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Innovations in Leadership Development: Centering Communities of Color

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Abstract

With innovative funding from a large local foundation, communities of color in Portland, Oregon developed an array of leadership programs to serve communities of color. This article shares the models they developed, including overviews of curriculum, theories of change, and concrete evidence-based gains achieved by the programs. Innovations include a leadership model that is rooted in community leadership, and the emergence of community priorities to guide the programs, alongside culturally-specific programs that are effective in reaching and supporting the participation of emerging and existing leaders of color. Community priorities included advocacy engagement that resulted in achieving real gains during the yearlong program, and preparing leaders to engage in racial equity work in public and institutional policy after graduation. Highlighted are the distinct assets of culturally specific programs that were perceived to be responsible for achieving significant gains. Conclusions emphasize the importance of culturally specific leadership programs for reaching and centering leaders of color and the ways that such investments hold potential to lead equity efforts in the community and in organizations. Avenues for strengthening programs and their evaluation conclude the article.

Keywords

Leadership Training, Community Leadership Education, Evaluation, Systems Change, Culturally Specific, Racial Equity, Case Study

1. Introduction

The local environment for communities of color in Portland, Oregon has been steeped in 28 different systems and institutions where racial disparities abound (Curry-Stevens & Cross-Hemmer and Coalition of Communities of Color,

2010). Led by the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC), a strategic initiative began to conduct research and subsequently to engage in advocacy practices at multiple sites to advance racial equity, partnering with researchers at Portland State University. As this work progressed, the importance of local leaders of color giving voice to their community's experiences became clear. With racial inequities moving to the foreground of considerations by policy makers and institutional leaders, there was both a proliferation of requests for involvement as well as heightened need for the existing leadership within communities of color to diversify beyond a small number of high profile executive directors. This paper shares the journey of the community's efforts to expand leadership in a strategic and responsive manner, as studied through case study research and a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

In 2010, funding was to support the ability of advocates of color to work with public officials to improve public policy and to address racial inequities across the region. Part of the initiative was to discern the success of the programs, and the author of this article was recruited to serve as Principal Investigator. The article is a potential source of insight on 1) specific models to reach and support the emergence of leaders of color, 2) design processes that identify community priorities for social change, 3) integration of systems change goals into leadership programs, and 4) elements of the models that might be worthy of replication, and elements that could be improved. The leadership programs continue today, with funding extended beyond the original two years of funding and funder diversification achieved. This paper identifies the social justice gains that were attained, emphasizing the benefits that flow directly from one key innovation: that the leadership initiative was culturally specific and that this identity fueled decisions that organically rooted the programs to maximize community benefits, and rendered the program transformative from start to close. This text is intended to inspire new thinking about the value of culturally specific programs and the potential they hold for moving social justice forward. As a research study, it begins to fill a gap in the literature on approaches that effectively reach and support the leadership of persons of color who in turn contribute to their community, and avenues to support systems change within and following leadership development programs. The work also contributes to the emerging evidence on the importance of culturally specific human services.

2. Research Method

This research study was conducted over a four-year period, aiming to capture both the development of the initiative as well as the first full year of operations. The Principal Investigator is author of this article and their home base was Portland State University, Oregon. IRB approval was obtained to conduct evaluations of the work the PI conducted with the Coalition of Communities of Color and its project-based work, of which the leadership initiative was a part. Broadly, the research followed case study methodology, involving observations of devel-

opment processes, artifact review (project proposals, and each initiative's curriculum documents), interviews with lead staff, surveys with program participants and lead staff, and participation in relevant team meetings. Monthly meetings were held where the project was originally configured during the first year (in 2010/2011), and then the PI attended team meetings on a monthly basis once the project coordinators were selected. In this early phase (and to a lesser degree throughout), the PI's role was that of a developmental evaluator (Patton, 2011), working to build "evaluation thinking" across the partners, and being responsive to their needs. Several contributions of the PI were made in this period: helping to build a theoretical framework for the initiative, digging into the value of culturally specific programs, and at the close, preparing staff to implement their own program evaluations.

The core of this article relies on case study research of the six leadership initiatives that operated between 2012 and 2014 when their first year of operations occurred (varying due to the cycle of the program), using mixed methods to detail the gains and challenges of the initiative. Formal pre/post surveys were done with the six project coordinators, the Coalition's leadership manager, as well as program participants. At the close of the project, qualitative interviews were conducted with the project staff, and member checking was done to confirm the accuracy of the representation of each project. The design was established in partnership with the member organizations and analysis occurred collaboratively, with findings shared with staff leads as they emerged. This design adhered to standard qualitative methodology, using triangulation of data sources and research methods, long-term immersion (of a total of four years for the PI), community inclusion, and ongoing critical reflection by the PI (Patton, 2001).

Participant surveys tapped into both standard group leadership practices such as "I attend to both task and process needs in a group", "I understand the power that leaders have in group situations", and "I can build a shared vision among group members". The 53-item survey then transitioned to much more social justice dimensions such as "I know what to do to share power among group members", "I have advocacy skills in knowing who makes decisions about the policy we seek to change" and "I am involved in community advocacy efforts". An example of the response scale for the survey questions are these: very well developed and practiced, well developed and practiced, fairly well developed and practices, developed skills but have not yet been able to practice them, and I have not obtained these skills yet. Administration of the survey was conducted online using Qualtrics software and on paper, with the PI then entering the survey data online. The data was reviewed to assess if cleaning was necessary, but no responses needed to be removed. The participation rate was 68.3%, with 82 of 120 participants completing the surveys. This falls just shy of a representative sample, with a 95% confidence level, and a ±6 point confidence interval.

