EYE ON THE PRIZE
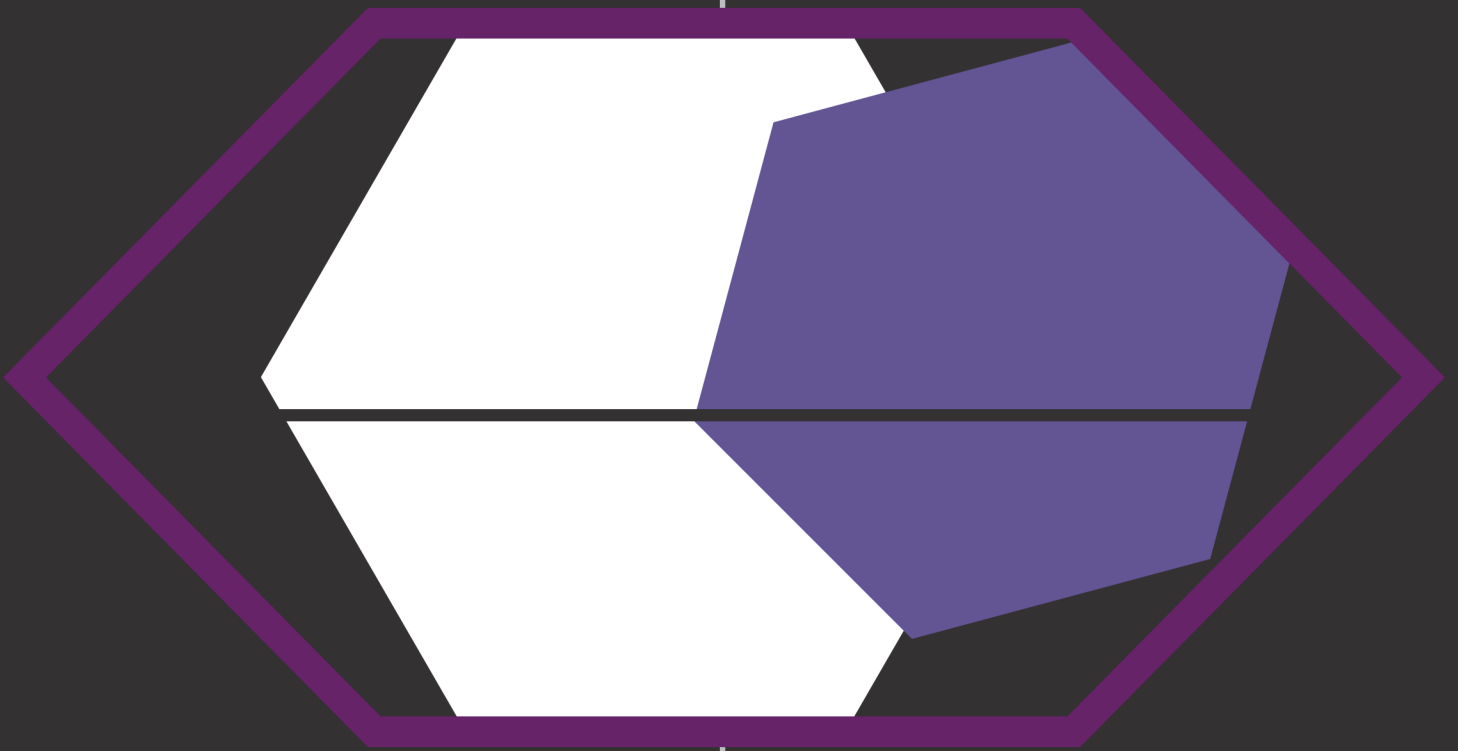
**Promising
Practices for Building
Equitable Community Development
Leadership Supports**

Even when we're committed to anti-racist practice, it can still be hard to figure out what to do next. We can learn about how structural racism has shown up in community development in the past and how it's still showing up today. We can prioritize moving our work in a different direction. We can carve out time for planning and reflection. But now what? What exactly will it look like, and how will we assess it?

There are no silver bullets in racial equity work, but that doesn't mean that there aren't already potentially promising practices out there in pretty much every part of community development work – including how we build and sustain community development leadership in more equitable ways. In this document, we outline what we've heard in interviews and read in the literature about community development leadership support.

