



**STRATEGIES FOR CREATING WELCOMING
COMMUNITIES**

INNOVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WELCOMING AMERICA AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS CLINTON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

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WELCOMING
AMERICA



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▲ *Building a Nation of Neighbors*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the spring and summer of 2011, graduate student Kate Raum researched innovative strategies for creating welcoming communities for immigrants and refugees in the US. Little research exists in the relatively new field of receiving community work. This document contains qualitative analyses of nine case studies on projects, programs, and leadership that have creatively addressed integration in receiving communities.

Welcoming America identifies three areas where community integration can be addressed most effectively: local leadership, messaging and media, and fostering contact between immigrants and longtime residents. The case studies included here look at these areas and explore varying situations, from specific instances of community action to general programs focused on cultivating welcoming communities. The cases selected were the most innovative projects that came to light, directly or tangentially, through brainstorming of the Receiving Communities Initiative.

The first three case studies survey how local leadership and community integration converge from the perspectives of a pastor, a mayor, and an immigrant organizer. The next three studies focus on messaging campaigns that use documentaries, social media, newspaper, and radio to follow positive community action, organize nontraditional constituencies around pro-immigrant causes, and engage community members in the power of the human story. The last three case studies explore how different approaches to dialogue foster relationship building in a variety of community settings.

The final section, future implications, combines advice, lessons learned, and common themes that emerged from the case studies. It is a look at what other communities may find useful when they begin their own receiving work from those that have gone before them.

This report is intended as a resource for communities that want to implement similar projects by providing insight into outcomes and lessons learned from the people who have had success in implementing them. It is a complementary project to The Spring Institute of Intercultural Learning's resource toolkit for receiving communities and The Center for American Progress' report on the state of receiving communities in the US.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Refugee and immigrant population levels have been on the rise in the US for several years. Many communities without a recent history of immigration are now experiencing growth that is sometimes difficult to understand. It can create anxiety, tension, and fear among longtime residents. Welcoming America, as a national, grassroots-driven collaborative, works to help communities that receive immigrants and refugees to understand the change taking place and appreciate their new community members.

Projects and programs addressing immigrants' needs are well documented across the US. Many federal, state, and local agencies provide skills training, language classes, and other integrative services for immigrants. Until recently, however, there has been little focus on understanding the unique needs of the communities that receive immigrants. Often the residents of these communities have little to no forewarning of the increase in population or the reasons for it. These unanswered questions may concern local residents, which can lead to anxiety and fear about the implications that their new neighbors will present within the community.

Receiving communities are the geographic and social entities, i.e. towns, neighborhoods, and schools, where immigrants and refugees move to or are placed upon arriving in the US. With the help of local partners, Welcoming America state affiliates find creative ways to address the concerns of the receiving community to promote a foundation of trust and acceptance between locals and new residents.

Welcoming America uses a three-pronged approach to addressing community social change. It believes that the most effective ways to encourage a community to be welcoming of immigrants are through local leadership development, strategic communication, and public engagement. These three action areas—leading a community by example, inserting positive messages into the community, and engaging people with one another—are all ways to combat the anxiety, tension, and fear that can accompany rapid migration.

RECEIVING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

In December 2010, Welcoming America and the Center for American Progress launched the Receiving Communities Initiative (RCI). The first stage of the project began by bringing together leading scholars and practitioners from a wide array of disciplines that focus on different aspects of immigration: political science, social psychology, public opinion research, demography, sociology, dialogue, leadership, and media. Those experts discussed the causes of immigration anxiety. They also brainstormed projects and programs in the nonprofit, civic, faith, philanthropic, business, and government sectors that are engaging in proactive work to create welcoming communities. The following is a report of the most innovative projects and programs that came to light, directly or tangentially, during the first stage of the RCI.

METHODOLOGY

Nine case studies are highlighted here, with three different cases reviewing each aspect of Welcoming America's three-pronged approach. The cases were selected as the best known examples of a particular prong: here, the prongs are referred to as local leadership, messaging and media, and fostering contact.

These qualitative analyses of each case include a short introduction, a background section, the action focused upon, and its outcome. Phone interviews were conducted that lasted from one to two hours. Interviews for each of the three prongs followed a set list of questions. The studies explore the successes and challenges of each case and include advice from the person engaged in the action on lessons learned and how to create similar programs in other receiving communities.

Little research has been done to evaluate what success looks like in the relatively new area of receiving communities work. The following case studies offer a qualitative glimpse of promising action taken locally to create a welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees. It is hoped that these actions can be replicated in other migration locations to help create foundationally strong communities across the US.

CASE STUDIES

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The first group of studies explores leadership in receiving communities from the perspectives of a member of the clergy, a mayor, and an immigrant organizer. Reverend Dr. Jeff Carter of Manassas, Virginia highlights a particular incident in his community and how he helped take action to overcome it. Mayor Larry Gilbert of Lewiston, Maine offers his view as a leader in a community with a history of tension around immigration. Ricardo Perez of Grand Junction, Colorado discusses how to involve immigrants in community leadership.

MESSAGING AND MEDIA

National and local messaging campaigns play a large role in how well a community receives immigrants. Not In Our Town uses documentaries and school curriculum to explore how a community creatively works together to counteract hate. The Center for New Community engages nontraditional constituencies through social media to organize around and take action for pro-immigrant causes. Immigrant Stories promotes a welcoming environment by highlighting the common humanity of old and new immigrants in one community through the power of story.

FOSTERING CONTACT

The final section focuses on the use of dialogue to engage new and longtime residents in various community settings. Public Conversations Project addresses contentious community issues through structured, meaningful dialogue. The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians offers a specific example of how community dialogue made a positive cultural and economic difference in West Philadelphia. The Montgomery County Public Schools Study Circles Program brings students, parents, and school faculty and staff together to address student achievement and parental involvement.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Reverend Dr. Jeff Carter, Manassas Church of the Brethren *Faith Leadership*

A particular instance of community discord in 2007 prompted Reverend Dr. Jeff Carter to take action by organizing faith leaders in support of local elected officials in Manassas, Virginia. Over 70 clergy signed an open letter of support that was delivered to local community leaders to promote a change in the way that immigration was discussed in the community. The letter, particularly the way the message was delivered, helped ease community and political tension around immigration.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, Reverend Dr. Jeff Carter noticed a negative stirring in Manassas, Virginia. Talk of immigrants and illegal immigration rumbled in the community. The tension and rhetoric became toxic: toxic for Hispanic immigrants and toxic for Christian values. When the congregation at Manassas Church of the Brethren began voicing concerns, Jeff knew that as a pastor and leader in the community, he needed to start asking questions publicly.

Jeff talked with the congregation. They asked for credible information on the immigrant situation in Manassas, so Jeff brought people into the church to tell the truth and give accurate information. He then asked for the support of the congregation to talk to other pastors about what was going on. The congregation's support was critical to getting the ball rolling.

Jeff called up pastor friends and asked them to have a conversation about the community with him over lunch. Four pastors came from Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Catholic and Episcopalian churches in town. They met at the same restaurant where the mayor of Manassas happened to be dining that day. In a small town where people know one another, the group drew the attention of the elected leader: he knew something was afoot simply by seeing the group of faith leaders eating together. "We'll be in touch," Jeff told the mayor.

The group discussed the problems of intolerance in the community around immigrants and illegal immigration. They decided to expand the conversation that day to get more faith leaders talking about it. They didn't intend to form a group, so much as to simply continue the conversation, but gradually that was exactly what happened.

THE ACTION

Jeff had an idea to draft a sign-on letter; a letter from concerned clergy in the community. The letter, titled "An Open Letter from Concerned Religious Leaders: A New Beginning", was an

offer of help to elected officials. They wanted to show their support for city leaders and support for a change in the way immigration was discussed in the community. They wanted to empower local officials to moderate legislation away from intolerance and continue to pursue the right path.

The initial group of four pastors began to grow when each pastor reached out to friends in the faith leadership community. They strategically figured out who could be called on to be supportive. They wanted diversity, so they intentionally built up relationships in the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities. They specifically reached out to faith leaders where the community's elected leaders attended religious services. At first they met in restaurants, but as the group grew, they began meeting in area churches.

Critical to the group's growth was the leadership of the Catholic diocese. Having the Dean of the diocese engaged and involved soon gained the diocese's approval of the letter and the confidence of the Bishop. Once the diocese approved, solid Catholic support followed. This was critical because in the Catholic hierarchy, upper-level support is needed to get others on board. The group was then able to approach Catholic leaders and ask: "Your diocese approved, so will you?"

Another critical layer of support came from the Benedictine nuns. They supported the letter prior to a nun being killed by an illegal immigrant who was driving drunk. The Benedictine Center's open and continued support of the immigrant community following a personal loss showed its grace during the healing process over the loss of its sister.

In calling on faith leaders to support the letter, the group used persuasion to get others involved. Sometimes this worked; however, lots of churches did not want to be affiliated with the letter so as to not be perceived as involved in politics. The group took the support they could get. By the time they sent the letter to city officials, it had over 70 signatures.

The letter was offered to elected officials quietly as a supportive, empowering suggestion to do the right thing regarding immigration. However, the letter was leaked to the press. Several people in the community demanded that the names of the faith leaders who signed the letter be released. A Washington Post article quoted one elected official calling Jeff and the religious group "illegitimate and misguided". But Jeff knew he did the right thing. He found support within his community. As he walked his daughter to the bus stop the day after the Post article was released, a man offered Jeff his support and told him he was doing the right thing. Jeff's own congregation knew someone needed to speak up; they told him that they supported their "illegitimate and misguided" pastor.

THE OUTCOME

The time it took from the first meeting in the restaurant to the time the letter came out was less than six months. In total, with the demand that names be released and the release of the Post article, it lasted a year and a half. The letter was a success: it showed support for the

elected officials, it expressed concerns of the faith community, and it made room for agreement between county leaders and faith leaders. Even today there is a different relationship between clergy and elected officials: there is now an open ear for the religious community in the offices of elected leaders.

Eventually, tension and unrest in the community dissipated. The letter helped, but Prince William County was hit hard by the housing crisis of 2008, pushing many immigrants out of the county. A large source of immigrant employment in the county was construction, so when there were no more houses to build, many immigrants left.

CHARACTER TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL LEADER

Jeff's leadership in the face of adversity is commendable. He saw discord within his community and he took action to fix it. Jeff understood the significance of a faith leader publicly addressing a political issue, something that leaders in the faith community are generally hesitant to do. He was mindful of the views of his parishioners as well as other faith leaders. Though his action was not popular with the entire Manassas community, his courage to do what he felt was the right thing—offering support to elected officials to moderate the immigration debate and legislation—expressed the concern of local clergy and helped to calm the atmosphere of Manassas around the issue of immigration.

SUCSESSES

The framing of the faith leaders' concerns was perhaps the most successful act for creating the opportunity for open dialogue with local officials. The open letter was a respectful offer of support on a difficult issue. It was not accusatory or overly directive; it was persuasive. It was a calm manifestation of community concern that allowed elected officials to invite clergy, and in turn, morality, into the discussion.

CHALLENGES

While the letter was generally a positive experience, Jeff saw that the immigrant community did not feel supported through the ordeal like it could have been. This was partially because the faith leaders worked only with the established power: local officials. They did not link up with advocacy groups. That, however, was intentional. They wanted to keep some distance from advocacy groups so as to stay away from protests.

Jeff also noticed that, while the Catholic Church was supportive of the movement because it has a large Hispanic congregation, Catholic clergy were viewed with skepticism by the anti-immigrant community.

As a result of tension subsiding around immigration, the group of faith leaders disbanded. Jeff notes that life got in the way; religious leaders were busy with their congregations and churches. Looking back, Jeff would have liked to have kept the group connected. He also

would have liked to “message out” more—they had an opportunity to open up the conversation on a larger scale with the entire community; Jeff does not feel that they took full advantage of that opportunity. However, they did come together at a time when the community needed moral leadership. They created positive change.