The program coordinator surveys were also conducted pre and post, with 81 questions asked. Their questions covered a broader range of topics, as the pro-

grams held far-reaching goals, established in the development process (and shared later in this article), and covered 14 domains. Elements such as their contribution to "building a racial equity movement" and "building civil society" and "community impacts" were part of the 14 domains. A sample question in each of these three domains are: "our work contributes to a racial equity movement", "our community is building its ability to be politically active and to communicate with politicians and policy makers", and "community members are more aware of the issues being debated in public arenas". An example of the survey response scale follows: excellent and substantive gains have been made, excellent gains though not as substantive as we would like, some gains being made, beginning signs of progress, and not yet doing this. The surveys were completed after the interviews, which also became an opportunity to provide authentic responses to these questions, and the drift towards idealized responses was minimized. All six coordinators participated in this survey, with their pre and post results are shared this paper.

The analysis of the qualitative data (interviews and the open-ended survey responses for both groups) followed standard qualitative guidelines, most closely aligned with grounded theory: iterative processes that included open and selective coding, thematic analysis, negative case analysis, and constant comparison review of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Member checking was routinely integrated.

3. The Initiative

The Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) represents six culturally specific communities: Latino, African American, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander, African immigrant and refugee, and Slavic[1]. Each community faces grave economic, social and political disparities. A series of seven research reports published from 2010 to 2014 detail 28 different systems and institutions where disparities are pronounced, ranging from education, child welfare, juvenile and adult justice and health insurance to child poverty, home ownership and wealth to political representation and voter participation. In response to these disparity reports and the recommendations for policy improvements advocated by the CCC, greater inclusion of advocates of color at policy tables required long-term capacity building for leadership roles. The CCC advanced this idea as part of a statewide competition launched by a local foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust.

In 2010, the Coalition of Communities of Color was selected as the winner of "Oregon's million dollar idea" for the Coalition's proposal to "promote leadership development among communities of color", beating out 533 other submissions. The Foundation decided to award the money to the CCC directly, instead

[1]In Oregon, the Slavic community is refugee-based, fleeing the former Soviet Union as religious refugees, facing persecution as Christians. Their identity-base challenges are similar to those of Italians who arrived in USA in the early 1900s, struggling with discrimination and trying to gain a social and economic foothold in the USA. Their status today is precarious, trying to regain ground after the recession's impact of doubling their child poverty rate from 16% to 30% and losing 24% of household incomes (Curry-Stevens & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014).

of the typical funding process of launching a competitive process to decide which leadership programs to fund. In response to this gift, the CCC turned to its membership and decided the following: that each community would design and deliver its own leadership program (and thus provide culturally specific leadership development), equally sharing the funds (which was $115,000 each for direct services), that an integrated program would be run by the CCC itself, that programs would be centrally networked and resourced to support graduates of the program, and that each community would turn to its own base to design its own program.

"Culturally specific organizations" are relative newcomers in the fields of health, education and social services, aiming to improve outcomes for communities of color. The literature also refers to these organizations as "ethnic agencies" or "ethno-specific organizations" (Holley, 2003; Iglehart & Becerra, 1996). Mainstream service providers have long over-promised to serve communities of color, and been unable to eliminate racial disparities in service access, retention and outcomes. Culturally specific organizations have been created by and for communities of color. In 2002, Multnomah County (Oregon) formally accepted the following definition of culturally specific organizations into policy, according to adherence with the following standards:

- Majority of agency clients served are from a particular community of color;
- Organizational environment is culturally focused and identified as such by clients;
- Prevalence of bilingual and/or bicultural staff reflects the community that is served;
- Established and successful community engagement and involvement with the community being served.

This definition has been retained for the last 14 years, and expanded with the following in 2014: the staff, board, and leadership reflect the community being served, and the community being served recognizes the organization as a culturally specific organization. This definition helps contextualize these leadership development programs, as they hold central the priority of ending inequities that exist, working structurally to change public and institutional policy and practice, and their subject position is that of being insiders to these experiences, both in terms of program participants, but also for their staff and advisors.

4. The Design and Development Process

The planning process occurred in 2011 with the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) building the framework for the initiative, continuing its practice to make all decisions by consensus, and determining that each grouping of culturally specific organizations would turn to its own community as it established the form that the leadership programs were to take. A set of obligations established the broad strokes of the substance, and another set to guide the process. The first was that each program was to integrate three functions: building the leadership pipeline (through skills development), linking the pipeline to leader-

ship opportunities, and being engaged in systems change work (to affect public and institutional policy). These three goals were established following an environmental scan conducted by a consulting firm, FSG that identified these functions in national and regional leadership programs. The majority of programs were not focusing on systems change, instead focusing on an individualized orientation to leadership, building skills that would benefit participants. The CCC opted for design that would benefit communities, and that would strengthen the work of the CCC. Explicitly, the second obligation was to follow these principles (as established by the CCC itself): to truly represent community and communicate community needs, to create change, including policy change, address racial and ethnic disparities, improve community outcomes, and for participants to be empowered to do something that creates change.