THE RESEARCH

There are a lot of places where our research provides guidance on how inequities show up in community development leadership support … but also what more explicitly anti-racist supports could look like.

In High-Level Findings, the Status Quo vs. Anti-Racist Practices comparison provides a handy framework for principles we can apply to that work, as well as a specific comparison of status quo and anti-racist leadership development. In Core Characteristics of Community Development Community, our Leadership Supports + Advancement section profiles how structural racism shows up in this kind of work, as well as what interviewees lifted up as anti-racist practices. In Storied Communities, Community Stories, residents outlined what they hoped to see in the future for community development (pages 22 – 23), including stronger resident leadership supports. More recently, we've gone even deeper on the topic of equitable leadership support – through the interviews we conducted in our national community development leadership scan and in the op-eds and Q+As in Issue 06 of The People's Practice.

There's no single approach to leadership support in a sector as broad as community development. We're talking about organizations that focus on different things (housing, financing, organizing, etc.) in different geographic contexts, at different geographic levels. Leadership development might be something a community development organization doesn't really focus on outside of annual performance reviews, or it might be their main activity year-round. Leadership programming might be one-time, or it might stretch over months and years. Regardless of where we work or what form our work takes, though, we can all play a role in equitable community development leadership.

Below, we outline different questions the research suggests we should consider in thinking about how we support community development leadership. We might not be able to tackle everything on the list, but if you answer "no" to most of the prompts below, it might be worth thinking about how to engage the people you serve in thinking about improvements to your programming. If you find yourself answering "yes" a lot, it may be worth focusing in on the rare "no" to see how you could make your approach even stronger … or how you can sustain those "yes" answers for the long haul.

- Are the leadership supports you offer **race-explicit and race-conscious**? Have you explored how support needs of practitioners and residents of color might be different (or not) from white practitioners and residents? Do your leadership supports prioritize helping practitioners and residents achieve demonstrated racially equitable outcomes and systems change?

- Do you approach leadership from the **bottom up and inside out**? Have you consulted with practitioners and residents directly about their needs and built leadership supports to address their priorities? Have you established ways for participants to frequently assess the leadership supports you offer and propose reforms or potential improvements?

- Are the leadership supports you offer **flexible**? Are practitioners and residents able to adapt to them to changing needs, priorities, and environments? Does your programming offer opportunities for short-term and long-term engagement that can be broken into smaller touch points? Is programming responsive to different levels of interest and bandwidth?

- Are your leadership supports **holistic**? Do they support practitioners and residents that are working across different functions, different career stages, or collaborating across different sectors? Do they help people to understand and address root causes of inequities? Do they create spaces for leaders to build relationships, share experiences, and receive peer support?

- Are your leadership supports **culturally relevant** for the people you're serving? Do you engage participants around their day-to-day experiences to make sure programming responds to the context of people's lives and communities? Does your programming address diverse experiences of participants from different backgrounds, as well as intersectional experiences?

- Do your leadership supports provide opportunities for **hands-on application** of leadership skills in real-world scenarios? Do they offer resources and learnings that participants can apply immediately to their work? Do they give participants the opportunity to deepen skills in working with other community development practitioners and with practitioners in other sectors?

- Do your leadership supports **value, name, and financially compensate** different kinds of community development expertise? Are they open to residents and grassroots leaders who aren't formally employed in community development? Do you build additional supports (including financial supports) for resident participants and grassroots leaders?

- Do your leadership supports help **established and senior practitioners and resident leaders** move into positions of even greater decision-making authority? Does programming help those with the strongest track records around equitable development to assume positions with the greatest opportunity to shape policy and funding?

- Do your leadership supports assist promising **mid-career practitioners and resident leaders**, especially those with the strongest track records around equitable development, to advance into more senior roles? Do they actively help mid-career leaders to plan for leadership succession and transition when more senior leaders leave?