LESSONS LEARNED

The process of writing the letter offered two opportunities to propel discussions of immigration into a social movement in Manassas. The clergy should have included immigrants in its actions, and the group should have used the momentum they built up to further immigration dialogue in the community. These are the essential pieces in creating social change.

Finally, “When faith leaders taken an interest in the public sphere, they *will* be called upon,” Jeff says. People are curious about what clergy will say because they are the moral leaders of the community. Their voices matter.

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Larry Gilbert, Mayor of Lewiston, Maine

City Leadership

The city of Lewiston, Maine has had a turbulent past as a receiving community for immigrants and refugees. Working with city staff, Mayor Larry Gilbert took office and has helped put a positive spotlight on Lewiston. Under his leadership and through community efforts, Lewiston has become a more welcoming place for all of its residents.

BACKGROUND

As a native of Lewiston, Maine, Mayor Larry Gilbert has been in positions of leadership for most of his professional career. He served 25 years on the Lewiston Police Department, rising through the ranks to chief of police, a position he held for five years before retiring to accept an appointment by President Bill Clinton as the United States Marshall for the District of Maine. He then served five years as the Associate Director of the Maine Community Policing Institute (MCPI) at the University of Maine at Augusta. He retired in 2007 and was elected as Lewiston's mayor, his current position. Much of Mayor Gilbert's success as a leader stems from his longstanding knowledge of and interaction with the community.

Lewiston has had its share of tension over the years, whether it was hate crimes or lack of support for immigrants. In 1993, then-Chief Gilbert initiated a hate/bias crimes taskforce to bring minority communities together to discuss issues in their communities. This came on the heels of gay bashing in Lewiston. As a result of those meetings, they advanced an anti-discrimination ordinance based on sexual orientation in the areas of housing and employment, public accommodation, and the extension of credit. That ordinance became law in Lewiston, only to be reversed at referendum. It was a decade later that the state of Maine passed a similar law.

Gilbert also created a cultural awareness training program for police officers during his work at MCPI. These instances of convening the community would eventually come to represent Mayor Gilbert's strategy in city government as well, paving the way for successful leadership when immigration and integration became a community concern.

Secondary migrant movement in Lewiston

In 2001 Lewiston began to receive an influx of 5,000 mostly Somali refugees. The refugees were secondary migrants to Lewiston: they came from Somalia and were resettled near Atlanta and other major cities, but they found conditions difficult and dangerous in urban communities. When word got out that Lewiston was a small, safe place with a good educational system, many Somalis migrated there.

The problem was that Lewiston was initially unprepared for their arrival. The city was not put on notice that a major migration was about to happen; this was an unofficial, word-of-mouth

movement. Lewiston did not have the infrastructure to handle it. Federal funding for resettlement projects generally goes to primary migrant locations, and there are restrictions on funding for secondary locations if refugees move. Lewiston did not receive the assistance of federal resources.

The state of Maine was unprepared in all aspects as well: cultural, educational, and health. Lewiston itself is not a wealthy community with an abundance of resources. If the city was to survive and thrive, it needed to have creative people to get things done. “If we don’t get the community involved, we’re never going to succeed at this,” says Mayor Gilbert. The lack of preparedness of the federal and state governments forced Lewiston to go outside those walls and work to develop more community interest. The city wasn’t even equipped to handle the language barrier, so nonprofits and churches had to step up to offer translation services.

A setback occurred in late 2002 when then-mayor Larry Raymond wrote an open letter to the Somali community, disparaging them and discouraging them from relocating to Lewiston. In early 2003 a white supremacist group showed up in town in support of their ideology of white supremacy. Interestingly, while these events garnered negative national attention, they also united the community to action.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Lewiston stepped up and worked together as a community to deal with intolerance and bring about unity. Mayor Gilbert and his staff point out that these activities did not happen all at once, nor did they take place quickly. Little by little, Lewiston moved forward to where it is today, and not simply because of the leadership of Mayor Gilbert. Much of the work was community-driven.

Mayor Gilbert knew that Lewiston needed the support of the whole community and beyond. Mayor Gilbert and city hall embraced everyone in their efforts; they involved anyone they could. They were transparent in everything they did. They made themselves available to the community.

Similar issues were happening in Portland, Maine at the same time. While the city of Portland was able to achieve results without a true partnership with the state of Maine, Lewiston was different: it developed financial and program relationships with the Governor’s office, the Maine Department of Labor, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Additionally, a number of partnerships with local agencies were also forged with the city. Lewiston was a small community with few resources and leveraging every available dollar and resource was critical to the community’s success in working with its new Mainers.

- In 2002 a community member who worked for the local hospital wanted to get community leaders involved in immigrant issues. He said it would have to become a community partnership and that the state needed to be involved. This effort led to the

publication of a report issued to Governor Angus King, which served as the precursor for a number of joint efforts at the state level.

- The highest profile and transformative community event was the Many And One Coalition counter-rally held in early 2003 when the white supremacist group came to town to recruit on the heels of the mayor's anti-immigrant sentiments. When 32 of the group's members showed up in Lewiston, 5,000 residents convened in support of their Somali neighbors, rejecting the group's message of hate.
- After the former mayor's open letter was released, local university students at several local colleges got involved through local school service learning initiatives that placed students within organizations to serve both refugee children and adults.
- In 2003 Lewiston asked for and received assistance from the Department of Justice to offer a community dialogue on immigrant integration through the city's Career Center.
- A graduate of Bates College partnered with the local hospital to create Lots to Garden, an urban garden initiative. It was an opportunity to get the refugee community involved. In addition to the garden, it teaches cooking classes and has a food pantry and farmer's market.

No single initiative made Lewiston the integrated place it is today. All of these activities, coupled with constant attention, act as a network device that reach out into the community. As Deputy City Administrator Phil Nadeau explains it, once a community issue becomes less immediate—once it's not a glaring problem—it begins to leave people's minds. People tend to forget. The mayor's office makes sure to keep people talking about it.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Mayor Gilbert assumed his city leadership duties after a long leadership career in law enforcement. His leadership qualities were enhanced by his previous close work with the immigrant community.

- Mayor Gilbert and his wife attend events such as the annual joint US-Somali Independence Day celebration, eating and dancing with Lewiston's residents. These community interactive events build trust, dignity, and the belief that immigrants are important members of the community.
- When he ran for Mayor, Gilbert had a male and female immigrant on his advisory committee. He distinguished himself by being proactive on the issue of immigration in Lewiston. His campaign flyers clearly supported diversity.
- It is important for Mayor Gilbert to reach out to the immigrant community and be sincere about it. Because he is available to the immigrant community, they reach out to him by coming to his office when they seek advice, assistance, and justice.
- Mayor Gilbert makes it a priority to respond quickly to bad press or negative instances in the community. This is his way of keeping issues transparent.

Lewiston has a host of community members who have been champions in the areas of immigration and integration. From the Executive Director of the Career Center to the manager of a faith-based resource center to a hospital employee, these are traits of Lewiston's outstanding community members who work for the cause:

- The sincere belief that they need to be more responsive to the needs of immigrants, and integrating that into their lifestyle, group, business, or organization
- Empathy
- Commitment of time and physical presence, especially when it is clear that the individual is voluntarily choosing to be involved in the cause rather than engaging in other interests or duties
- Caring
- Socializing with immigrants in a meaningful, sincere way

In Mayor Gilbert's own words: "All I did was be supportive and provide some leadership. But mostly I provided support. We had those champions: sincere, transparent people."

HOW TO MAKE THINGS WORK IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Lewiston is not breaking new ground when it comes to diversity and cultural change. The distinction is that what happened in Lewiston is representative of what is happening in other, smaller communities all over the US. The suggestions Mayor Gilbert offers are the ways in which small-town Lewiston dealt with immigration issues.

- Be proactive: reach out to the community
- Get everyone involved
- Be transparent
- Be sincere
- It is better to approach a mayor through a collaborative effort. Create a coalition. Bring in partners and nongovernmental organizations.
- Get your state agencies involved, even if you are told it is not possible
- Even if you have elected officials who have little or no interest, it can still work: informal groups get work done even when formal coalitions fail because everyone knows one another and they will still work together informally
- Keep inviting people to participate and work with you

Most importantly, Mayor Gilbert says, is to realize it is "we", not city hall: it is the whole community that works together to make a difference.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following are some important lessons Mayor Gilbert has learned in his tenure. Though they may seem obvious, they are the glue for community success.

- Part of the reason Lewiston is a success story in immigrant integration is because it is a community of primarily first and second generation Franco-Americans. Its residents saw the struggles their forefathers went through in coming to the US as immigrants working in factories. They understand and can relate to this new generation of immigrants.
- Look at how surrounding communities deal with the issue; tailor your community's strategy to play off the strengths and weaknesses of others.
- It takes the support of city staff that does an outstanding job to allow a mayor to successfully lead.

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Ricardo Perez, Director of Hispanic Affairs Project

Immigrant Leadership

The Hispanic Affairs Project began in 2006 to create community support for immigrants in Mesa County, Colorado. Soon after, it became apparent that the Hispanic community needed a voice in local leadership. Ricardo Perez, himself a community leader, helps educate, empower, and organize immigrants to take on leadership roles in their communities.

BACKGROUND

Ricardo Perez emigrated from El Salvador to Grand Junction, Mesa County, Colorado in 2003. In the roughly five years before he arrived, Grand Junction experienced a population shift as many Mexican families moved to the area. At first they came to work in construction, but as those jobs decreased, many Mexican immigrants began to work in agriculture or the service industry. Immigrants primarily came from the Atlantic and Pacific coasts looking for work or to be close to their families. Today, immigrants make up over 20 percent of the county's population. Ninety-five percent of the Hispanic community is Mexican.

The Hispanic community has strong cultural and religious values: many are Catholic and were looking for places to worship at the time that they moved to Grand Junction. Catholic churches had a sudden increase in Spanish speaking parishioners. Churches took action and began providing mass in Spanish. The English-speaking Priesthood and Bishop reached out to the community for support. They asked people who had experience working with the Hispanic community to help provide more Spanish religious services and education. Many Mexican immigrants came from farming backgrounds and had little to no education.

Between 2000 and 2005, religious organizations began doing more work in the community. About the time that Ricardo moved to Grand Junction, the Catholic Church was looking for a layperson to work on education and other services. As a community organizer in El Salvador, Ricardo's work on civil and human rights social movements with different groups—unions, rural farm workers, and urban students—made him a perfect fit for this transitioning community. He had experience in leadership, local, and personal development. Ricardo began working with several religious groups in the county. He saw a good opportunity to connect the work of all churches in the area to create a team.

THE ACTION

Ricardo solicited seven leaders from seven different communities in the area around Grand Junction, known as the Western Slope, to work together to address religious needs and identify the social, political, and economic needs of Hispanic immigrants. The seven community leaders were immigrants who volunteered to be involved. They were laypeople who were active in their churches and communities.

The seven community representatives and Ricardo got to work identifying social issues that were serious problems: integration, language, jobs, and legal status. In 2005 and 2006 they created and implemented a strategic plan. They put together another group of community leaders from the same seven communities, this time composed of 35 men and women. This new group focused specifically on the social and political needs of Hispanic immigrants. As before, these were laypeople, volunteers active in their churches.

The group learned of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, a Catholic convention supporting social development in the United States. They applied for and received a grant to fund a coordinator position. Ricardo became the coordinator and the Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP) was born.

Once HAP was established, it updated its strategic plan to include six components: human rights: immigration and integration, leadership development, migrant farm workers, institutional development, civic engagement, and services. The addition of a seventh component, youth, is currently in discussion because it is a critical issue to integration and leadership formation.

At the same time that HAP received grant funding, immigration reform was the top priority of national debate. HAP went house to house, identifying the needs of immigrant families and promoting immigration reform in the Western Slope as Senator Kennedy's proposed bill, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act received criticism and ultimately failed in June 2007.