Each community needed to progress at its own pace, with varying degrees of working partnerships already in place, and in other situations needing to develop anew. Key features of these partnership development practices included shared decision making, mutual regard and appreciation, practicing transparency, demonstrating trustworthiness, and power sharing in all parts of the process.

At the end of this yearlong design process, each of six communities of color had designed their own program. In the subsequent 20 months, each delivered a culturally specific leadership development program that typically lasted 11 months. When we examined the models that had emerged, they each shared theoretical and conceptual foundations. This next section highlights the theoretical framework that underpinned the initiative.

5. The Shared Theoretical Basis

This is where the work gets more interesting! While each community designed their models independently, there were significant shared approaches. When the PI worked to identify the theories on which they were based (as logic models were not part of the design process) and assist programs by building a theoretical framework for the programs, what emerged was an alignment with some of the literature on leadership, and that added new approaches to the field.

When the project began, the FSG literature search (introduced above) concluded that there was no external authority on the type of leadership development that Coalition members were interested in. The programs scanned by consultants and further explored by the PI showed the dearth of culturally specific leadership programs and showed that existing programs emphasized the building of individual leadership skills, so-called "building the leadership pipeline" practices, but minimal "systems change" efforts to advance equity or reforms in the policy environment. The intermediate step of "linking the pipeline to leadership opportunities" was also undervalued in mainstream programs. The CCC's leadership programs more expansively integrated "systems change" and "linking the pipeline", in ways that aimed to improve the "upstream" conditions that manifest or fail to ameliorate "downstream" distress.

It is worthwhile to note that Year 2 intentions by the CCC programs were to

further extend both the "systems change" and the "linking the pipeline" emphasis so that there was a more pronounced focus on addressing racial inequities in the region.

The model that united the leadership programs stretched beyond the three-part set of goals. Additional features were:

1) Working in a culturally specific context, joining together participants with shared racial identities, in cultures that represented their heritage, led by staff who shared these identities, and that gave priority to their own community's needs.
2) The design process formalized the expectation that the programs were meeting community needs. Communities that were tapped for their insights included community elders, other culturally specific organizations, and public forums, which gathered the community together. These insights informed the recruitment process, curriculum, systems change goals and priorities for the goals of the programs. One example of this model was to have a nomination process by the community itself (as opposed to self-selection), and to include elders on the selection panel that reviewed nominations and selected participants.
3) The focus on "systems change" connected the programs to the work of the CCC itself, a leading advocacy organization pressing an array of agendas for racial equity forward. The focus also heightened emphasis on improving relevance, impact, durability and responsiveness of the local policy landscape.

Having clear theories of change are essential for programs (Russon & Reinelt, 2004) as it guides program design, facilitation, principles of service provision and evaluation in substantial ways. Operationally, the six culturally specificprograms emphasized two theories of change: "community leadership education" and "transformative leadership". Community leadership education (Apaliyah, 2011; Doherty, 2003; Hiyane-Brown, 2003; Kirk & Shutte, 2004; Langone, 1992; Malik, 2011) positions leadership development as a path to strengthen the entire community, and simultaneously build social capital and civic engagement across the community. This stands apart from conventional leadership programs that invest in the development of individuals, hoping they will return to the community to invest in its wellbeing. By embedding the program in the community, allowing the community to shape it and to inform the selection of individuals, the six culturally specific leadership development programs became poised to build community strength, creating a new generation of leaders, and ensuring that they work to the better of the community.

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Weiner, 2003) aims to "instigate structural transformations at the material level … in addition to the ideological work at the pedagogical level" (Weiner, 2003: pp. 89-90). Such work entails transforming social conditions, and works via an empowerment approach that emphasizes building efficacy to work for change. Efficacy involves the building of skills and confidence to take action. Central to the process is that "action and reflection" are embedded in the model itself (also called "praxis").

This means that the projects must be rooted in the community's sensibilities and responsive to its investments, priorities and contexts, and in turn validated by communities themselves.

This initiative aimed to strengthen community capacity, build social capital, and promote civic engagement within each community of color. While each member community developed its own model, there was broad agreement about the foundations of the needs facing communities of color and the nature of the work to be undertaken: racial equity was to be advanced through these initiatives, leaders expected to advance the needs of their community, rather than their individual career interests, and racial inequity understood to exist in the institutions and structures of society, as well as in policies, practice, behaviors and discourses that infuse how people of color walk through life.

Figure 1 demonstrates how the programs aimed to advance racial equity. Each community launched its own design process, drawing in community partners who worked with the lead organizations to identify community needs. This generated the broad strokes of the curriculum, alongside advocacy projects that community members wanted to advance. It also generated a set of expectations for inclusion of community members, and all leadership programs established a steering committee of leading community members to guide the project and to assist with recruitment. In essence, this demonstrates adherence to the service-user voice movement (Beresford, 2000; Beresford & Croft, 2001) and stretches beyond service users infusing the program and includes community members who more broadly depend on the success of the initiative.

When aiming to understand why these commonalities occurred, dialogue with leadership program coordinators suggested it is the result of being rooted in a culturally specific organizational context. Each of the members of the CCC are culturally specific organizations and their orientation to the community is such that 1) primary commitments are to their communities, and by extension to their service users, 2) they hold a critique of mainstream leadership programs as too individualized and too focused on how to improve one's career as opposed to one's community, and 3) that they are driven to address both racial disparities and community empowerment because the program staff and organizations themselves have futures that are tied to the wellbeing of program participants and communities in which they are based. These flow from a shared insider status and connected futures because they hold the same racial identity.

