

A tool for predominately white organizations and multi-racial organizations of white people and people of color

Assessing Organizational Racism

"We don't really have a problem with racism in our community because most of our population is white."



"We tried to get more people of color involved. We invited them to our meetings but they didn't end up coming. They never said why."

When it comes to race and racism, many social change organizations have trouble walking their talk (and for some, even talking the talk gets short shrift).

Predominantly white organizations may think that racism is not their issue until more people of color join. Or they may think that the extent of their work around race is to get more people of color to join.

The Dismantling Racism Project at Western States Center believes that racism is everyone's problem, whether or not people of color are involved in your organization. Primarily white organizations can and should become anti-racist, even if their racial composition does not change. Becoming a multi-cultural organization is not a necessary goal of anti-racist work.

The fact is, racism is reflected in every institution and organization in the U.S.: social change groups are not exempt. The structures and cultures of community-based, grassroots groups reproduce the white privilege and racial oppression of the wider society. Whatever your social change mission, it's bound to fall short as long as racism continues to flourish and maintain the status quo.

Fortunately, organizations, like individuals, can evolve to become anti-racist. The transformation begins with developing a comprehensive understanding of how racism and oppression operate within an organization's own walls. From that analysis comes a commitment and concrete plans for dismantling racism within the organization and in the larger society.

This Organizational Assessment — an excerpt of a longer self-evaluation tool used by the Dismantling Racism Project — offers a place to start. This sampling of questions is designed to help you examine and change the ways your organization replicates larger racist patterns.

Grab a snack and something to drink, get a pen and a pad of paper. Better yet, gather a few other people from your organization and work through these questions together. As you read each question, take a moment to answer it for your organization before reading the additional commentary.

Finally, remember: this is a starting place. The

fundamental evolution needed to become actively anti-racist is a long, slow, deep process. But organizations that have made the commitment — like the Idaho Women's Network — are living proof that it can be done. The changes they've made (see page 16) confirm that the hard work of transformation is worth every minute.

Who makes decisions in your organization?

- Does your organization have a goal to dismantle racism? Is this goal reflected in your decision-making process?
- Is there a shared analysis of who has decision-making power and who does not? Does everyone know how decisions are made?
- Is there a deliberate plan to develop the leadership of people of color staff members and to share decision-making authority?
- Is your organization accountable to people of color organizations and communities who are affected by but not part of the organization?

Anti-racist organizations develop the leadership of staff and members so that power can be shared in a meaningful and accountable way. In an anti-racist multi-racial organization, decision-making power is shared across race. A white anti-racist organization must create a decision-making process that is accountable to organizations and communities of color; this task is essential, complicated and requires constant attention.

Who has control and influence over financial resources?

- Who develops the budget? Who does the fundraising?
- When the budget or fundraising plan reflects work to be done in support of people of color communities, do these communities have input on where the money comes from and how it is going to be spent?
- Does your organization advocate with funders to support the work of people of color organizations directly?

In an anti-racist multi-racial organization the budget

and fundraising plan are understood by people of color as well as white people at all levels of the organization. Budgeting and fundraising in a white anti-racist organization must ensure accountability around racism.

What kind of education about racism and oppression is provided through the organization?

- Are people of color supported in seeking information around issues of internalized racist oppression and self-empowerment either within the organization or from outside the organization?
- Are white people supported in seeking information around issues of white privilege and supremacy either within the organization or from outside the organization?
- Are there regular trainings and discussions at the member, staff and board level about dismantling racism and accountability?

An anti-racist organization will provide training and encourage discussion about racism, white privilege, power and accountability with board, staff and members. People of color within an organization will have specific opportunities to understand and dismantle internalized racist oppression, while white people are charged with understanding and dismantling white privilege.

What is the culture of your organization?

- What are the values and norms, stated or unstated?
- Are people of color welcomed in the organization only in so far as they assimilate into the existing organizational culture?
- Is white culture treated as the norm? Do the art, holiday activities, and food reflect people of color cultures?
- Is discussion of racism and oppression normal and encouraged or seen to distract from “the real work?” Do people in leadership positions participate in and support discussion of power and oppression issues?
- Are there people of color who consistently do not participate in meetings and discussion? If so, is

there active reflection on why, and how to encourage more balanced participation?

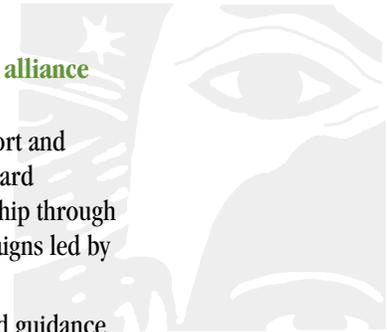
These questions reveal whether the day-to-day experience of the organization reflects the lives and cultures of people of color. Groups committed to addressing racism and oppression must examine the ways that we communicate, the space in which we work, and the activities we share.

How does your organization work in alliance with people of color organizations?

- Does your organization provide support and resources for members, staff, and board members of color to develop leadership through working with organizations or campaigns led by people of color?
- Does your organization seek input and guidance from people of color organizations and community leaders of color in its strategic planning and decision making?
- Does your organization advocate for the participation of people of color organizations when working in coalition with other groups?
- Does your organization provide support and resources for white members, staff, and board to develop as anti-racist white allies through working with organizations or campaigns led by people of color?

An anti-racist organization will work in alliance with people of color organizations. However, the structure of an alliance is fundamental to the success of anti-racist work. Primarily white organizations often come to the table with greater staff capacity and financial resources than people of color organizations. This imbalance of power often undermines the leadership of organizations of color when working in alliance.

Western States Center is committed to its own internal transformation while supporting organizations in the region to become effective anti-racist allies. The Center's Dismantling Racism Project has a number of resources available for individuals, organizations and coalitions.



*This Assessment Tool was developed by the Dismantling Racism Project at Western States Center, drawing heavily from Dismantling Racism curriculum designed by **changework**, 1705 Wallace Street, Durham NC 27707, (919) 490-4448.*