In March of that year, HAP held a series of rallies and marches for the Hispanic community. Four thousand people participated in one rally. Local media called it the biggest public manifestation in any Western Colorado community. Before the rally, the community was largely unaware of immigrants in the area. Afterward, it was apparent that immigrants exist and have a significant presence in the Western Slope. The rally created awareness of the Hispanic community.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Getting the community involved happened in two ways: through local, individual efforts, and through collaborations with other pro-immigrant organizations. The Grand Junction area is geographically isolated, consisting of mountains, desert, and open ranch. Historically, there have been very few organizations in the area working with immigrants, and even neighbors have been isolated from one another. HAP has been able to bring immigrant families together and provide the space for new organizations and partnerships to grow.

The Western Colorado Justice for Immigrants Committee (WCJIC) was created in 2006. It is a grassroots organization that works to achieve reform and to support immigrant families. The creation of this organization was an important moment for immigrants and HAP. It was a great opportunity to show the importance of working together, to empower immigrant leaders, and to show how big the immigrant community is. Another important partnership with the

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC), founded in 2002, helped HAP reach an audience at the state level.

HAP is mindful of keeping up communication with everyone, particularly individual families. HAP describes its relationship with its members as a familial one. Members communicate with one another not simply because they need something, but to visit and interact. HAP believes that when it creates relationships with families, everyone becomes confident in one another: people don't have problems with their family members because they are family. They are close; they are friends.

HAP recognizes the importance of involving every level of the community. Its board is comprised of ten people: men and women, young and old. They represent each of the seven communities and are elected by their communities, not the director. It is a diverse group of people who have their own voices and views. Thirty-five people participate with HAP's leadership committee. They consist of seniors, men, women, workers, and young people of different communities.

WCJIC is made up of over 75 members from local groups in different communities. The work of WCJIC has empowered immigrants. There is even participation from a group of indigenous families from Mexico whose primary language is not Spanish who live 60 miles outside of town. Their group is currently working on a strategic plan.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Once HAP's influence in the community began to grow, it became aware of the need for more leadership and civic participation. HAP's needs assessment work underscored the importance of leadership development in the Hispanic community. HAP now provides know-your-rights trainings and leadership development capacity, in which people participate in developing leadership skills.

Together with WCJIC and CIRC, HAP has educated and brainstormed with leaders to come up with ideas on how to work within the community. They have held leadership trainings at the local level, and a few leaders have participated in trainings in other cities. Their leadership development work is conducted in Spanish, focused on the Hispanic community and the immigrant reality.

THE OUTCOME

HAP highlights two specific outcomes of their work. First, immigrants are now more active at the local level. They participate in community social events. They have also begun collaborating with other groups with which they have mutual interests: groups working on environmental, educational, and cultural diversity issues. It is a long term process, but Ricardo sees the change. Local businesses, for example, pay more attention to the Hispanic community and engage with them more than they did before HAP began its community work.

Second, HAP's leadership development is paying off. People who have been through the training are more aware. They have better capacity to lead meetings, to organize activity, to talk, and to create better relationships with others. Two examples illustrate this change. Five years ago, a religious woman who has since become active with WCJIC was a quiet, rude, difficult person. Now that she has had leadership training, she talks more, has confidence in herself, and expresses herself well with others. Now she leads activities and is a community coordinator.

Another example is that of a young man who participated as a board member for three years, but recently returned home to Mexico because of a lack of job opportunity in the States. Before coming to the US he had never been to school; he learned to read and write at home. He was not a good person and not leading a good life. His father described him as a drunk, lazy man. But when he came to HAP, he felt welcomed. For the first time he had the opportunity to express his opinions, allowing his confidence to grow. Now he uses his leadership skills as an active member of his community in Mexico. His father says he is a hard worker, participating in community activities and dedicating his time to the community. Not only does leadership training help develop a community; it also helps develop personal character.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Ricardo grew up during the twelve years of the Salvadoran Civil War in El Salvador. At university he was trained in philosophy and theology, where he learned about social development and became connected with social movements in his home country. After the war Ricardo worked with the reconstruction process. He uses the same skills and resources today in the US that he learned while working on human rights movements with farm workers in the mountains of El Salvador. Ricardo has found that there is little difference between the experiences of the oppressed in El Salvador and the US: he believes that everyone sees injustice. Though the US is a country rich with resources, people suffer because of the lack of immigration reform.

Ricardo was welcomed into the Mexican community in Grand Junction because he is mindful of cultural factors and because he is compassionate. "We're all Latinos, but we're so different." He took time to create relationships and to get to know every person. Ricardo stresses the importance of spending meaningful time in the community. He attends all community celebrations and social functions.

SUCSESSES

HAP points to some interesting successes it has had in its structure as an organization and in its work. First is the setup of its committees: everything is done by consensus. From the beginning, the relationship is the same for every person on the committee. They have the same opportunities to express their opinions and decisions. Their own ideas are heard, are valid, and are important to the group. Everyone is happy with this model because the

committee reaches decisions together and everyone agrees on the outcome. This is the most important aspect of how HAP works.

Another structural aspect of HAP is that, while Ricardo is its director, his authority does not originate from *being* the director. Ricardo asks questions and listens to what people want. He is respectful of their opinions. He is careful to listen to the deeper message and the underlying feelings that are being conveyed. It is his genuine curiosity and drive to help that gives him authority in the community, not his position as director of the organization.

Finally, HAP's biggest success is in implementing its goal of leadership development in the Hispanic community. It is already seeing positive changes in communities from five years ago when it began. HAP is creating a social movement that will continue to make a difference in the lives of immigrants in Mesa County.

CHALLENGES

HAP faces some significant challenges in its work, but it has been surprisingly creative in its response to each obstacle. In the beginning, HAP had trouble figuring out how to drive its social development in such a negative, anti-immigrant environment. It discovered the impossibility of creating dialogue between immigrants and receiving communities by talking about immigration reform. HAP worked with Welcoming Colorado to shift the dialogue focus from the reform debate to the humanity of immigrants themselves. This, along with cultivating relationships on the local level, helped strengthen the movement.

The biggest problem HAP has encountered is the language barrier. While members of HAP are taking more time to learn English, the organization does not have the capacity to do many things in English. It does not have access to resources to get the skills its leaders need. Another barrier to language is the political environment: immigrants are sometimes afraid to speak because of the tension in the community. Still, many people participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and even seek out forms of education other than language.

Finally, many immigrants have not had experience with political development, either individually or collectively. They came from Mexico to find jobs. Often they are poor and uneducated when they arrive. They did not participate in civil or political life in their home country, so it is completely new to them. HAP's leadership development tries to show the importance of community participation and being more socially active.

ADVICE FOR COMMUNITIES

Ricardo stresses that current Hispanic immigrants are the future hope for the US. He believes that when we have the capacity to collaborate and to share our leadership, values, and cultures, society will change for the better. If immigrant communities are not involved or participating in mainstream society, it will be a sad future for the US. Communities must recognize this now in order to see what lies ahead locally and nationally.

LESSONS LEARNED

Above all, take time to create relationships with people. Ricardo already knew the importance of getting to know every person in the community, but working with immigrants in Mesa County has reinforced the importance of spending time in the community. Because of that, Ricardo has a greater understanding of Mexican culture. He has learned a lot about American society as well. “If I’d worked construction all the time, my level of communication with the Anglo community would be low; but because of my job, I learn more about the Anglos, especially the ones who are more involved in social justice.”

In Ricardo’s unique position as a Salvadoran organizer working with mostly Mexican immigrants in the US, he has learned a different way to do community organizing work. “I spend a lot of time on the phone.” In Latin America, organizing is done in person. In the US, though, community leaders are trying to be more connected with elected officials, so it requires more phone time. Connecting with elected officials does not happen in Mexico, but here it is essential to create communication between representatives and the community.

Finally, HAP would not be able to do as much work as it does without the help of the church. The Hispanic community is a religious community. It is important to keep good relationships with local churches. The Catholic Church has provided the best entry point for HAP to be able to work within the immigrant community.

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MESSAGING AND MEDIA

Not In Our Town *A Message of Community Action*

Since 1995, the Not In Our Town movement has been helping communities counter hate and intolerance through documentaries, awareness campaigns, and online resources. Founded by the nonprofit media company The Working Group, Not In Our Town highlights positive stories of community action, connects individuals and groups, and provides guidance for communities against all forms of hate.

BACKGROUND

The Not in Our Town (NIOT) movement is an example of several combined media strategies that highlight positive action communities have taken to address hate and intolerance. It began with a 1995 short film examining how the people of Billings, Montana responded to a number of attacks on its residents.

Billings is a city of less than 100,000 people. Within a short amount of time in the early 1990s Billings experienced several hate incidents. Racist skinheads showed up at an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church during services and stood threateningly in the back of the room. A Native American woman's house was painted with "Die, Indian, Die" and swastikas. A brick was thrown through a Jewish boy's bedroom window that displayed a menorah.

It was a scary time for Billings. There were few state hate crime laws at the time. But the story of how the people of Billings reacted became a powerful message. It was the basis of the first film, *Not in Our Town*. After the film aired, other towns used Billings' actions as a model in their own communities. The following are some of the strategies Billings used:

- Members of the community began supporting the AME church by attending services there, regardless of their race or religion
- Several organizations worked together to donate paint and manpower to paint over racist graffiti on the Native American woman's house
- The local newspaper printed a full page picture of a menorah and encouraged residents to put it up in their windows in support of the Jewish community
- The police chief publicly endorsed the positive actions of community members

While residents' reactions did not completely end hate and intolerance in Billings, support for their neighbors and tolerance resonated in other communities. The *Not in Our Town* short film became a model for cross-constituency community action. When audiences saw the film broadcast on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) they began discussions in their own

communities about who they needed to have on board to start similar movements: the media, businesses, law enforcement, community leaders and activists, and others.

TYPES OF MESSAGES PROMOTED

NIOT highlights the positive actions that communities take to combat hate, whether it is from an outside source or from within the community.

THE ACTION

Once the NIOT model went public, the filmmakers who created it, The Working Group, did follow up pieces in other communities. Those films became reinforcement of positive action. They are not stories of hate crimes; rather, they are uplifting stories of community action.

Springing out of the NIOT movement was Not in Our School (NIOS), a campaign to create safe schools free from stereotypes, intolerance, and hate. The original NIOS model began in middle schools. The NIOS model has been used on high school and college campuses for over a decade. NIOS offers free lesson plans for all age ranges on its website. The curricula address stereotypes, bullying, and intolerance. It also provides activities for engaging students in awareness of topics such as hate speech and disability.

NIOT launched a website in April 2010 that was a viral success within one month. The site hosts a plethora of resources: the NIOT blog on the positive actions communities are taking against hate; links to NIOT groups across the country; action kits and sample materials for initiating a NIOT movement in your own community; lesson plans for NIOS; materials for positive action on college campuses; and videos of supportive communities engaging in positive action to end hate and intolerance.

THE OUTCOME

Local communities began to build upon the actions of Billings. A network of hundreds of communities has used the NIOT model in times of crisis. Sixteen years after the film was launched, it is still being used as a resource to respond to hate.

The NIOT model has empowered communities to produce their own creative responses to hate and intolerance. For example, when a hate group targeted businesses and churches in Bloomington, Indiana, community members organized a physical barrier around the group that was made up of umbrellas: a visual shield against hate. Residents of Kokomo, Indiana, among other actions, organized a petition for tolerance when the Ku Klux Klan came to town. At the same time as the KKK's recruitment rally, the community held a unity celebration and picnic in a different part of town.

Schools have also positively used the NIOS model to combat hate:

- Students at Gunn High School in San Francisco, California staged a peaceful awareness event that included posters and singing when a hate group protested the school's gay-straight alliance
- Middle school students at Mother Caroline Academy, an all-girls school in Dorchester, Massachusetts initiated a "spread the peace" campaign that involved knocking on doors and hanging posters to promote peace in response to gun violence in their community
- A student-driven mentoring program at Shaw High School in East Cleveland, Ohio teaches elementary students the importance of being an "upstander", not a bystander, when they witness bullying

The positive responses communities use to combat hate help them deal with the negativity with which they are faced. Communities often feel that it is not enough to simply ignore hate; banding together in an act of unity allows a community to stand up for itself against hate and intolerance.