Detailing each curriculum is beyond the reach of this article. But the distinctiveness of each program is shared below so that the responsiveness of the programs to the community can be understood. In these descriptions, the core curriculum focus can be seen, alongside information on who were prioritized as needing these resources. As well, the internal community dynamics that were focused on is included.

African American: This program focused on younger emerging leaders, so that youth activism could be supported and energized. They focused on anti-colonial content, building a sophisticated analysis of power and resistance,

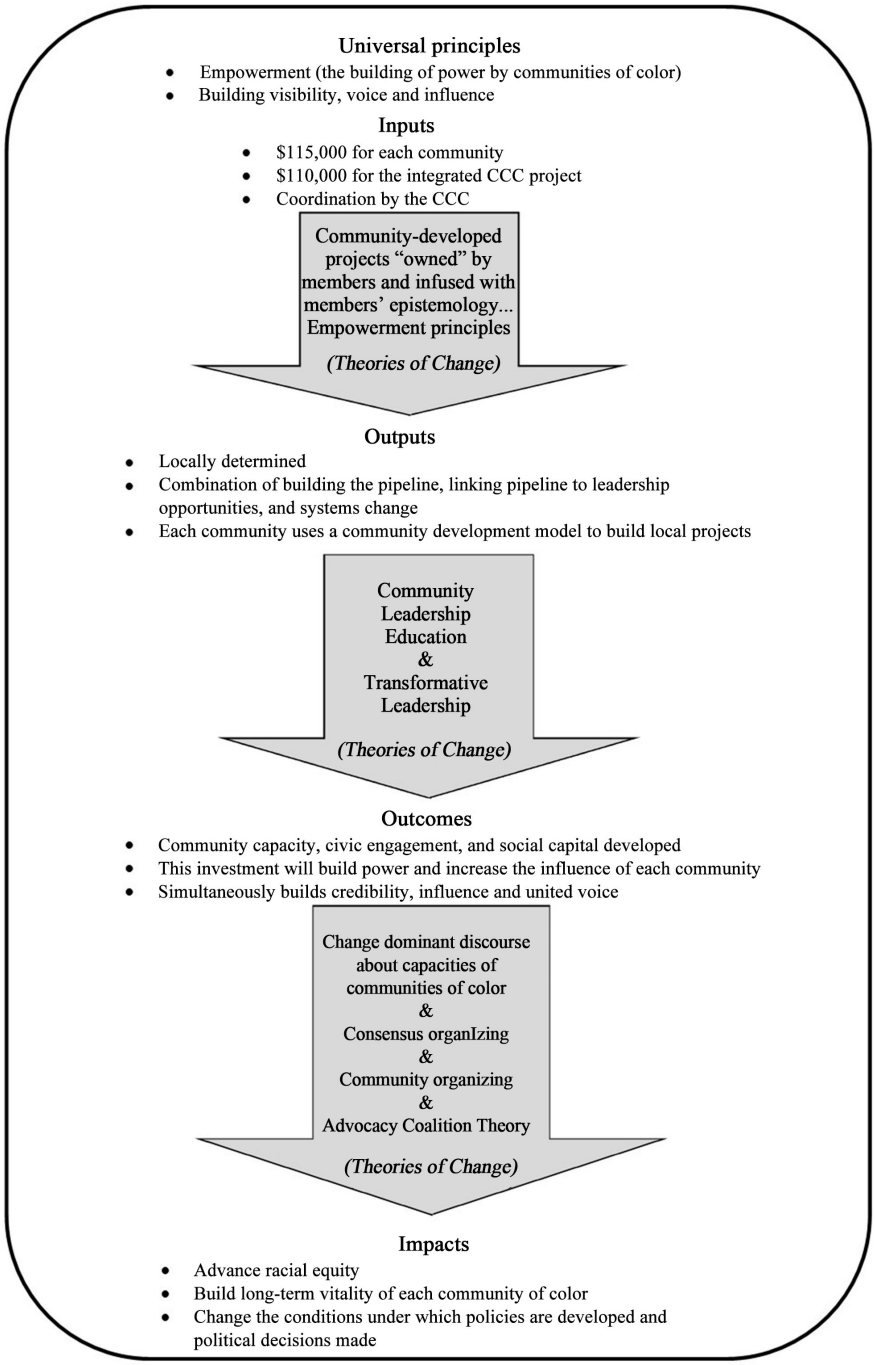

Figure 1. Theory of change for the leadership development initiative.

capturing the legacies of activism that were both local and national. Core dynamics within the community were addressed, focusing on how 1) issues of misogyny and homophobia continued to fracture the community, and 2) some leaders were intent on using the program to better their individual standing in the workforce, replicating the western individualized approach to leadership. The advocacy efforts have focused on resisting gentrification and systems change efforts included educational bus tours with the Mayor and staff, a PhotoVoice

project with middle school students, and creating a resource guide within the Black community so more intentional local support of Black businesses could be facilitated. The project also took on public protest over a land development deal that the group won, and this placed the group into the public spotlight in ways that have invigorated Black youth activism in the region.

