientation and status report on the organization, facilitates a dialogue with the staff to identify outcomes and strategies for the technical support project, and then drafts a technical support plan with outcomes, strategies, timelines, roles, and costs. The draft plan is reviewed by the AIWA staff and desired revisions are communicated to NCDI. This process continues until the AIWA staff is satisfied that the scope of work and methodology are adequate to meet their needs.

Over the past ten years, NCDI has assisted AIWA with developing various organizational plans. One of our basic tenets during each planning phase was to create learning spaces where people could participate in the planning process based on their own cultural norms and social practices. Thus, our approach was to first hold separate planning meetings with Chinese garment workers in Oakland and Korean electronics workers in San Jose. Since the NCDI president

was the only person in these meetings who did not speak the native language, all meetings were conducted in Chinese or Korean with periodic translations into English. Further, all ideas recorded on easel paper were simultaneously written in two languages – Chinese/Korean and English.

After the initial planning meetings in Oakland and San Jose, the next step was to convene joint meetings to develop an integrated organizational plan. These meetings were all conducted in three languages with simultaneous translation of conversations and written documents including the recordings on easel paper. For example, the Chinese participants usually spoke in their native language with simultaneous translation into the Korean and English languages. When Korean participants spoke, they too talked in their native language with translation into Chinese and English. This is how culturally-based capacity building works, by creating spaces where people can participate in their own culturally authentic ways.

Working in the Community

After the national garment workers campaign was won, AIWA tackled the basic question of “what next?” in its social justice work. One of the perplexing questions that had not been resolved was how to develop an integrated program framework for its service delivery and organizing activities. In our work with other organizations facing the same issue, NCDI had designed a seven step planning process for developing an integrated program plan. The seven steps were building awareness, initial engagement, member enrollment, service provision, leadership training, organizational leadership roles, and community/movement leadership. NCDI shared this model with AIWA staff, who used it to develop the CTOS leadership methodology. After the initial framing of the CTOS approach, the organization undertook an extensive program review to deepen understanding of its leadership methodology and developed a sophisticated database to document and track the impact of its leadership development work. Today, AIWA is a learning organization that engages in data-smart program planning on a regular and consistent basis.

Working for the Community

NCDI has not had a direct role in assisting AIWA to implement its social change strategy and apply the CTOS model.

Learning Questions

In thinking about the next phase of our work, NCDI has identified a set of key capacity building questions for community builders and organizational leaders. These core questions are presented below.

For Community Builders

The basic community-building questions that culturally-based capacity builders need to be mindful of include the following:

- 1. Community Engagement**
How do we engage residents and other constituents to play active, relevant, and meaningful roles in the social change process?
- 2. Organizational Infrastructure**
How do we integrate organizational development with building institutional capacity for social change?
- 3. Relationship Building**
How do we build sustainable and authentic cross-cultural partnerships? How do we involve cultural groups that may be reticent about coming to the table?
- 4. Community Development**
How do we change the socioeconomic conditions in communities to improve the quality of life? How do we ensure access to institutional services and/or resources and equitable results when we bring different cultural groups together?
- 5. Organizing/Advocacy for Institutional Change**
How do we mobilize and empower communities to work together to achieve policy change and institutional accountability?
- 6. Community Research and Evaluation**
How do we help communities to document, analyze, frame, and tell their own stories about lessons learned and best practices in building healthy communities?

For Organizational Leaders

There is a direct relationship between the quality of life in a community and the capacity of its institutions to address basic human needs, build community, promote social transformation, and achieve institutional change. Therefore, organizational capacity-building is at the heart of the social change process. The basic organizational development challenges for capacity builders who work from a culturally-based perspective are¹⁴

- 1. Identity (Vision, Mission, Values, Strategies, and Niche)**
How do we support organizations in developing identity statements that define their basic purposes, articulate their strategic aims, reflect the voices of their diverse

14 These seven capacity areas are generally accepted in the management services field as basic requirements for building a sustainable organization.

constituencies, and commit them to advancing the cause of social justice?

- 2. Leadership and Governance**

How do we support organizations in developing diverse boards that govern with vision, competence, and compassion? What are the guiding principles for determining who should be at the table and defining the roles they should play?