- Do you offer any professional development supports for **entry-level practitioners and resident leaders** who are demonstrating emerging leadership qualities? Are there classes, sessions, or opportunities in which they can gain knowledge, capacity, or be connected with mentors?

five PROMISING PRACTICES

Assessing the ways you currently support community development leadership is a great start to being more explicit about the priority you place on equitable practices. Once we've done some of that assessment, the next step is to start to envision how we can contribute to a more equitable future for community development leadership. We don't all have to do everything, but we all can do something. Fortunately, our research has pointed to a lot of different promising leadership support practices. Not all of them are going to be relevant to every practitioner trying to do this work, but they still offer some inspiration to get us thinking and can also help us start to identify patterns around how people are approaching equitable leadership support.

PROMISING PRACTICE 1: INVEST IN CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PRACTITIONERS AND RESIDENT LEADERS AROUND SYSTEMS CHANGE.

Investing in technical community development capacities is important, but it's definitely not the only kind of competency we need to do equitable work. Over and over, our research highlighted a perception that community development chronically underinvests in skill-building around changing systems, especially for frontline staff and for residents. That shrinks our readiness to do root cause work around things like history, narrative, culture, and policy.

That kind of capacity building could take a lot of different forms. It could look like the Racial Equity Institute's trainings around structural racism, including in systems like housing and wealth-building. It could look like AYNI Institute's trainings around how social movements work and how they succeed. It could look like Strategy College's focus on political education as a core part of community organizing work. Systems change capacity building can also be really powerful when it's building up resources and participation at a local level, like in Catalyst Miami's Leadership Training programs, Detroit Equity Action Lab, or Madisonville Community Studio.

It's probably worth noting that none of the programs we referenced here focus solely on community development leadership. Rather, they're open to people working across lots of different sectors around grassroots change. Based on what we've heard in our research, that's a good thing; interviewees have consistently called for cohort-based learning that draws folks together across sectoral lines, especially people who have traditionally been underserved by community development leadership programs.

PROMISING PRACTICE 2: EQUIP PRACTITIONERS WITH MATERIAL AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE WORK.

Offering high-quality learning and training programs around systems change is a great start, but it's not the only kind of systems change support residents and practitioners have said they need to do transformational work. For a lot of the programs that interviewees lifted up, that kind of additional support is built directly into training programs, like in the LEAD Racial Equity Institute (cohort development of racial equity action plans and ongoing coaching) and the Systems Change Fellowship (operating support, coaching peer support, and connections to funders). For others, training is one part of a much broader kind of support, like in the Housing and Healing Justice Corps' intentional co-housing.

Interviewees also named forms of supports that are maybe a little less common in leadership development programs. They noted a need to increasingly focus on the safety and security of practitioners and residents doing race-explicit work in difficult political environments. That kind of support shows up in Vision Change Win's safety and security training, networking, and rapid response assistance. The commitment to resourcing safety and security work also shows up in Funders for Justice's Safety and Security Pledge.

Interviewees also named the importance of systems change technology supports, and those appeared to be underrepresented, too. While there has been a lot more attention in community development to equitably addressing the digital divide, there hasn't seemed to be as much explicit focus on how we harness digital resources for systems change. The closest parallel we found was Tech Matter's efforts to increase technology access and understanding of what technology can and cannot do in systems change, as well as promoting standards for how to use data and technology in ethical ways.

PROMISING PRACTICE 3: EXPAND CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORTS AROUND RACE-CONSCIOUS POLICY.

In considering systems change, our interviewees and the literature frequently highlighted the importance of race-conscious community development policy, the kinds that projects like the Structural Racism Remedies Repository and the Repository of City Racial Equity Policies and Decisions are working to make more accessible. That access to information is important, but interviewees noted that because policy covers so much ground, it requires investments in other kinds of capacity building support. Community development policy is made, implemented, and legally interpreted. It happens at local, state, and national levels. It gets pushed by workers inside of government, as well as organizers and activists outside of government. Interviewees stressed the need to extend leadership supports to people serving in different functions, different geographies, and different development priorities.

Government workers are an obvious target, especially for those within local government. That might look like The Opportunity Accelerator, which worked with five local jurisdictions to plan for equitable population-level outcomes, or the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, a network of more than 400 jurisdictions engaged in racial equity peer learning. As these examples show, race-conscious policy capacity building programs can be beneficial with both narrow and broad sets of participants. Programs can be tailored to reach people with specific functions in policy work, such as the Just Transition Lawyering Institute's focus on supporting attorneys, or in specific career stages, such as the Leadership Academy's focus on supporting early career professionals. Programs can also be impactful with broader cohorts, whether at the local level (like Newarkers Organized for Accountable Development), state level (like the Residents United Network), or multi-regional level (like the Reinventing Our Communities cohort program).