Latino: This community decided to focus on more established leaders who needed to build strong community among themselves, and thus develop the leadership of the Latino community overall across the state of Oregon. The curriculum focused expansively working through internalized racism and reconciling relationships that had historically been divided. Despite having a lengthy history of presence in Oregon, the community had remained relatively disconnected and without strong leaders. The legacy of the community is one infused with dominant culture perspectives and competitive values, with community members reproducing harsh judgments about identity and culture of Latinos. The group also contributed to organizing a statewide advocacy forum on establishing a Latino-specific advocacy agenda.

Native American: Anticipating a generational turnover of existing leaders, this program focused across the age spectrum with a goal of preparing the next generation for moving into leadership positions in health, education and social services. It also focused heavily on helping participants identify the type of leaders they wanted to become, as the dominant western frames of charismatic, transactional and individualized leadership had previously infused their thinking about being leaders, and thus weakened the historic pattern of leadership development. An array of advocacy efforts was started in the first year, although largely eclipsed by the curriculum that focused on cohort leadership development and organizational skill development.

Asian and Pacific Islander: This community focused more heavily on newer leaders who were discovering, through a popular education curriculum, the importance of civic engagement and building confidence and support networks to define the presence they wanted to have in their communities. A combination of this commitment alongside advocacy training and participation in activist practice comprised the goals. The group undertook different projects depending on their interests, ranging from creating a radio show to detail Asian and Pacific Islander issues, voter registration, doing a training-for-trainers to take the disparities information to the community, to a financial aid workshop for the Hmong community.

Slavic: Given that the Slavic community is comprised of religious refugees from the former Soviet Union, their distrust of the state is pronounced, and opted to tend to needs that were pressing for community health and wellbeing. Their curriculum included building leadership skills for facilitating community workshops, alongside some introduction to civic engagement (meeting with public officials) and then undertaking the workshops in areas such as learning about voting, disaster preparedness, enrolling in health insurance, and under-

standing the school system. The internal dynamics focused on gaining the support of religious leaders for a movement towards civic engagement. The community had been staunchly disconnected from political leaders, and this program signaled, with the support of religious leaders as partners in the delivery of the program, as well as inclusive of some leaders as participants, a movement towards civic engagement.

African Newcomers: Locally, the community has been building its visibility and voice, and there was eagerness across the community to participate, and it was thus not characterized by ages or seniority. Its history of using a popular education model to work together thus had a legacy of infusing critical awareness and organizing to heighten presence in public issues such as gang violence, culturally responsive health care, and recognition of foreign credentials. The community's dynamics has long been fractured by tribal histories that were damaged by the slave trade, by colonial extraction of resources, of inequality and by civil wars and conflicts. While much progress has been made locally, creating solidarity across African communities remains an ongoing priority.

These details provide us insight into the ways that each community of color defined their needs both as unique and as shared. Of key importance is that the cohort dynamics dialogues could not have occurred in a cross-racial program. Each community needed unique time and space to build its cohort, to address core challenges, and the nature of these priorities varied—but each community identified such a need.

6. Research Results

6.1. Building the Pipeline, Linking the Pipeline and Systems Change

The research conducted at the close of the first year of each program demonstrated that the programs had met their goals, as it was clearly demonstrated that the programs had made gains in each of the three areas: building the pipeline, linking the pipeline to leadership opportunities and systems change. In terms of building the pipeline, a total of 120 existing and emerging leaders of color representing six communities of color and a total of almost fifty regions of the world, graduated from the program in Year 1. This included members of eighteen different Native Tribes, African immigrants and refugees from ten African nations, Slavic participants from the former Soviet Union, mostly from the Ukraine, and also from Belarus, Latinos who are Mexican, Honduran, indigenous and first-, second- and third-generation immigrants, 13 Asian and Pacific Islander communities and African Americans including many who are biracial, including indigenous Native, Latino, Somali and Caribbean origins. Each year of operations intends to add an additional 120 leaders of color to the region, serving to diversify the leadership landscape, and building a generation of leaders who are equipped to work in community-grounded ways, with non-dominant leadership styles, and with experience in doing systems change work (albeit to

varying degrees).

Participant gains were measured in six domains: having relevant personal and interpersonal skills, working within a group, advocacy skills, community engagement, and leadership within an organization. These gains, noted by both the participants and the coordinator, showed adequate but not excellent gains in these skills, first because pre-existing skills were high, and second because building these pipeline skills were but one of three essential elements of the program.

The most difficult to measure outcome is systems change, not because it is difficult to identify, but because attribution of responsibility for the gains is tough to measure. The leadership programs contributed to a range of social justice gains, including gaining modified driver's licenses for undocumented residents (overturned a year later, but still passed into law during the time of the advocacy efforts), bringing public attention to gentrification and setting the stage for local investments in subsidized housing (promised to be $20 million over the subsequent five year), creating a standing community board for the African advocacy agenda, participating in public testimony to preserve funding for culturally specific service organizations in the County budget (which was successfully preserved), and gaining tuition equity at the state level that assured undocumented high school graduates access to in-state tuition rates. This said, there was some divergence between what the participants wanted to do as projects and what the community needed. This was partially a pedagogical disconnect, as several programs worked with popular education and were oriented to helping participants determine what was important to them to engage with. It was also a signal of group preferences which had numerous leaders wanting to provide services for their communities, instead of moving further upstream to engage in public and institutional policy.