SUCSESSES

No other documentary film has been able to launch a movement such as this; one that continues 16 years after the broadcast of the film. It speaks to the power of the story. NIOT has been successful because it chronicles the story of Billings and other towns. It does more than tell the story: it follows the community's response. These communities have been persistent about creating new responses to hate. The success is a duality: communities continue to take action, and NIOT continues to follow the action.

Another success NIOT has had is its ability to adapt to new technology. NIOT is observant of how change takes place and it, too, has been a part of the process. NIOT has learned how to use media strategically to encourage civic engagement and promote safe, inclusive towns.

The most successful ongoing NIOT communities have developed good relationships with local media: newspapers, reporters, and radio stations. Local reporters are often seen as reliable sources of information in the community, so it is important to have strong connections to them. The NIOT alliance in Ft. Collins, Colorado has a monthly op-ed section that the newspaper offered to them. Because of their relationship with local media, the group has a legitimate voice within it.

Other successful NIOT communities are those that understand the need to engage key community stakeholders. They have conversations with civic leaders, community activists, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and teachers and students. By bringing these people to the table, a community has the potential to really get at the root of institutional change.

CHALLENGES

One constant challenge for NIOT.org is cross-generational use of its website. People with differing levels of skill use the site at differing levels of engagement. It is meant to be accessible and useful to everyone, and it strives to provide varied resources for differing levels of engagement. It works to provide a technological balance at all levels.

Another, different challenge is one within communities. Communities often experience hate targeted at a specific group and build a coalition to address it. But then another group gets targeted, and the coalition does not know how to respond to hate focused on the new group. Communities need broad coalitions, so that no matter who the victim of hate is, the response can be applied in all situations.

ADVICE FOR ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES

The NIOT film, school initiatives, and website showcase activities that communities have engaged in to respond to hate and intolerance. In the 16 years since the movement began, NIOT has been intentional about encouraging communities to be creative in their actions. NIOT does not by tell people how to be a NIOT community.

The following are five steps that offer the greatest impact through messaging for organizations who wish to provide anti-hate resources to communities.

1. **Share an empowering story about positive action.** The most powerful way to engage people is through storytelling. People connect to individuals and groups that have experienced hate and have responded to it positively. Through storytelling, people see that they, too, can have a positive impact in their own community.
2. **Cover the follow-up action.** No community's story begins and ends with one incident. Provide coverage of the community's positive response and continue to document the community's actions. Following up can highlight even more positive action. It also allows the community to share strategies with other communities that are going through the same problems.
3. **Provide action opportunities.** Create an easily accessible action kit that communities can use or adapt. Keep in mind, though, that positive storytelling is the key to moving an audience to action.
4. **Employ technology your community will use.** Be creative in the ways you provide information through technology. Reach people where they are, whether that is through social media, videos, downloadable tools, interactive maps, or other avenues.
5. **Collaborate.** Engage civic stakeholders, media partners, businesses, faith groups, community groups, and any other relevant groups or individuals.

NIOT is a community-based effort that belongs to everyone. It is a responsibility and a challenge for all of us.

LESSONS LEARNED

NIOT stresses that people and communities learn at different rates and different times. It believes in the importance of allowing for local community learning. *NIOT is less about spreading information and more about giving people access points for action.* It is about finding stories that make people see that it is possible to take action; that it is possible to change.

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Center for New Community ***Addressing Bigotry Through Media***

Based in Chicago, The Center for New Community reaches audiences by using social media to support its goals of defending democracy, empowering communities, and promoting equality. It engages audiences who are not typically invested in community issues by exposing how each group's personal interest is affected by the particular issue.

BACKGROUND

The Center for New Community (CNC) was established in 1995 to build community, justice, and equality through organizing. CNC and its community organizer employees empower and help communities empower themselves in any number of areas of community concern. It works in several communities in the Midwest, including Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. CNC's work is particularly focused on pro-immigration dialogue.

TYPES OF MESSAGES PROMOTED

The messages of CNC fall into one of two categories:

- Holding bigoted organizations accountable for their actions
- Finding alternatives for elevating conversations around immigrant integration and pro-migrant dialogue

CNC believes bigotry and immigration go hand in hand. It must take on bigotry as it clears space for the immigration debate to find ways for new frames and positive voices to be heard in America. CNC finds it especially important to engage in multiracial dialogues and formations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD SPOKESPERSON

While CNC has only one media strategist in name, all seven organizers at CNC are trained in media strategy. They understand how to interact with the public and the media to gain the right kind of attention for community causes. This makes for better organizers.

An effective spokesperson in a community organizing context has these traits:

- Background in organizing and an understanding of organizing strategy
- Works *authentically* with communities
- Is *genuine*
- Organically understands the messages put forth
- Is in a position to make important strategy decisions

THE ACTION

CNC's goal is to spread its messages to the widest possible audience by using the internet as its primary outlet. The most effective means of communications are its blog and short films. Though it is difficult to measure the impact of messaging, CNC has never reached this many people through other avenues.

- Imagine 2050 (<http://imagine2050.newcomm.org/>) is the most successful promoter of CNC's writing and work. It is a constant source of broadcasting CNC's research for leadership, supporters, and constituents.
- CNC uses YouTube to broadcast three short films that educate audiences on its organizing work. (<http://www.youtube.com/user/NativismWatchTV?blend=16&ob=5>.) It is an accessible and inclusive tool to reach people who know a lot about CNC, and also to reach people who are new to organizing.

The driving force behind CNC's messaging is its organizing work. At the most basic level, CNC's messaging strategies counter bigotry and elevate communities who need more space through debate and dialogue to deal with immigration, race, and economic inequality.

While most of CNC's messaging focuses on social media, it still creates print media that has an impact. For example, CNC recently released a report called Storm Warning, which tells the story of Suffolk County, New York in the ten years leading up to a murder in a community where immigrants were constantly dehumanized. The report is featured on CNC's website, but it was also printed for distribution to constituents and elected officials; not as a call to action or as a research piece, but as an effective and historical narrative resource.

WHAT MAKES FOR SUCCESSFUL MESSAGING

Audience is the key to effective messaging. CNC must reach a wide audience, but it must do so strategically. It is not effective to attempt to reach every single person, but CNC wants all communities engaged in immigration issues, even if indirectly.

One strategy that makes CNC unique is the type of audience it attempts to engage. It works to identify nontraditional constituencies that will be sympathetic to its causes. These are individuals and groups that CNC and other organizations may have discounted or overlooked in the past, assuming they were not important or were not interested.

For example, CNC finds that there is a significant amount of the progressive white community engaged in immigration issues, even if they don't know that they are really engaging. They are responding to bigoted organizations in some way. They may not be able to identify the real threats of a particular bigoted organization—it may not be the primary focus of their work—but those are the people CNC seeks to engage.

Nontraditional constituencies are often interested but don't have the proper frames for addressing the issues: they don't have the right entry point. *They must be activated.* People

engage when they feel that their self interest is involved. Therefore, CNC pays particular attention to constituents' individual interests. It gets at the heart of what is important to people.

One example is that of a nontraditional network that CNC works with in a particular black community. They have taken a stance on immigration, but it is not a policy position—their position is that anti-immigrant groups are bad for communities of color. The network looks at attacks on the 14th Amendment and says: “This is the cornerstone of civil rights in our country. This is bad for us and for immigrants. We need to do something.” They engage because it affects their self interest. Similarly, members of the white community who are interested in a truly multiracial country will engage if they feel that the future vision of their community does not include their members.

ADVICE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

CNC suggests that a community looks at what is going on around and within it: does the community have a lot of division or unequal access to resources such as education, jobs, or transportation? First, identify an easy issue that the community can organize around. Make it the primary concern. Once the issue and key players are identified, the community can begin to message to them effectively.

For example, if the primary issue is lack of access to public transportation for refugees to get a big employer just outside town, think creatively to do the following:

- Get refugees involved: how can you build infrastructure that allows refugees to empower themselves around this issue?
- Get pockets of the community involved: build strategies around public transportation to use as a way to integrate other parts of the community into the issue.
- Get multifaceted formations of the community involved: create ways to get different community groups, sectors, races, and religions involved together around public transportation.
- Make it an opportunity for folks from all aspects of the community to engage.

CNC does not have a specific holding plan for its messaging strategies. Each cause is unique and based on the particular movement, but the civil rights movement in general is pivotal in informing all of CNC's strategies. CNC's work is contingent on the influence of power that bigoted organizations hold at any given time. Depending on what is going on in the community, CNC tailors its messaging to be responsive to that influence. CNC is dependent on the capacity of communities it works with, the capacity of CNC itself, and the capacity of the organizations it works against.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The short term impact of messaging: it creates opportunities for alternative voices and perspectives to be heard
- The long term impact: it is changing the vision of what our nation currently is to something that is more inclusive
- The most important factor resulting from messaging: it reaches a diverse group of constituents

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Immigrant Stories

A Community's Story

Immigrant Stories is a weekly newspaper article, radio spot, and blog post in the Glenwood Springs, Colorado area that was started in 2008 to tell the stories of the community's immigrants, past and present. The goal is to spark interest in the common humanity between old and new immigrants while promoting a welcoming initiative and immigrant integration.

BACKGROUND

A fairly affluent community situated between Aspen and Vail in the Roaring Fork Valley, Glenwood Springs is a haven for recent immigrants who come to work in the ski resorts and restaurants. The town was one of 19 communities that had an established immigrant integration project funded by The Colorado Trust through 2010. Community members involved with the integration project promoted integration and positive contact by sponsoring community-wide picnics, intercultural events, and foreign language functions. However, they found it increasingly difficult to engage people because of the heated political climate of the time. The atmosphere became divisive. Undocumented immigrants would not attend community events for fear of being detained. Longtime residents began expressing disdain for "illegal" immigrants.

A recently retired Director of Marketing at Colorado Mountain College and a lifelong resident of Glenwood Springs, Walter Gallacher was involved in the integration project. He knew that the "illegal" argument was unproductive and that the frame needed to be changed. He also knew that one way to take back the argument was to tell the immigrants' stories.

Inspired by National Public Radio's StoryCorps series, which records 3-minute stories of everyday Americans to promote shared humanity and the value of listening, Walter suggested the concept at a committee brainstorming meeting and got the green light. He had no experience in radio, but he had the time to learn. Walter found a person to help him who had radio and computer experience. They approached the community radio station; while the station was skeptical, they were receptive to the immigrant story idea, gave him airtime, and helped him develop his production skills.

It seemed logical to bring people together through media because the community was not willing to come together physically. Immigrant Stories does not try to change the minds of people on the far left or right, but it can reach the people in the middle who may be ambivalent about newcomers.

TYPES OF MESSAGING PROMOTED

The project idea was to develop short, moving stories that highlight immigrants in the Glenwood Springs area. "Part of what you do in an image campaign is reframe: this is an effort

to reframe the immigrant as a point of pride and not something to be ashamed of,” says Walter. “The stories reveal our shared humanity. It’s harder to objectify people once you hear their story.” The project gets residents’ stories out into the community to remind people that everyone came from somewhere else, that everyone is somehow connected to a story of immigration.

THE ACTION

Good stories are usually referred to Walter by word of mouth. Immigrant Stories interviews people from all walks of life: key community members, such as the mayor of Glenwood Springs, the CEO of a major business in town, and children of Italian immigrants, as well as more recent Hispanic immigrants. It is important to involve residents who have stature in the community because people respect what they say. They often tell the story of the immigrant experience in a way that resonates with people whose own immigrant stories are not as fresh as those of other immigrant groups.