- 3. Planning**

How do we support organizations in developing long-term and short-term plans that are responsive to diverse community voices?

- 4. Finance**

How do we support organizations in developing strategies to increase philanthropic giving (time, talent, and money) from within communities of color and to launch enterprise activities resulting in sustainable earned income streams?

- 5. Systems and Infrastructure**

How do we support organizations in building an organizational culture that values equity, inclusiveness, and diversity? Are these systems the same or how are they different from mainstream organizations?

- 6. Human Resources**

How do we support organizations in recruiting, training, and maintaining a culturally diverse and capable staff team? How do we help them to deal with power sharing issues? What are the most effective tools when we are trying to work through language differences and cultural expectations in organizational and community settings?

- 7. Program Development, Management, and Evaluation**

How do we support organizations in developing culturally-based programs that are responsive to the community's voice? What are culturally appropriate ways for engaging constituents and developing partnerships with other community organizations?

Final Thoughts

Building Capacity for Social Change is offered to capacity and community builders as a tested way of working in communities of color, and ought not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all "cookie cutter" template. The ways of working described herein need to be adapted to each organization and/or community in which one is invited to work. This approach, because it honors the indigenous wisdom and assets of each community and organization, will yield effective results with most communities and organizations working for social change.

To lead people walk beside them...

As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate...When the best leader's work is done the people say, "We did it ourselves!" — Lao Tzu

About the Authors

Omowale Satterwhite

Frank J. Omowale Satterwhite is a national leader in community development who focuses on working with communities of color and other marginalized communities. He has personally provided technical assistance to over one thousand grassroots community-based agencies and social justice organizations throughout the United States and abroad. He has incorporated the values of equity, democracy, and local empowerment for social change throughout all of these efforts. He completed an undergraduate degree at Howard University, a master's degree at Southern Illinois University, and holds a PhD from Stanford University.

Omo is currently the president of the National Community Development (NCDI) Institute which he founded in 2001. He is also the founder and a current board member of the parent organization, the Community Development Institute (CDI) located in East Palo Alto, California, with which he has been involved for twenty-three years. Both organizations are nonprofits dedicated to assisting low-income communities in combating the causes of racism and poverty through political empowerment, economic development, and social revitalization. Their work focuses on strengthening community-based institutions, training indigenous leaders, developing strong families, and building healthier and safer communities.

Through this work, Omo has not only supported the development of many communities throughout the country, but has also inspired many hundreds of individuals to use the methods and strategies that he has developed. These individuals have consistently encouraged him to describe and codify his methods, which is why this article has been written.

Shiree Teng

Shiree Teng, an independent capacity builder to foundations and nonprofit organizations, has over twenty-five years of experience working with public and nonprofit organizations as front line staff, executive director, board chair, trainer, and consultant. Her fields of expertise include community organizing, public health, housing, early care and education, employment and training, and labor education.

Shiree was a former program officer at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy Program, and currently serves in a consultant capacity to this and other foundations. Shiree is skilled in facilitation, organizational assessment, planning, and evaluation, stakeholder analysis, board and staff development, communications, diversity, and uses a culturally-based orientation to her practice.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Shiree is fluent in three spoken dialects of Chinese, and has a lifelong appreciation of issues facing immigrants and communities of color. In 1996, she was selected to participate in an international seminar on "NGOs' Role in Building Civil Societies," held in Salzburg, Austria, with fellowship support from the W.K.

Kellogg Foundation. Shiree received her BA in Psychology and Social Welfare from the University of California, Berkeley, and is working on a doctoral degree in Human and Organizational Development.

About NCDI

NCDI is a decidedly different kind of capacity building organization. In contrast to mainstream consulting firms where the clientele are largely corporations, public agencies, or large nonprofit organizations, NCDI's focus is on low-income communities of color, particularly emerging organizations and groups.

If we worked primarily with mainstream agencies, we would be called "consultants." However, at NCDI, we prefer to be called "organization helpers" or "capacity builders" who facilitate social change.

In conventional consulting contexts, we would be seen as experts who have more knowledge and wisdom than those whom we serve. At NCDI, we understand that wisdom lies within and flows from the community.