Plans for Year 2 saw several programs shift away from a more organic (and slow) emergence of advocacy ideas to instead placing these activities up front in the recruitment process. Two programs asked for such interests to be part of the application process, and the African American program decided to continue the focus on gentrification that it began in Year 1, allowing it to join a campaign in action, rather than beginning anew in Year 2. The African program had firmed up its advocacy council to both generate action plans for the Year 2 cohort, as well as inviting members of the cohort to join the council directly. And the CCC's leadership program worked with their own committees (in housing, health and human services, community and economic development and education) to identify roles for the Year 2 cohort and Year 1 alumnae to participate in. These program enhancements increased the likelihood that policy "wins" would be experienced in Year 2 of the program. This demonstrates "reflection in action" and "continuous quality improvement" to improve the programs.

The gains in terms of "linking the pipeline to leadership opportunities" were solid but worthy of review. There are two sites for this linking function to occur: the first is in the leadership programs themselves, and the second is in the Coali-

tion-wide program. At the close of the formal evaluation period (2 months after the end of each program), about half of graduates had been placed in leadership opportunities. A wide array of sites were used: the African Community Advocacy Council (noted earlier), Oregon's advisory committee for diversifying its teachers, board of directors for a woman's shelter, the city's land use planning advisory committee, a city department's budget advisory committee, and the Latino graduates remained engaged in its own action plan that committed them to engagement for a subsequent year. One community was simply not ready for these roles: the Native American graduates were in early stages mostly due to their reluctance to enter unwelcoming environments. Said the program coordinator, "*The majority of the cohort struggled with their capacity to be the voice and advocates when they felt like they were the only* [*Natives*] *present … their old option was to retreat and be invisible*" (personal communication, Ovalles, 2013). It is important to keep this in mind when discerning evaluation metrics for similar projects: placement into policy and institutional roles may be limited by environmental factors and ought not to suggest deficiencies in the programs. Advocacy to improve inclusion practices may be required, sometimes as a prerequisite to participation.

There is an interplay of interests that hold potential to limit the options for effective advocacy-based placements. In reflecting on the range of roles taken on by graduates, and the seemingly eclectic nature of the roles, it seems at first glance that the coordinators had neglected an opportunity to coordinate presence and maximize influence. For example, in the ideal world, there could be, say, five strategic choices for influential roles over the course of a year on issues such as addressing racial disparities in school, improving the service quality when newcomers are served, and, for example, making police practices more culturally responsive. Further dialogue on this issue with coordinators, however, helps us understand the constraints of such a strategic approach. There are four factors that influence placement decisions, and making them explicit can help strengthen a leadership program: does the community think it is important? Do the leadership programs think it is important? Do the placement bodies currently have openings and want to include such leaders? Does the leader want to be placed there and do they have the time availability for such placement?

The current emphasis is on the individual's preferences and availability. While their choices demonstrate their community commitments, these choices were mostly an individual decision. The challenge is in how to reorient from an individual to a collective and community decision, as the community wants to increase the chance that graduates become strategically engaged in advancing racial equity. It is important to aspire for placement decisions to be strategically aligned. Moving beyond this to incorporate strategic influence is anticipated in coming years.

Retention in these roles can also be a challenge. All graduates are people of color who face varying degrees of discrimination, or at the very least limited

practices of inclusion, when they enter dominant spaces such as a city committee or a mainstream board of directors. The role of the coordinator for the graduate program includes responding to these types of behaviors and discourses that make some spaces unwelcoming. Identifying challenges, providing feedback and making concrete recommendations is a practice that is going to occur in future years of the program.

6.2. The Value of Culturally Specific Programing

What has been innovative in the findings is that three additional benefits were documented in both the quantitative survey data as well as the narratives collected in the surveys and interviews with program staff. These findings reinforce the importance of culturally specific programs in reaching new leaders, and in building a culture that affirms and includes leaders of color, and the development model that emphasizes identification of and response to community priorities serves also to generate community benefits early in the influence of the programs. Listed below are the details of these three innovations:

1) ***Culturally specific programs are essential for building the leadership of communities of color***. As such programs respond to the cultural needs of each community, and are conducted in ways where participants are understood, affirmed and welcomed as insiders instead of outsiders to the culture. In addition, such programs are expedient for getting to work, as cultural norms support the ready inclusion of participants and focus on shared issues is readily facilitated. Several projects opted to address internalized oppression (the consequences of imperialism and colonization, and the impediments to successful leadership), with progress on these issues impossible without cultural specificity in the program. More than $2/3$ of participants were unlikely to have participated if their program were not culturally specific.
2) ***The cohort experience was essential for the success of the program.*** While each program is unique in its curriculum, the development of the cohort has been essential for its success. In every program, the cohort experience supports participants to experience belonging and the safe container to address/redress and heal from the consequences of racial marginalization and colonization. The cohort also creates a community itself, with shared values and a mission to work for the improvement of wellbeing for their larger communities that in turn becomes a community asset for future advocacy practice.
3) ***Programs are efficient and effective.*** One significant outcome (that had not been anticipated going into the research) is that programs are highly efficient in terms of attaining community-level outcomes. When programs make curriculum decisions, they determine program-level details. The programs are different as each is customized according to community needs and designed to maximize the benefit to the community (in terms of outcomes and impacts). Customizing is essential as it maximizes cultural relevance and re-

sponse to community priorities. While we expected these programs to be effective, the efficiency that is embedded in their work assures funders that the breadth and depth of programing is essential for gaining these results, and that reducing the number of programs would certainly result in compromising the gains of the entire program. If programs were reduced to, say, a single program for emerging leaders of color, harshly impacted would be the cohort experience, the community benefits, and by extension, the long-term wellbeing of the community. One element of this efficiency is based in the customizing of the program to meet community needs. Each program prioritized different elements and had a distinct profile of gains in their projects. Given that the design of each program reflected community priorities, it is an obvious outcome that the profile of gains varied. This reflects both an intuitive and conscious selection process in the design process, with results accordingly being customized.