The interview process lasts 45 minutes to an hour. Walter looks for a place to conduct the interview where it is quiet, with uncluttered sound. Sometimes it is a person’s home or the local community college. After the interview Walter outlines it, selects the most significant parts of the story to tell, then edits it for the time and word limit. He can often make more than one story out of one interview.

The same story appears weekly in several media sources: the community radio station, the local newspaper, and on Walter’s blog and the Community Integration Initiative website. Radio stories are three minutes long. Newspaper stories are 1200-1600 words.

THE OUTCOME

Immigrant Stories has been around for nearly four years. Reader surveys show that it is one of the most popular pieces in the newspaper. Walter thinks this is because they are not basic news stories; they are stories told in immigrants’ own words. To date, he has recorded 165 radio stories and written 120 newspaper stories.

The stories seem to create a stronger sense of community. Walter has heard of people reaching out to those who are interviewed, perhaps unaware before hearing or reading the story that they are from the same country or region of the world.

The Immigrant Stories project has earned Walter local speaking engagements with the Rotary Club, college classes, and the library lecture series. Other communities have contacted Walter for advice on creating similar projects. Walter has been and continues to be happy to help people who contact him.

CHARACTER TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY STORYTELLER

Walter is a second generation Scottish immigrant. His father came to Glenwood Springs from the Brooklyn shipyards. Though his father quickly adjusted, Walter heard stories of what it was like to grow up being different from others. Walter connects with the experiences of immigrant families who are struggling to make a life here now. Current immigrant students have to work long hours to help their families. Walter's father was unable to finish high school because he had to go to work to help support the family.

Walter is a retired marketing director with strong communication skills and community respect. Public service is part of his DNA. A former community organizer and VISTA volunteer, Walter feels that it is important to give back to his community. "What makes this country great is the diversity of immigrants who bring us new ideas. Why *not* tell stories to make it harder to classify these people as 'illegal'?"

SUCSESSES

The biggest success of the Immigrant Stories project is bringing people together in a way that was not possible before. Glenwood Springs is a small town, so the community often knows the people who are interviewed. Residents sometimes stop the person in town to tell them they heard or read their story. The project encourages dialogue between people. The interviewee becomes a local celebrity for a week. Even for residents who do not know the interviewee, the story still offers a moment of pause and reflection into the life of a fellow community member.

Another factor that makes the project successful is its inclusiveness. Walter does not believe the project would work as well if he only told stories of recent immigrants. The stories of Italian immigrants who moved to the area in the 1920s are similar to the stories of Hispanic immigrants today: Italians were discriminated against and told to go home. The Ku Klux Klan marched to scare them out of the state. Now Italians are one of the most affluent groups in the community. Telling the stories of residents whose parents and grandparents faced the same adversity as today's immigrants connects people, regardless of what side of the immigration debate they fall on. There is power and beauty in storytelling. It is harder to argue against a group when you know their individual stories.

CHALLENGES

Obviously one challenge of the project is funding it. Immigrant Stories received a grant last year from a local foundation that saw the value of the project. The grant covers operation costs but does not pay for Walter's time. He often invests his own money in the project, but he continues to do so because he believes the stories are powerful enough that they must be shared.

Another issue is the Spanish language barrier. For a while Immigrant Stories translated the weekly stories into Spanish and published them in the local Latino newspapers, but the

newspapers went out of business. Walter says that it is important for the Spanish speaking community to know that they are not the only group that has faced discrimination; they are just the most recent group that it is happening to.

ADVICE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

If other communities are interested in replicating the Immigrant Stories project, “Just do it,” Walter says. This is not an expensive, equipment-intensive process, especially if the local radio station and newspaper get involved. Newspapers are struggling right now, which means they often need stories and will take them for free. Walter photographs interviewees and sends a picture to the paper along with the story. It does not require much work of the newspaper. Walter’s local radio station gave him a time slot because they believed in the idea. The stories create “driveway moments” that pull people in and keep them listening to the radio.

Along with free radio and newspaper slots, other parts of the process can be met through in-kind donations. People who are retired, semi-retired, or who are students have the willingness and the time to devote to the project. The biggest costs for starting the project were the time it took to apply for the grant, which Walter wrote, and the computer, which the grant paid for.

One thing Walter says he would do differently if he could start over is to follow up with the people he interviewed. He would like to know what happened after the story was told: who talked to whom, whether perceptions were changed, and if so, how and for whom.

LESSONS LEARNED

“We must not see any person as an abstraction. Instead, we must see every person as a universe with its own secrets, with its own treasures, with its own sources of anguish and some measure of triumph.”

Eli Wiesel, Holocaust survivor

These words hold meaning for Walter in the work that he does telling the stories of immigrants. “By calling people ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’, you’re doing that abstraction. If you can make a person an abstraction, it’s much easier to discount and disavow them, to treat them poorly. But if you know something about them, if you know their personal story, it’s harder to do that.” Stories are powerful. It is more difficult to remain aloof or uncaring when one knows an individual’s story.

Immigrants’ stories are similar, no matter where they come from or when they arrive. Stories of the immigrant ancestors of longtime residents are just as important as the stories of new immigrants. The old stories give perspective to longtime residents, showing them that they have a connection through their parents or grandparents to the same experiences that new immigrants face. The old stories also help connect new immigrants to longtime residents by showing them that the sometimes unpleasant experience of being an immigrant is not unique to their particular group, that others endured the same treatment.

A final lesson is in the power of an idea. A small project with few resources and no staff can create positive perspective changes that are bigger than the original idea could have predicted. That is a story in itself.

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FOSTERING CONTACT

Public Conversations Project *Community Dialogue in Tense Situations*

Since 1989, Public Conversations Project has provided dialogue facilitation on contentious issues in the US and around the world. Dave Joseph, Vice President of Programs and practitioner, has worked as a dialogue facilitator, trainer, and mediator for over 15 years. The work that he and Public Conversations Project do creates a context within which people with differing identities and/or core values can engage in constructive, respectful, and deep conversations across these divides.

BACKGROUND

The Public Conversations Project (PCP) model has been developed through more than 20 years of action research. Communities on six continents have used or adapted the PCP model to address tensions ranging from religion and sexual orientation to race and abortion. The model is also suited for use in immigration and integration dialogues.

People can and do engage in dialogue on their own. Many organizations feel more comfortable calling on the experience that PCP has facilitating groups; however, PCP offers a wide range of step-by-step resources on its website for communities to use to address their own issues.

Community dialogue is different from mediation. The term “mediation” is used primarily when seeking agreement, solving a problem, or negotiating a solution. The terms “dialogue” and “constructive conversation”, however, do not attempt to resolve a particular issue or get people to compromise or negotiate. The purpose is to allow participants the opportunity to learn and understand more about one another, thereby building and deepening trust.

Often, dialogue work focuses on identity-based issues—perspectives that will not change. PCP’s dialogue work includes listening to and understanding one another so people are able to move toward a feeling of shared humanity and connectedness. It is then that it becomes possible to care about one another, to explore differences in greater depth, and to identify areas of shared concern.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

PCP stresses the importance of voluntary participation. It is important that people not feel required to share; that they have the opportunity to pass on particular questions. Participants are encouraged to engage to the extent that they are comfortable. They need a base level of interest, curiosity, and willingness to engage with one another without feeling that they are

being grilled or cornered. The intention is to create an environment where people feel safe enough to participate freely and to take risks. PCP asks initial participants to select individuals from both sides of the issue who are credible, who are respected in the community, and who are really willing to hear, not just to speak.

THE ACTION

The following is a look at the start-to-finish process of a PCP dialogue: how it begins, how people get involved, how to make it successful, and how to set up the dialogue itself. Interestingly, the actual dialogue is not where the bulk of the work occurs: 80 percent of the work is done before people ever come into the room for the discussion. Laying the groundwork, as will be shown, is really where the potential for change lies.

How the dialogue process starts

Usually one party from a community contacts PCP because they are distressed at the damage done in their community as a result of the “cost of conflict”. They talk about the fact that their organization, neighborhood, or community has been fractured: people are engaged in stereotyping or blaming or attacking. There is a lot of talking at raised volumes, but no one is listening. The party is concerned about their relationships and that their ability to function as a community has been damaged. It is hard to work together anymore or even be heard in a constructive way without having it be hurtful.

Identifying a convener

A “convener” is an individual who has stature in the community. A convener is widely seen as neutral and not having a side, is interested in promoting the idea of dialogue, and is able to draw participants in and get the community to be open to the idea of a conversation. PCP talks with the initiating party about the process and the work that PCP does.

Sometimes one convener is adequate if that person has a well known position in the community, is perceived as being neutral on the issue, and can engage people. Sometimes, however, if that person is affiliated with a particular position, it is helpful to look for someone credible from the other side of the issue to be a co-convener. A co-convener has the ability to engage a different part of the community that may not be possible with only one convener.

Next, PCP has conversations with potential conveners from both sides of the issue to better understand the problem. PCP learns what conversations have already taken place, whose voices are not being heard, and the strengths or resources available in the community. The convener or co-conveners can suggest potential participants who might be interested in learning and understanding more about each other’s positions.

Mapping Conversations

PCP holds a series of “mapping conversations” to better understand the nature of the conflict. It asks the potential conveners to create a small planning group of 4-6 people from both sides of the issue who are interested in exploring the idea of dialogue. This planning group will serve as cultural brokers, local experts, and people with whom PCP can test out ideas.

In working with the planning group, PCP carefully identifies potential participants for the community dialogue. There are certain people who are so entrenched in a position that they are unlikely to see a point in coming together. They are more interested in persuading and pushing as opposed to seeing other points of view. Being an advocate for a particular issue is not necessarily a disqualifier for participating, but if the advocate is unwilling to listen to the other side she will probably not be interested in participating in dialogue.

In addition to being credible, respected, and willing to hear, potential participants need to have some sense of the cost of the conflict in their community. They need to have a personal reason or investment to participate.

Designing the Dialogue Invitation

It is important to work with the planning group to design an invitation that defines the following:

- What a dialogue is
- The purpose of the dialogue
- What people should and should not expect
- Who the facilitators are and what their roles will be
- Where it will take place
- Where more information about the dialogue can be obtained

The idea is to make sure people are prepared. The more they know what to expect, the more comfortable and receptive they will be to attending and participating in the dialogue.

The invitation should include a proposed set of communication agreements, also called ground rules. These are tailored to every group and situation, and they are subject to modification at the time of the dialogue. Whether participants or the facilitator propose the communication agreements depends on the culture of the participants. Some common agreements include:

- Agreement of some form of confidentiality that will allow people to take risks
- Participation is voluntary
- Agreement not to interrupt
- Agreement to share time so that everyone’s voice can be heard and no one dominates
- Agreement to speak from personal experience, but not as a representative of everyone with whom a particular identity is shared (i.e. an immigrant should not expect or be expected to speak for all immigrants)

Preparation Conversations

A PCP facilitator then has an in person, telephone, or email conversation with each participant before the dialogue begins. The facilitator talks to everyone individually and gets to know them. They discuss the ground rules. The facilitator finds out what will make the dialogue worthwhile for the participant and what things they may want to emphasize. The facilitator also asks what would cause the person to regret participating. They explain what it will be like to be in a room with people who may have very different points of view. The facilitator explains that each person should have the ability to restrain themselves from making judgments or trying to educate others to their point of view.

The preparation conversation allows participants to ask any questions they have and to feel more confident about what the dialogue process will involve. People feel a greater sense of ownership when they help craft the agreements, when they know that people will not attack or interrupt them, and they know they will be heard as they wish to be, rather than in light of how others may stereotype them.

The Dialogue

The PCP model is focused on the relational aspects of the dialogue as opposed to coming up with a solution. Facilitators do not control the process; they work side by side to have a conversation that works for both groups. One dialogue has 6-10 people and lasts one to two hours.

PCP uses a particular kind of structure for conversations that is unnatural or artificial. The structure typically begins with an invitation for each person to tell a story from their life experience as a way to invite connection and curiosity from other participants. This also avoids having people state their positions first, which can invite resistance from others.

