

Racism in our Communal Structures: A Community Assessment Tool

The tool describes four stages of community development, so that we can identify our starting point. Most communities have a few characteristics from each stage, while others may have one dominant stage that prevails. Evolving through the stages requires step-by-step change - unfortunately, we can't skip steps.

Some white-dominated intentional communities are geographically located in places that have tiny non-white populations. While we must be careful to not use geography as an excuse to maintain white domination, in some cases, the goal of evolving towards becoming a multi-racial community just doesn't make sense. In those places, strong, independent organizations of color are most needed, and the white community can work to become an accountable, mutually-supportive ally group. This process entails developing structures of accountability to communities of color, and developing communal structures that normalize the anti-racist lens. In most cases, though, the all-whiteness of our community is something that is created, and that can be changed.

General Descriptions of the Four Stages of Community Development

The All White Community

These communities don't intentionally exclude people of color, but have not analyzed their organizational structure and culture for seeds of racism. These communities often ask the question "Where are all the people of color- why don't they volunteer here or support us?" When these communities are unsuccessful at recruiting people of color, they may tend to (subconsciously) blame people of color for not being interested in their important work, or decide that "the work" is more important than having a multi-cultural or anti-racist group.

The Token Community

These communities feel mostly like the All White Community, with a few people of color involved. This community has set specific goals for including people of color, but maintains a white dominated culture across the board.

The Multi-Cultural Community

This community celebrates diversity, with many people of color involved. It addresses race issues within the group, but is mostly controlled by decisions and standards set by whites.

The Anti-Racist Community

These communities analyze their practices and cultures regularly through an anti-racist lens. Caucusing (separate supportive discussions about racism) is used to encourage the growth of anti-racist white allies and empowered people of color. Power is shared between people of color and whites; racism and privilege are talked about regularly. The commitment to end racism is a consistent theme in community materials, ministries and meetings.

Questions for Reflection

1. Use the graph to examine your communal structures. Within each structure (communal culture, primary work, etc.) circle the stage that best describes your community. Describe details and examples of each.
2. Brainstorm some initial ideas for your community to evolve forward.

	All White Community	Token Community	Multicultural Community	Anti-Racist Community
<p>Community Culture</p> <p>- What is celebrated? - What are the expectations of behavior? - How do we interact?</p>	<p>We primarily measure success by how much is accomplished</p> <p>We pay more attention to “product” than process</p> <p>We don’t discuss our communal structures with any significant power or race analysis</p> <p>Consensus in name only; dominant members (whites) dictate most of the decisions</p> <p>We’re in denial that our community may be reproducing racism</p>	<p>White people’s ideas and practices (how meetings are conducted, how the house is run, etc.) dictate the norm</p> <p>When discussing oppression, we focus on individual prejudice, rather than structural racism</p> <p>We avoid conflict when possible</p> <p>Paternalistic; deep down we believe in our status quo: “the community knows best”</p>	<p>Non-white heroes and groups are celebrated in practical ways</p> <p>“Bootstraps” mentality and workaholism still encouraged</p> <p>While celebrating individuals who have succeeded, we still generally assume a level playing field</p> <p>Expectations for community behavior are clearly laid out</p>	<p>We encourage a diversity of work styles, and are intentional about balancing what gets done with how it gets done</p> <p>We name racism when we see it, both in the world, and within our community.</p> <p>We can engage in conflict with one another without too much fuss</p> <p>We devote time, energy and money to community building and mentoring</p>
<p>Primary Work/Ministry</p> <p>- Hospitality - what kind and why? - Education? -What other groups do we work with?</p>	<p>Our primary work involves white people serving/helping people of color</p> <p>Collaborations are typically with other white-dominated organizations</p> <p>We don't do much analysis of the relationship between service and justice, little emphasis on resistance</p>	<p>This community tries to “empower” people of color but lacks the analysis of power dynamics</p> <p>Justice is discussed mostly in terms of international issues</p> <p>People of color are mostly aware of our community because it is providing a direct service</p>	<p>This community has some participation from people of color in its daily work</p> <p>We seek to learn more about structural racism and its affect on our ministry</p> <p>Some opportunities for guests/clients to join community</p>	<p>Power is shared between people of color and whites in planning and implementing this community’s mission</p> <p>We regularly review our community’s mission and practices through an anti-racist lens</p> <p>We have mutually supportive relationships with organizations representing people of color</p>

<p>Leadership & Decision Making</p> <p><u>How are decisions made, in and out of meetings?</u> <u>What is the process for entering community?</u> <u>How is money handled?</u></p>	<p>Decision making is controlled by whites, especially white men</p> <p>Sharing power with people of color feels threatening and not desirable</p> <p>Entrance into this community is on a “who you know” basis</p>	<p>People of color are encouraged to participate in mostly non-decision making ways: as event speakers, cooks, or infrequent volunteers</p>	<p>This community includes people of color in most areas of the work</p> <p>Whites still set the norms and have the strongest, or best-heard voices in meetings</p>	<p>We are very transparent in our decision making</p> <p>The process of entering community and participating in the work is easily understood and accessible to all people</p> <p>We are not overly controlling about “how things should be” and open to new ideas</p>
<p>Resistance</p> <p><u>Who participates?</u> <u>Does our analysis and process mirror the change we’re seeking?</u></p>	<p>Outreach for campaigns and actions is only to other white-dominated church groups and organizations</p> <p>Little analysis of power dynamics about the campaign itself</p>	<p>Messaging mostly speaks “for” targeted groups, with a few exceptions of token speakers</p> <p>The idea of “solidarity” retains the power imbalance between whites and people of color</p>	<p>Participants include a broad spectrum of people of color</p> <p>“Solidarity” starts to imply following the lead of people of color</p>	<p>Direct actions consistently include analysis and recognition of different levels of risk for whites and people of color</p> <p>Discussion of risking “jail time” is in the context of racism and the prison industrial complex</p> <p>Leadership from people of color in all realms of decision making</p>
<p>Sources of Support</p> <p><u>How do we ask for help?</u> <u>What groups do we seek out?</u> <u>Who are our volunteers and donors?</u></p>	<p>This community may be primarily funded by a small number of large donors</p> <p>In terms of volunteers and donations of food, etc. we are supported by white wealthy schools, churches, students and groups</p>	<p>There are a few people of color who volunteer or donate money, but they don’t often stay involved for long</p>	<p>When we have a specific need, we ask for help from a wide range of both whites and people of color</p> <p>Our most regular, committed volunteers include people of color</p>	<p>We have a large number of individual donors from diverse backgrounds</p> <p>People of color take leadership in different areas of finances, donations, etc. in supporting the community’s mission</p>
<p>Core Values & Communication</p> <p><u>How is our philosophy communicated?</u> <u>What modes to we use?</u></p>	<p>Community values presume a privileged background</p> <p>Writing is white-centered: speaking from whites, to whites.</p>	<p>In newsletters, etc. people of color are conspicuously and inappropriately highlighted in a tokenizing way</p>	<p>Voices from people of color throughout material, but interpreted and framed by whites</p>	<p>Philosophy communicated in flexible way, acknowledging different experiences with racism</p> <p>We are willing to examine our mission through and anti-racist lens and evolve as needed</p>

Adapted from “Dismantling Racism” from the Western States Center.

This worksheet is part of a book project, “Recipes for the Beloved Community”. Contact Jenny Truax for more info cwjedi@gmail.com