The benefits of culturally specific leadership programs were magnified in this research. Participants and staff both confirmed that cultural-specificity is essential for the wellbeing of participants and their ability to do critical leadership work. Such programs expanded the options for building connection and solidarity among participants, leading to enduring relationships and building social capital and social networks that work in service to improving the wellbeing of communities of color. It allows programs to work on issues of internalized oppression and the dynamics of colonization and imperialism that infuse leadership development in communities of color. Quotes from the cohort staff and participants reveal just how important these achievements are:

- "*Racism keeps us apart from each other. Coming together is a triumph. Being able to stay together through hardship—that takes skill*" (personal communication, Ramirez Arriaga, 2013).
- "*In the long run, they can have hard dialogues yet still truly love and respect each other and move forward … this is a huge gain … conflicts aren't the deal breaker they've been in the past for our community*" (personal communication, Ovalles, 2013).
- "*We did not only build a cohort, we built a family. A tight knit group of Native leaders who are all striving to make a difference in our communities. The friendships I've gained throughout the program are some of the most rich, meaningful, and supportive relationships I have experienced. The leadership community we've built together not only benefits us but the greater community around us*" (participant, 2013).
- "[*Our program*] *was powerful. It helped guide my own dreams and passions as they relate to leadership … was incredibly healing and validating. Spiritual and physical energy is zapped when one attempts to meet the constant challenges of institutional inequities and systemic injustices.* [*It*] *allowed me to catch my breath, heal, and gain confidence in the powers I have within, strength I was born with and a heritage that taught me the value of service to my community. I stand tall in my efforts to move forward with my brothers*

and sisters as leaders and as a 'comunidad de lideres" (*community of leaders*) (participant, 2013).

6.3. Domains and Scope of Gains

When we look at the details of the program gains, there was evidence that each were responding to their own community's needs for leadership development and building both capacity and promise for being able to link dozens of leaders to an array of policy tables across the region. **Figure 2** shows the program-wide gains (reported as a composite of ratings for all six programs). In it, we see that gains have been most pronounced in the area of "changing policy practice" and "community engagement". These gains showed an increase of 1.5 full ratings. Slightly smaller gains were reached in creating the cohort community, building advocacy skills and capacities, non-policy impacts (such as improved services), building civil society, and building a movement for racial equity (all at more than one full rating level higher). These results are available disaggregated for each community, but beyond the page length of this article. The metrics for this were in self-reports by the coordinators of the programs, along with details of how these gains were demonstrated in an array of narratives (interviews and survey).

Overall, our learning is that these programs are able to generate results on each domain of focus, and that these gains are considerable, increasing what we call the "footprint" of their influence.

7. The Impact of the Research

The developmental evaluation provided attention to the emerging program needs, alongside responding to the external environment, and undertook two activities that have proved essential for supporting the programs: reviewing program elements that led to identifying the shared logic model with shared theories of change and, secondly, building an evaluation framework that explicitly focused on the program elements that tapped into ways that the cohort valued its cultural specificity. With these in place, the broader case study research was then able to detail how, in addition to the explicit three goals, the programs benefitted from being culturally specific. Without this developmental approach in place, the evaluation framework would likely have been more limited in reach and less compelling findings would have resulted. When the case study research was subsequently conducted, it documented four elements for the funders: that the program met the three aims of the program, that culturally specific leadership programs were essential for participant recruitment and for reaching and extending beyond the three aims, that the diversity of programs was needed to strengthen community access and effective cohort relationships, and that it was both effective as well as efficient. The time savings by being able to provide racial and cultural inclusiveness allowed the cohort members to get quickly to work, and to build durable capacity to work together and both individually and collectively be the types of leaders they wanted to be.

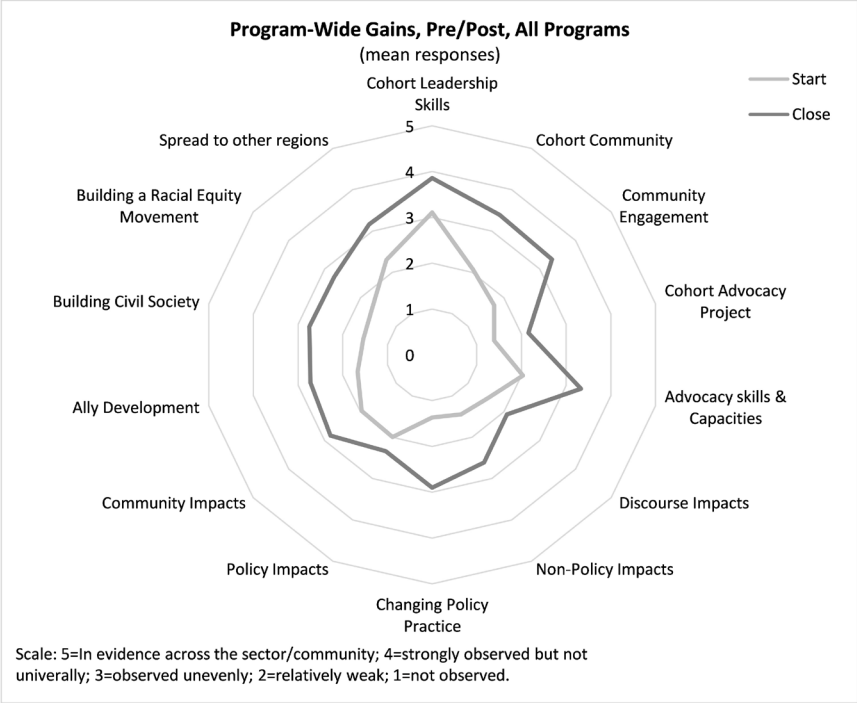

Figure 2. Program-wide gains.