During the first part of the dialogue the facilitator asks three questions. He takes time and lets participants reflect on what they want to say. Then each person speaks for 2-3 minutes. During that time, other people listen then speak sequentially.

The first question is a question of personal experience. It invites people to talk in a way that promotes curiosity, interest, a sense of engagement, and a sense of something that no one can argue with. Typically, a participant's story get people interested enough that it breaks down barriers. The second question gets at the heart of the matter at hand. It asks people to articulate their values, fears, hopes, and assumptions surrounding the issue. The third question explores the gray areas or areas where values may conflict with each other. It encourages participants to reach deeper to explain their perspective.

The second part of the dialogue is where people ask one another questions. They are given time to think about the questions they would like to ask. Trick, baiting, or rhetorical questions

are not permissible because they run counter to the purpose of the dialogue. The purpose is to learn and understand more about one another rather than persuade, convince, or win an argument.

The dialogue closes with the facilitator asking participants to end with parting reflections or sentiments that will bring the dialogue to a satisfying close.

THE OUTCOME

This type of community dialogue is effective partly because of the front-end work invested in the process. Most of the relationship and trust building, as well as the dispelling of fear, is established before the participants engage in dialogue with one another. There are many ways of approaching community dialogue and, while the PCP model is not the only or best process, it is a tool. It is an instrument that is effective in dealing with concerns.

This kind of dialogue can help people shift their focus and shift their relationships. People often focus on the deficits and strains in a community; PCP wants to make sure sufficient attention is given to the areas that may be able to bridge the gaps. By shifting the focus, people often recognize that their attention has been directed toward where they differ. They may have lost sight of the common ground between them. Perhaps, though, there is no common ground: there still may be a common humanity. Often that gets lost. Dialogue can help re-humanize the other and ourselves.

Through PCP dialogue, people frequently recognize that some of their understanding has been based on stereotypes. They tend to experience a sense of humanizing the other. This helps people recognize similarities and shared concerns. People often realize that there are possibilities for collaboration that did not seem to exist beforehand.

While PCP believes that greater mutual understanding and the opening up of possibility can be achieved through dialogue, it offers no promise that common ground will be found or that action will be taken as a result of the dialogue. The presumption that people will become friends or resolve disagreements by the end of a dialogue runs counter to PCP's purpose. Still, one Liberian woman spoke about the potential for dialogue following the 1989-2003 civil wars. "As a former rebel, I believe that if we had known about dialogue, perhaps we would not have had a civil war."

CHARACTER TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL FACILITATOR

Hakuri, hakuri, maganin zaman dunya.
Patience is the medicine for living in the world.
Hausa Proverb

One of the qualities that a facilitator needs is patience for the pacing and process of a dialogue, which is often a much slower process than normal conversation. This is intentional, as the

dialogue process promotes reflection, rather than reactivity on the part of participants. Patience also plays a role in the willingness to take time to craft questions that will help participants have fresh, new conversations, rather than getting stuck in the same old conversations, which frequently involve stereotypes, blaming, and judgments.

Curiosity and openness to new experience are also valuable facilitator traits and promote a sense of connection with participants that helps them feel trusted and receptive to dialogue. In addition, another important trait is compassion, which opens up the facilitator to hearing people speak of their passions in incredibly open, frank, and candid ways.

Personally, Dave Joseph feels privileged to witness people speaking about things during a dialogue that are unexpected, surprising, deep, or painful. He is impressed with the courageous conversations that take place in a dialogue. Listening to others talk in this way displays a greater sense of complexity that allows Dave to feel like a more whole human being and to recognize his own humanity. For Dave, witnessing in others such levels of honesty that do not naturally occur in other parts of life feels like a calling.

SUCSESSES

PCP has the most success with dialogues and when its facilitators are transparent and very clear with people. They do not attempt to convince or persuade. Facilitators do not try to sell or persuade participants to take part in dialogue; rather, they invite participants to identify a reason that it would be valuable or desirable, understanding that not everyone may feel that way.

Facilitators do not presume there will be agreement at the end of a dialogue. The role of the facilitator is one of neutrality. If either side perceives the facilitator as siding with the other, the facilitator loses effectiveness and people will not trust the process.

CHALLENGES

Sometimes people have certain expectations for how the dialogue will play out and what level of engagement is reasonable to expect. Sometimes, even when people engage in a respectful conversation, it turns how to be less exciting or less deep than they had hoped, leading to a feeling of disappointment. Some people express that they have just scratched the surface of the issue and they would have liked to have gone deeper. However, there is only so much that can be done in two hours. A reasonable expectation for that amount of time is to build some trust that may not have existed before. But sometimes people and issues are more complex than what can fit into two hours, which is why sometimes participants agree to take part in a series of conversations rather than a single one.

Potential participants in a dialogue process sometimes worry about what *could* happen. However, in Dave Joseph's 15 years as a facilitator, he has this to say: "What has never happened in my experience is the most common fear people have: if you have people of

different groups, things will get out of control.” The conversation’s structure and communication agreements typically promote a great sense of ownership on the part of participants. These, coupled with participants’ clarity of purpose, identified during the preparatory conversation, usually contribute to a surprisingly respectful and constructive conversation.

ADVICE FOR COMMUNITIES

The PCP model is a tool that, when used effectively, has the potential to influence a community. PCP offers numerous resources on its website (www.publicconversations.org) to assist communities in the dialogue process. PCP can also assist your community with facilitators trained in addressing tough issues of common concern.

Some communities need an ongoing dialogue effort to effectively build trust. PCP facilitators see themselves as servant leaders, so they assist a community based on the community’s request. PCP has participated in dialogues that only require one session. It has also facilitated dialogue processes that last a year or more. Your community may need more or less work depending on the issue and level of tension.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following are some guiding principles for creating community dialogue:

- It is essential to help potential participants be clear about their purposes for the dialogue; i.e. learning, understanding, and building or deepening relationships and trust, rather than persuasion or convincing.
- Some people may want a much deeper level of dialogue: listen to the needs of the community, but keep in mind that dialogue is often a process.
- The role of the dialogue facilitator is to be a servant leader, i.e. to help participants accomplish their purposes. The facilitator models transparency and openness in all her contacts with potential participants.
- Communication agreements support the group’s purpose and can be customized for each group.
- The structure of the dialogue promotes deeper listening and respectful speaking.
- Sharing of personal experience frequently creates a sense of connection, curiosity, and complexity that can lead to diminished stereotypes and demonization of the other.

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Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians ***Convening Neighbors around Common Issues***

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is an economic and workforce development organization established in 2003 by Anne O’Callaghan to aid in the social, political, and economic integration of immigrants. Today, the Welcoming Center provides job training and placement services, small business development assistance, free legal clinics, and comprehensive information and referral services for immigrants across the five-county Philadelphia region. Work with receiving communities of native-born Americans includes small-business support and technical assistance to local business associations and community development corporations. In addition, the Welcoming Center regularly hosts public forums that provide factual information about issues related to the economic impact of immigrants and cross-ethnic collaboration.

BACKGROUND

Anne O’Callaghan has lived in Pennsylvania for over 40 years. An immigrant herself, Anne knew of the variety of services available for immigrants in her community, but she observed that there was no centralized information source where people could learn about available services and obtain employment. In 2003 she founded the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians to serve as that centralized resource.

At its core, the Welcoming Center is an economic and workforce development organization. It does not provide social services, but it does provide referrals to them. The Welcoming Center believes that no one thrives without employment, so it strives to help work-authorized immigrants find jobs. Another key component of the Welcoming Center’s philosophy is shared prosperity: the idea that both US-born and newcomer community members benefit when the immigration process is smooth and successful. Naturally, then, the Welcoming Center is also an immigrant integration organization: it works to foster relationships among individuals and groups including local businesses and governments, ethnic and community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, labor unions, and other groups.

The Welcoming Center’s intensive integration work began in the summer of 2006 following an episode of cross-ethnic violence in West Philadelphia. The assault of a Liberian immigrant student by fellow American-born students put a spotlight on existing community tensions, misperceptions, and mistrust.

Native-born community leaders and others were frustrated by changes in their neighborhoods, including the arrival of new residents and businesses, over which they felt they had little influence. A long period of economic disinvestment and numerous experiences with university researchers and other outsiders who promised help but did not follow through resulted in tremendous distrust. Myths about immigrants and the services they received were widespread and persistent.

At the same time, immigrant community members struggled to feel at home in the unfamiliar cultural context of their new neighborhood and to become socially and politically integrated in school and places of work.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Welcoming Center began by meeting with native-born community leaders, who in West Philadelphia were primarily African-American. Executive Director Anne O’Callaghan expressed serious interest in having the community leaders involved in a roundtable town hall-style meeting to discuss the issue and what could be done about it. The Welcoming Center assured leaders that it would listen carefully and work toward implementing at least one suggestion from the meeting.

Identifying informal community leaders

The Welcoming Center actively seeks out leaders of different ethnic groups, including immigrants, particularly in its integration work. The process of locating and identifying informal leaders takes some intentional work. Most authentic informal leaders do not walk around claiming the role of “leader” in the community. The Welcoming Center defines informal community leaders as informal “block captains”: rather than elected or self-appointed leaders, they are the go-to people who others in the community naturally look to for suggestions, advice, and answers.

One of Anne’s approaches to locating informal leaders was through faith. She attended services at different religious institutions every week for six months. The Welcoming Center also sought out informal leaders in established immigrant organizations. It did this by drilling down into the neighborhoods and having repeated conversations with both immigrants and members of the receiving community.

Another aspect of community involvement that makes the Welcoming Center unique is its staffing. Half of its 15-person team (plus 10 part time employees) is foreign born; half is native born. The Welcoming Center uses different people depending on what needs to be done. There are times when a foreign-born person is the best individual to convey a message or to attend a gathering. Other times it is more important to have a native-born individual carry the message. This approach to hiring within the organization allows for more involvement of the Welcoming Center in communities, and reciprocally, more community involvement with the Welcoming Center.

THE ACTION

Once native-born community leaders were on board, the Welcoming Center planned a community dialogue day called Creating Community through Collaboration. The Welcoming Center hoped to improve cross-cultural understanding and eventually improve economic outcomes for the community by bringing people together to talk.

At the time, the Welcoming Center's office was located in the central business district of Philadelphia, but it held the community dialogue in a nonprofit space in a West Philadelphia neighborhood with easy access to public transit. This was a key decision made in response to community feedback that "downtown Philadelphia" felt distant and unwelcoming in comparison to a neighborhood-based event space.

The Welcoming Center was careful about who was invited to the community dialogue. Not everyone it invited was completely on board with the idea, but it did not invite people who it knew to be hostile or malicious. It was intentional about inviting longtime or permanent residents of the community: the neighborhoods were popular with students from nearby universities, but students had a limited personal stake in the community and were likely to eventually move away.

Participants were asked to give up a whole Saturday in June 2006. The day was carefully planned. The Welcoming Center structured the day so that local elected officials who wanted to speak could do so in the morning during a panel discussion, leaving the afternoon free for the roundtable discussions that formed the bulk of the agenda. At the afternoon sessions, participants were divided into groups of ten, with five foreign-born participants and five native-born participants per table.

The Welcoming Center was also selective of the facilitators for the discussions. First and foremost, it wanted well-trained facilitators who were culturally competent and who themselves reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the community. Facilitators were paid for their time, and a professional facilitation moderator was hired to help them prepare for the event. During the roundtable discussion, facilitators made sure everyone was heard and that people did not get shut down by other participants. The goal of community dialogue is to create situations where people can hear one another without static or a lack of charity toward each other.

THE OUTCOME

What emerged from the roundtable discussions was that many of the participants, including native-born and immigrants, identified the same areas of concern and opportunity in their shared communities.