In traditional consulting firms, the primary motive for the work is profit; at NCDI, our motive is to build sustainable capacity for social change and community transformation where power and resources are more equitably distributed in our society.

Through it all, we consistently remind ourselves to be humble and vigilant in serving communities as responsible agents of social change. Seeing ourselves as servants in the change process reminds us of the greater purpose of our work.

Please see our website, www.ncdinet.org for more information.

The roles of capacity builders are to help individuals, organizations, and communities to...

	Develop the Leadership Capacity of Individuals	Strengthen the Capacity of Community Institutions	Transform Communities as a Whole
Engage Community Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement leadership development programs for community members ▪ Engage community members in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing a shared vision for community change ○ Identifying common community goals, assets, and solutions ○ Implementing effective community outreach/education programs ○ Building trusting cross-cultural relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and implement a consistent community feedback mechanism ▪ Recruit community residents and service consumers as board and staff members ▪ Develop a sustainable feedback loop involving residents and/or service consumers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create sustainable community outreach/education channels ▪ Develop and implement a community change agenda that empowers residents, builds leadership, and defines a social change vision ▪ Develop community-based, constituent-led structures that enable people to manage their own affairs
Develop Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design, develop, and implement leadership development programs for residents and organizational leaders ▪ Develop strategies to organize residents and other stakeholders to hold community institutions accountable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct regular organizational assessments, strategic planning, and evaluations ▪ Build core organizational capacities to better lead, manage, govern and adapt to external changes ▪ Build an organizational culture that integrates capacity building as a norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster a community-wide culture that values organizational effectiveness and capacity building ▪ Form partnerships with stakeholder groups ▪ Promote a systems model that emphasizes collaborative approaches to delivering services
Build Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage in, facilitate, and lead cross-cultural bridge-building ▪ Strengthen constituents' ability to build social networks and capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build internal cross-cultural bridges at all levels ▪ Organize clients, peer community-based organizations, funders, and policy makers to develop shared goals and achieve results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote understanding of the cultural practices and values of diverse groups ▪ Celebrate, embrace, and honor cultural traditions, preferences, beliefs, and achievements

Develop the Leadership Capacity of Individuals	Strengthen the Capacity of Community Institutions	Transform Communities as a Whole	
<p>Enhance Community Infrastructure and Improve Social Conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand knowledge through training and peer-to-peer learning in areas such as housing, jobs, education, etc. Compile and distribute information on current and future community development projects and plans Train community members to become wise consumers of experts and consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide baseline data on material and social conditions in the community Implement programs that reflect the community's vision and improve material and social conditions Mobilize and leverage private, public, and community resources including money, knowledge, networks, and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and hold a community change agenda and corresponding baseline and performance measures for residents, institutions, and external stakeholders Develop a community report card and conduct periodic quality-of-life assessments
<p>Advocate for Systems Change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage residents and leaders to identify key advocacy issues and work together for a common cause Provide training to develop research, planning, organizing, communications, and other critical advocacy skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build organizational capacity to conduct and engage in power mapping processes Identify existing advocacy organizations and campaigns Engage peer organizations and their constituents in defining advocacy goals and developing the capacity to speak with one voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review community history and former advocacy campaigns with stakeholder groups Facilitate a process to define and update the community's policy agenda Engage community stakeholders in advocating for policy changes that will directly benefit the neighborhood Link resident leaders to a broad policy development process (city, county, and region) Develop a community-based process that will be used to hold organizations and key stakeholders accountable to achieving shared results
<p>Document and Tell the Community's Story</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the capacity of community members to develop their own research and learning agenda Provide training in participatory evaluation and other popular education/evaluation methods Engage residents and leaders in the evaluation process and share findings with them Create the demand and support efforts to tell the community's story from the residents' perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive asset map Conduct regular assessments of program effectiveness and project outcomes using both standard and participatory evaluation methods Engage community organizations in continuous research and development, modeling innovative practices and leading by example Build the capacity to document and share organizational journeys, lessons, and insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile information on community history, demography, organizations, leadership groups, social networks, planning projects, advocacy campaigns, and capacity building programs Develop, instill, and refine the community's capacity to tell its own stories Document and share the community's learnings and journey with others

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