The case study research did not provide sufficient durable "proof" that participants were changing the policy landscape so as to make progress on reducing racial disparities. For this, long term tracking of cohort graduates was needed. While encouraging indicators were in place (skills, intention, some experience in change projects, and placements at graduation), funders and communities of color themselves want evidence that the program is making a difference in the long run. Also needed is better evidence that the programs were responsible for the systems change work they assessed themselves responsible for. Like all systems change efforts, attribution of responsibility for progress is difficult to establish. Sometimes crediting the organization with positive impacts is wishful thinking—other times it is an accurate insight. Adding an assessment of stakeholder perceptions could help discern attribution. The research also surfaced ideas for working more strategically to influence public policy, by coordinating placement efforts to maximize influence in a smaller range, and in embedding social change projects into the programs that were aligned with existing efforts of the CCC itself and other advocacy organizations that were members of the CCC. This not only has the benefit of strategically working on priorities while the programs are in session, but it connects participants to existing community structures where they can remain involved after graduating.

8. Conclusion: Learnings for the Field of Leadership Development

The reason for the success of this leadership initiative is that it used culturally specific organizations to design and deliver the programs. The gains achieved

flowed from the way the community was involved in designing programs and establishing its goals, and from the curriculum that provided time, space and safety to address internal issues that, in various ways, limited each community from acting upon its assets. Also flowing from its culturally specific foundation is a relationship with the community that is more engaged. Each program consulted deeply with the community on local needs, assets and opportunities, which ensured its relevance and responsiveness, aligning with community leadership education theory. This practice could extend to mainstream leadership programs; it is simply intuitive in culturally specific organizations. Doing so will strengthen partnerships, curriculum (ensuring it addresses local needs), pedagogy that builds on the community's strengths, and identify the barriers that interfere with emerging leaders demonstrating their assets. Engaging with the community will help a program resist the dominant culture that positions leadership development as mostly an individual attribute to be acquired. Community education models resist such individualizing, as they place priority in the ways the community benefits from the initiative instead of the individuals involved.

A far-reaching set of outcomes were also tied to being culturally specific: the programs were able to identify and center issues of power, oppression and privilege that were manifest in their own community, and integrate these in the curriculum. These were not typical mainstream versions of this curriculum, but culturally specific elements, such as internalized oppression, colorism, misogyny, and homophobia. Providing culturally specific space with facilitators who also share one's identity is essential for progress on these issues, and building a community of leaders able to support each other after the program ends.

Attention to how leadership graduates are connected to leadership opportunities is an important challenge for the field. This initiative had an additional program to link graduates to leadership opportunities, and figuring out how to add both a strategic and community orientation to such linkage is important for increasing community benefits.

This research confirms that it is necessary to track progress of participants and the program in long-term ways, aiming for a three to five year follow up. This is a labor-heavy requirement, but there is little that persuades funders as to the viability of a leadership program than the types of activities its graduates move into. Asking graduates to check back in regularly with the coordinator and report on activities can help. Technology can assist with this task, by having them look to a website where they can learn about opportunities and also report out on what they have been doing. Creating a culture of evaluation can help with this imperative, alongside raising expectations for funders to contribute to long-term tracking efforts.

Finally, the article closes with recommendations for more mainstream institutions to consider how to apply the learning in this article. Since this research was conducted with only one leadership initiative (albeit covering seven leadership

programs), the relevance is potentially narrow. Local initiatives will need to discern the applicability of this advice. When regions are committed to meaningful leadership development within communities of color, there are three messages: build authentic relationships and deep partnerships with communities of color and provide resources and money to them to build their own leadership programs. This approach will ensure that the assets of culturally specific settings, participants, networks, facilitation, curriculum and local priorities are tapped. The benefits of working within one's culture are demonstrated in this research. It is anticipated that the greater the marginalization of one's community, the greater the imperative for working exclusively within that community. There will be a time and place for intercultural connections, but these research findings suggest that community specific programs are essential. Second, prioritize recruiting potential leaders through community-rooted selection processes. If regions are invested in addressing racial inequities, emerging leaders must be committed to working on these issues and with local communities of color. Third, ensure that staffing levels are sufficient to address all three elements of building the pipeline, linking the pipeline to leadership opportunities and systems change (both as part of the program and in work that follows).

This initiative remains a vital part of the racial equity movement in Oregon. It has since shaped its own identity, as the Bridges Leadership Initiative, and its own mission: "The CCC envisions an Oregon where our communities of color self-organize, build our collective power, and our leaders are implementing community-driven strategies to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice, and prosperity" (CCC, 2016). It has deepened its strategy and influence, and presence in the political and policy landscape.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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