PROMISING PRACTICE 4: EXPAND PRACTITIONER AWARENESS OF (AND RESPONSE TO) APPRAISAL DISPARITY.

Our research also highlighted some areas where the sector would benefit from specific, functional interventions, including in real estate appraisal. Roughly 97% of appraisers are white, making it one of the least diverse American professions.

Despite the role that appraisal plays in community development, interviewees worried that there was a lack of awareness in the sector about appraiser diversity, appraisal bias, and consequences for communities of color. Fortunately, it does look like there's been more relevant appraisal research over the past few years, including around topics that haven't previously gotten much attention, such as commercial property appraisals and Automated Valuation Models.

There's also been some more explicit focus on appraisal within government. The Interagency Taskforce on Property Appraisal and Valuation Equity (PAVE) brought together 13 federal agencies and ultimately issued a comprehensive set of recommendations. Some of those recommendations have already been put into action, including requiring lenders in the FHA Single Family program to enable borrowers to request reconsideration of property valuations. Those kinds of intervention recommendations are also happening at the local level, such as in the Philadelphia Home Appraisal Bias Task Force's call for stronger data collection; local appraiser training and options for remote learning; and encouragement of anchor institutions to work with local appraisers of color. Individual organizations are also playing a big role, whether by offering plain-language know-your-rights information to consumers like Black Homes Matter or encouraging a critical review of Community Development Financial Institutions' underwriting procedures like IFF. Organizations are also attempting to break down barriers that have led to large-scale lack of appraiser diversity, including recruitment and retention resources through the Appraiser Diversity Initiative and alternative licensure processes through the Mississippi Practical Appraiser Training program.

PROMISING PRACTICE 5: TARGET INVESTMENT TO STRENGTHEN THE PIPELINE OF REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS OF COLOR.

We also heard frequently about the need for increased investment in the pipeline of developers of color working in and with community development. Real estate development is another workforce that is overwhelmingly white, and barriers to success for developers of color (including a chronic lack of financial investment) are well-documented. Leadership supports to address this cannot be one-size-fits-all. Focusing exclusively on early-stage developers ignores that even well-established developers of color face pervasive financing challenges. Focusing exclusively on large developers reduces wealth-building opportunities for smaller businesses operating closer to communities where projects are located.

Looking at the whole pipeline requires a range of supports – typically, increasing access to technical assistance, networking, and especially capital. The Equitable Path Forward Growth Fund has committed $350 million in debt, equity, and grants to supporting developers of color at both an organization level and project level. The Black Developer Capital Initiative is deploying $40 million to established, Black-led affordable housing developers. Growing Diverse Housing Developers is investing $30 million in affordable housing developers, paired with peer learning, mentorship, and advisory services. At a more local level, the Developers of Color Grant Program is providing up to $100,000 to developers of color as match funding for pre-development costs, as part of the broader Detroit Affordable Housing Leverage Fund. In Dallas, the Community Developers Roundtable provides a cohort with peer learning, advisory services, mentorship, and pre-development funding, and it revises its offerings based on participant feedback (such as through expanded loan product offerings and increased alumni engagement). Many of these leadership supports are working to explicitly connect the developer pipeline to expanded housing production in order to strengthen local economies. The Guilford County Homeownership Pipeline Project, for instance, offers a paid development capacity building program, targeted to Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises. It then connects participants to nonprofit housing developers in order to link them to efforts to renovate vacant housing and develop new housing within the county.

The People's Practice

We hope you've found something promising in these practices!

Feeling inspired to keep going deep on anti-racist community development?

Visit us at www.thepeoplespractice.org for additional op-eds, Q+As, research, resources, and more!

The Anti-Racist Community Development Research Project was produced with support from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to increase understanding of structural racism in community development and pathways to racially equitable outcomes that promote health equity. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of RWJF.

Developed by

spire+
BASE

In Partnership with

thirdspace
ACTION LAB