Both native-born and immigrant participants identified high-quality public education for their children, issues of crime and safety, and quality of life as major concerns. Notes from each of

the discussion groups also showed that there was great distress in the receiving community from residents who felt displaced, while the immigrant community at times felt afraid and unaccepted without understanding why.

Of the multitude of ideas and suggestions that were brainstormed by meeting participants, the idea of a neighborhood-based resource center gained the most significant traction by the end of the day. A small group of native-born merchants offered to assist with finding space if a center could be funded.

The Welcoming Center did not have the funding to start a neighborhood resource center. Its office was in the center of the city. Nevertheless, it built on the momentum of the community meeting and began meeting with the local business association that had offered to provide assistance.

Over the next nine months, the Welcoming Center continued to gather information and explore what a neighborhood center might look like and what services it could provide. In addition, the organization applied for and eventually received funding through the William Penn Foundation to hire staff to do neighborhood-based work in preparation for the resource center. The first staff member for the project was hired in the spring of 2007, less than a year after the community dialogue took place.

Between the summer of 2006 and the spring of 2007, the Welcoming Center held follow-up meetings and individual conversations in the community to update participants on their progress and to continue to gather feedback from community members.

During this period, the Welcoming Center received an invitation from a local business association, mostly consisting of African American business owners, to begin corridor mapping in the neighborhood. The mapping process consisted of repeated informal interviews with store owners and vendors, resulting in a first-of-its-kind demographic and economic portrait of the corridor.

The Welcoming Center's first staff member for this project was a young African American woman with a strong grounding in cross-cultural work. She began building relationships with local store owners while conducting the corridor-mapping process. A little more than a year later in August 2008, the new neighborhood-based resource center opened.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

While community dialogue helped spark the creation of the local resource center, it is not the only strategy the Welcoming Center uses for economic and workforce development. While it often does not initially have funding for new projects, it regularly sees a need in the community that it finds important enough to explore further through a small pilot program. Successful pilots have led to additional services, a few of which are outlined below.

Project Building Cultures youth program. This program works with high school students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to help them succeed in school and pursue opportunities after graduation. In addition to fostering positive interaction between students from diverse backgrounds, the program offers help with homework, English practice, and career and college information.

English for Entrepreneurs. While she was engaged in the corridor-mapping process described above, the staff member the Welcoming Center hired observed miscommunication between customers and store owners as a source of significant community tensions and even altercations. For example, immigrant business owners often put a customer's change on the counter rather than in their hand, which was perceived as rude by American-born customers. In other cases, store employees did not understand what customers said, resulting in an incorrect order. These small misunderstandings increased distrust in the community and sometimes escalated into outright conflict.

For the pilot English for Entrepreneurs classes, the Welcoming Center recruited Mandarin-speaking graduate students to develop a curriculum aimed at owners and employees of Chinese takeout restaurants. The class consisted of six to eight Chinese store owners and a Chinese instructor.

The success of this pilot project provided a foundation for its later expansion. After a lengthy effort, the Welcoming Center finally obtained funding from the City of Philadelphia to provide small business services. English for Entrepreneurs became part of those services. Since the launch, four additional classes have been held, two focused on Korean-speaking merchants and two focused on French-speaking West African merchants.

The program is powerful, but it is an extremely labor-intensive process. It reflects both actually existing tensions in the community and a practical attempt to defuse those tensions through better customer services and intercultural communication. The Welcoming Center saw the need for it and provided a solution. The program came several steps down the road after the initial community dialogue, but it was simply a product of being attentive to the needs of the community.

CHARACTER TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY LEADER

Anne has lived and worked in the Philadelphia area for more than 40 years. This has afforded her credibility in the community. Anne was a physical therapist active with the Visiting Nurse Association for much of that time. She was also a software entrepreneur before she founded the Welcoming Center.

Anne's colleagues stress that the Welcoming Center could not have done one-fourth of the work it has done without her life experience. They report that Anne possesses a moral authority that caused people to believe her when she said the Welcoming Center promised to listen and take action, even though the community had received empty promises before.

Part of this authority lies in her appearance: she has stark white hair and an Irish accent. In addition, Anne is willing to travel everywhere and talk to everyone. She is capable of putting her ego on the line, being patient, and holding her tongue when necessary, and she has the tenacity and curiosity needed to get things done. Anne is committed to the community. She has built a reputation and has connections across multiple social worlds.

SUCSESSES

One of the biggest successes the Welcoming Center has had in fostering good relationships between immigrants and native-born residents was the community dialogue that produced the neighborhood resource center. The Welcoming Center was mindful during every step of the planning process. That attention to detail, from identifying informal community leaders to selecting qualified facilitators to instilling confidence that they would follow through with action, allowed for honest, open dialogue.

CHALLENGES

During the community dialogue planning process, the Welcoming Center faced mistrust and misperception in the community. Residents felt as if they had been studied to death. Outside organizations had made promises that went unfulfilled. Anne's earnestness in her discussions was a key in convincing community members to participate in the dialogue.

Another challenge was local political turf issues. Elected officials and other organizations felt a strong sense of ownership about the neighborhoods where the Welcoming Center was proposing to work. Recognizing and accommodating their investment was vital, as was strategizing about how to acknowledge community members' fears that this would turn out to be just another false hope. The Welcoming Center took these issues into consideration when structuring the day, which is why the morning panel discussion was created as a part of the community dialogue.

ADVICE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

When the Welcoming Center became interested in cross-cultural work, it researched but did not find many other organizations engaged in the combination of economic workforce development and immigrant integration. Nor did it find other organizations that were focused on employment for immigrants. While some immigrant-service organizations have ancillary jobs programs, and some economic development organizations end up serving immigrant entrepreneurs, the purposeful combination of the two is rare.

Instead, the Welcoming Center has largely found its own way in the work that it does, though staff does draw on sociological research such as Robert Putnam's research on "bonding" and "bridging" between and among ethnic communities.

The Welcoming Center receives numerous inquiries from people who want to learn how to achieve similar results. The Welcoming Center stresses that this work is not for the faint of heart. It is hard. It takes a long time. It requires dedicated commitment. It is labor-intensive.

The Welcoming Center urges others to understand that sometimes change feels like loss. It is important to recognize the loss that longtime residents may feel, without making it the focal point of all conversations. At the community dialogue, native-born residents of West Philadelphia expressed feelings of loss and displacement from their neighborhoods. Trained facilitators allowed those residents to express their perspective through the community dialogue, while leaving space for the discussion to include other issues.

Other pieces of advice that the Welcoming Center learned through experience:

- Research the types of businesses, religious institutions, and other organizations you visit so you know something about them.
- With West Philadelphia, the Welcoming Center dove in head first: if they were to do it again, they might have selected a slightly less politically divided corridor to work with.
- Understand that even with all the time and relationship-building you put into a community, there will still be issues that you will not be privy to in the community.
- You need really strong, diverse ties that cross social, racial, and religious lines.
- Look at the landscape in your community. Be attentive to its unique needs.
- This is not “community building in a box”. It is not a project that can be accomplished in an 18-month time frame.

In addition, while fostering contact between foreign-born and native-born residents through activities such as picnics, festivals, and dinners can be a good entry step, these activities by themselves do not create substantial relationships. They do not create community. It really takes drilling down in the neighborhood, getting to know people, and putting in the amount of time it takes to build relationships. There is no substitute for sweat equity.

Finally, and most importantly, the work you do must be *purposeful*: good intentions and good will are not sufficient for good outcomes.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Welcoming Center has learned some over-arching lessons that have helped in fostering relationships within the community. These are big picture factors that keep the Welcoming Center focused on its service-oriented goals.

- There is no magic bullet for community integration. No one activity or program has been a stand-out success.
- People watch what you do. You must match your action with your words.

- Diverse staff makes a difference. It has an impact when the people who are talking are themselves reflective of the communities in which they are working. Not just racially or ethnically, but with regard to age, gender, religion, and social class.
- Being an immigrant is like growing a second heart: the immigration experience is wrenching, dislocating, and exciting. But your first heart does not go away. You live with the duality.

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Montgomery County Public Schools Study Circles Program *Race, Ethnicity, and the Achievement Gap*

Study Circles is a dialogue and action program in Montgomery County, Maryland public schools that addresses racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parental involvement. It works with parents, students, and school faculty and staff to eventually reach a place where race and ethnicity are not predictors of success in education.

BACKGROUND

The Montgomery County, Maryland school district is large: bordering Washington, D.C., the district has 200 schools and 140,000 students. Montgomery County, while traditionally affluent, has seen growths in poverty and diversity in the last 40 years. Today there is no racial or ethnic majority in the school district. It is a wide mix of racial groups, ethnic groups, and languages. Students' families come from Central America, Latin America, and all parts of Asia and Africa.

Nearly a decade ago, the superintendent of Montgomery County School District reached out to Everyday Democracy, an organization that helps people with diverse backgrounds and views talk and work together to solve problems. The superintendent wanted to bring teachers and parents of diverse backgrounds together to create dialogue around *closing the achievement gap* for students.

At the time, John Landesman worked for Everyday Democracy, collaborating with the state superintendent to provide dialogue trainings for school districts. He helped develop the pilot Study Circles program for Montgomery County, and eventually left Everyday Democracy to work for the school district full time.

In early dialogues, it became apparent that race was an issue that kept surfacing and getting in the way, so the scope of the dialogues was changed to address it. The dialogues now focus on *the impact of race and ethnicity on student achievement and parent involvement*. Study Circles' vision is to get to a place where race and ethnicity are not predictors of success in school. The program obviously cannot do this alone, but it makes sure that everyone involved has a voice, that schools are representing the whole school community—not just portions of it—and that people are learning from one another.

Every year new cultures appear in the schools. Schools have difficulty adapting to them. The idea is to help people understand different cultures through dialogue, to have honest conversations about different experiences people have and how they play out in the schools, and then to develop ways to address the problems.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

It was the superintendent who provided the spark to get the Study Circles program started by reaching out to Everyday Democracy. High level school district officials understood the importance of dialogue and addressing issues surrounding the achievement gap.

During the piloting phase of the program several organizations were instrumental in organizing, providing technical support, locating facilitators, and getting parents involved. Everyday Democracy, the Business Roundtable for Education, and Impact Silver Spring all helped get the program off the ground.

The target audience for the program is parents and school staff. School staff is primarily white, while students and parents are diverse. The goal is to create relationships between these groups so they understand how to work to address one another's needs: the needs of students to achieve, the needs of schools to adapt and teach, and the needs of parents to be involved in their children's educations. The second goal is to create action.

Engaging School Staff

It was a challenge to get staff interested in the program for the first few years. Without a model to consult, staff did not recognize what the program could do for them. Many people were fearful of talking about race and how it impacts their school. Most principals did not want to take it on. Additionally, schools are under a lot of pressure, and school staff does not have a lot of time. It was difficult to convince staff to participate. Study Circles was a new program with no guarantees that it would be around the next year to continue its work. But the school district kept funding the program year after year.

It was a time-intensive process and Study Circles had to ask staff to commit to it. Eventually, it was word of mouth that convinced staff and teachers to participate. The more success the program had, the more people believed in it. They realized that it was not something to be afraid of. It has taken time to get to this point, but within the last two years Study Circles has even begun working with the central office leadership and other employees in the school district.

Engaging Parents

Parents have also been difficult to engage for several reasons. One is that, depending on the school, families do not live near enough to get to them easily. Another reason is that parents have conflicting work hours, so they cannot all come at the same time during the day or during the evening. Other challenges to parent involvement and their remedies are discussed below.

THE ACTION

There are two big action steps to the Study Circles program: organizing to get parents involved and the actual study circles process itself. An informational meeting is held to get parents involved. That meeting is held when a school requests one. It is usually requested because the school has an achievement gap that it wants to work to close, not because of a specific issue or problem that occurred in the school.

Organizing to get parents involved

The program holds an informational meeting for every study circle session. The school sends out fliers to the whole school community, inviting everyone to the meeting. Fliers are distributed in different languages. The program recruits heavily for the informational meeting, but not for the study circles themselves. The idea is to get as many people to the meeting as possible to show them what a study circle looks like.

Study Circles and the schools use several other strategies to recruit parents: for example, sometimes principals will sit outside in the mornings to recruit parents when they drop off their children. Study Circles asks the school to think of 50-60 families that would not normally come to such a meeting: the principal sends those families a personal letter of invitation. The school then gives the list of families to Study Circles, which calls to personally invite each family.

The informational meeting is a very different kind of meeting. It is all about relationship building from the start, and recognizing that each person is an expert in his/her own experiences. The meeting lasts up to two hours. The first half hour is a dinner; the meeting lasts up to an hour and a half. The Study Circles program is explained, and then everyone is put in a sample study circle to see what it is like. Childcare and language interpretation are provided. Usually there are 20-60 people at each informational meeting.

The study circle process

Initially, study circles consisted of only parents and school staff. Later, some circles included high school students. Now middle and high school study circles include a mixture of staff and parents, staff and students, or students only. Elementary school circles involve parents and staff.

Study circles consist of six two-hour sessions. Most of the process is spent building relationships. There are activities for participants to get to know one another. While critics argue that the program should be more task-oriented, the Study Circles program realizes that without first reaching understanding, tasks do not occur.

Each session has a particular focus. The first session is simply discussion. Participants are paired up and they talk about their individual experiences, but they do not necessarily talk about race at this point. The second session focuses on relationship building and learning

about cultures. Participants are asked to bring something from their culture to share: food, music, an object, a photo, a reading, etc. They also create a cultural timeline activity. Participants are asked to think about events in their lives that have impacted them: a global event, a personal event, and an event that changed the way they think about race. By the end of the second session participants report that they have built a bond that they did not expect.

The third session builds on the cultural timeline experience, but takes it in a different direction. Participants talk about stereotypes and skin color and how those things are experienced differently in each community represented. In the fourth session, participants discuss how the issues of stereotypes and skin color impact the school: how they get in the way of teaching and learning. The third and fourth sessions often leave participants feeling uncomfortable. They do not necessarily end on a happy note.

The fifth session discusses action steps that can be taken to address the impact of race and ethnicity on student achievement and parent involvement in the school. The sixth and final session is a completion of the action plan for staff, parents, and students. Participants are asked to evaluate the program at the end.

THE OUTCOME

There are several outcomes of this program. First, Study Circles has reached many parents and students who do not normally participate in the school community. Second, because most study circles are held at the school level, the program learns things that the district decision-makers do not hear. The program brings the voices of the schools to the district's policymakers who have a direct impact at the district level.

Finally, some of the newer study circles are "affinity circles". These are for students that are not doing well in school. The program helps them create a presentation that is seen by school staff. The staff then uses the presentation to develop strategies to better understand the students and their needs.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

John Landesman co-created the Study Circles program for the Montgomery County School District. He writes the material and often facilitates the circles. Though John is opinionated and passionate about advocacy work, he recognizes within himself the ability to remain neutral. As he observes advocates talking over one another, not listening, and not trying to understand, he sees the need to bring people together toward common ground. People need to actually listen to one another and build relationships. "The more I do this work, the more I realize the importance of it," he says.

John believes that most people are good people, but they do not have the opportunity to step outside their own worlds. Most people grow up in a world where the people around them are similar to them. "I'm interested in people from all different backgrounds. I can often see a

different side of things.” To do this work, he says, it can’t be about you. “I don’t go in as an expert. I’m just good at helping people talk about important things.” There are a lot of people who are smart and good directors, John says, but you have to take a step back and not be an expert all the time.

SUCSESSES

One thing the program does very well is build relationships. It is 98-99 percent successful in creating relationships in the study circles sessions. The program creates a welcoming atmosphere where parents report that they feel more a part of the school community. Most participants say how connected they feel to the group when the program is finished.

The Study Circles program’s services are requested for more, and more different, kinds of issues and opportunities. People now see the program as an asset. Though budget cuts have hit the county, the program still exists, is still growing, and is even thriving.

CHALLENGES

The main part of the program—the action steps at the end—is a challenge, but it is getting better. Study Circles does not have offices in the schools, so it does not supervise the action that groups create. The program simply gets the group to the point of action. Some schools do it better than others. The program is now connecting action steps to things that are already happening in the schools. By connecting to groups and activities that are already in place, there is a greater chance for completion of the action steps.

Another occasional struggle is getting the Latino community involved. In response to this, Study Circles created a Spanish language study circle model. The sessions are all held in Spanish with administration and staff participating through interpreters. This flips the normal translation model around: usually everything is in English and the parents are the ones with interpreters.

Literacy rates vary even in a family’s native language, and often cultural emphasis on particular issues such as education varies. These are other challenges that Study Circles faces. Though materials are available in six languages, it cannot be assumed that this opens up availability of information to everyone.

ADVICE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

Study Circles stresses the importance of communication and dialogue in schools. One example illustrates this well. There was a small Vietnamese community in a particular school in the district consisting of approximately 20 families. School staff was frustrated that the families were not connected to their children’s education. The staff did not understand why the families were not helping one another out.

The action step the school took was to bring all the Vietnamese families together. The families were all invited to a meeting with the principal. The staff assumed that the families all knew one another, but before that meeting with the principal, *none of the families did*. Several reasons surfaced for their lack of involvement, including that most of the families worked long hours and some of the parents were illiterate. This was an eye-opening experience for school staff, who had taken for granted that the families were a community that knew each other well and socialized together.

As a result of the meeting with the principal, the families took action steps of their own. They created a phone tree and a ride tree. Many of the mothers could not drive, so whichever father was available to come to school meetings would offer rides to everyone. These simple acts of communication, between the school and the Vietnamese families, and between the families themselves, helped open dialogue and get parents of the Vietnamese students more involved in their children's educations.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson Study Circles has learned is that you need to *spend as much time organizing as you do holding the actual dialogue itself*. Below are other lessons learned for dialogue, facilitation, and evaluation.

The most important things needed for dialogue are good facilitators and good materials. You need facilitators who know what they are doing. Additionally, materials with good activities are important because, even if you do not have the greatest facilitator, people are still able to be taken through the process.

Even though facilitators have their own beliefs, this is not diversity training: it is important to understand where people are coming from. Facilitators do not say there is a right or a wrong way to solve issues or get things done. A lot of teaching and learning goes on in a dialogue, but it comes from the group, not from the facilitator.

Finally, participant evaluations are important: listen to them. This is one of the best things that happened for Study Circles because it allows for improvement. By listening to what is happening in the groups, you can adapt to their needs. Study Circles adds new activities, changing the process every year.

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FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Each person or organization interviewed for this report shared lessons they have learned and their advice for communities that want to implement similar projects. This section synthesizes the most important things to keep in mind when engaging in receiving community work from the perspectives of the people and organizations that have had success. When appropriate, the author has included perceptions gained from speaking with the individuals interviewed. For example, it was apparent through conversations with the leaders doing receiving community work that they each have a uniquely high level of compassion for others, though none of the leaders interviewed specifically indicated that. It came across in the way in which they spoke about their work.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Certain qualities and actions emerged during conversations with local leaders that seem so crucial as to define a good leader. The most essential quality in a good leader, as noted above, is *a uniquely high level of compassion for others*. They are empathetic toward the problems that others face. The most essential action taken by a good leader is *forming effective collaborations with other leaders and organizations*. They are skilled at bringing people together around an issue.

Qualities of a leader. In addition to a high level of compassion, good leaders also possess the following character traits:

- They are patient
- They have a strong sense of justice
- They are mindful in their responses

Actions of a leader. Good leaders know how to collaborate effectively. They are also skilled in the following:

- They see the big picture
- They understand that creating change is not a one-person show
- They include all interested parties
- They are able to apply skills from other sectors to integration work
- They take action

How leaders emerge. Generally, leaders are found within the community itself. They have often been in the community a long time and understand its intricacies on a fundamental level. This knowledge gives them credibility with community members. They have observed a particular issue the community deals with and they often have fresh ideas to approaching it and are willing to implement them. Good leaders are listeners. They have been listening to the community sometimes for years. They validate community members' concerns and take action. Finally, leaders emerge when all the right factors align: they have the skills that a community needs at the time that the community needs them.

How leaders stay engaged. A leader's sense of compassion for particular groups or individuals drives their sense of personal responsibility. They often feel that it is their duty to help when and where they can. Good leaders are already a part of, or become a part of, the community in which they lead. They are personally invested in the outcomes.

How leaders find the courage to work in contentious environments. Leaders of unpopular positions understand internally that they are doing the right thing. Their courage comes from knowing they are doing the best thing they can to make their communities a better place. They are sure of themselves and their position.

MESSAGING AND MEDIA

Two seemingly conflicting but equally important aspects of strategic communication rise to the top of the list. First, *storytelling is a powerful medium*. It can be difficult to implement, but telling the story is crucial to humanizing an issue and finding common ground. Second, *messaging is less about spreading information and more about giving people access points for action*. Media and written word provide outlets for people to creatively explore the possibility for change. While this may seem to run counter to the idea of simply telling the story, storytelling itself can actually become the action for change rather than the message.

The entities using messaging and media to create more welcoming communities have a genuine interest and curiosity in the messages they share. Depending on the message and the medium, these ideas are important to consider:

- Focus on positive messages, not defensive messaging
- Develop a messaging plan—create a strategy and formalize it
- Start with the most pressing issue, make it the primary focus, and organize around it
- Brainstorm your key audiences and ways to address their concerns
- Understand who you are talking to
- Say things in a way that will make your audience want to listen
- Engage people’s self interest
- Be deliberate about choosing spokespeople

Choosing a spokesperson. It is important to choose a spokesperson who clearly understands the issues facing the community. So too, it is important to designate one or a few spokespeople and make sure only they do the talking. The following are traits of an effective spokesperson:

- Someone who is genuine and sincere
- Someone who expresses herself well and can effectively articulate talking points
- Someone who is skilled at redirecting conversations from negative to positive issues

Types of messaging used. The following are ways in which messages can be conveyed. The most effective form of messaging seems to be online media.

- FAQ sheets, either a printed brochure or on a website
- Tough questions sessions
- Deliberately chosen spokespeople
- Blogs
- Film
- Print reports
- Websites
- Social media sites
- Documentaries
- Radio
- Newspaper

Types of messages used. The entities interviewed here have used the following types of messages to convey their views.

- “It is a two-way street to build stronger communities.”
- “Bigoted organizations need to be held accountable.”
- Stories of positive community action
- “It is okay to engage white people in race discussions.”

- “We are all part of the community, and we all came from somewhere else.”

FOSTERING CONTACT

Hands down, the most important advice the three entities interviewed have for fostering meaningful contact in the community is to *build meaningful relationships*. It is a process that does not happen easily or quickly, but it simply must be done if community integration is to have any level of success. Provide opportunities to cultivate relationships through peer support, group collaborations of mutual interest, and facilitation around issues of concern.

Each of the entities interviewed have used dialogue as a catalyst for creating relationships. None of them, though, presume that dialogue automatically leads to lasting relationships. It is important to manage expectations when engaging in community building.

Common advice from the entities that work toward community engagement is similar to the advice from local leaders and messaging and media entities.

- Be completely transparent in your actions
- Be absolutely clear in your words
- Be careful not to presume things—do not presume people will or will not like one another; that dialogue can or cannot work; or that community members are or are not trying to understand one another
- Dialogue is one of many tools used to aid relationship building, not the only one
- Dialogue and interaction must be meaningful, not superficial
- Minimize threats and myths as much as possible by redirecting conversations
- Good facilitators help people come to conclusions on their own, without telling them what to think

This compilation of advice, lessons learned, and common themes from the nine interviews conducted is intended as a resource for other communities that are doing receiving work. Each community is uniquely different, but much of this advice is broad enough to apply in varied situations. The communities highlighted here have experienced integration issues and have worked to turn negative or ambivalent situations into positive change.

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