

How to Engage With Communities of Color 101

Guidance for Environmental Agencies and Nonprofits

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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This 101 guide is not all exhausted. It was created to give you a sound starting point in your journey engaging with communities of color. If you would like to have a greater conversation about this very important issue you may reach out to BeKura W. Shabazz at firstallianceconsulting@gmail.com.

Historically communities of color have been intentionally left out of important policy and permitting conversations that have left their communities bearing the brunt of environmental pollutants. As a result, these community members are suffering from a myriad of various diseases that range from cancer, asthma, and other respiratory diseases and in some instances the loss of their very lives. This has been a historical best practice of governments and corporations since our governments subscribed to putting profit over people as a better business model than the people over profit model. We recognize that similar constructs exist within the nonprofit culture and we must do all we can to eradicate systems, ideologies and narratives that cause harm within our own organizations. Creating safe spaces to have difficult conversations that evolve our organizations into the little world that we want to live in should always be something that Boards and upper management should strive to do as a collective with all valued employees involved in the process.

The purpose of this guidance is to acknowledge that environmental racial discrimination is real and it continues to plague communities of color today. Acknowledging that issues surrounding race are somewhat complicated, we must make a dedicated effort at eradicating all forms of racial disparities within our control within our organizations and within ourselves. To provide guidance to governments and nonprofit environmental organizations on engaging with communities of color. This guidance is not exhaustive of all the things we can do to ensure that we engage with communities of color with pure intentions. That part of the work must be done by the heart of the organization. The organization must make a decision to be committed to racial equity first before any of the other work can begin. That alone will determine the success of all other efforts that come after that one decision is made but that is the first step.

FOUNDATION WORK

Questions to Ask Before The Work Starts

1. Has your organization made a decision to be committed to racial equity?
2. What is that commitment?
3. How do you plan on incorporating your commitment to racial equity in your orgs overall scheme of work?

OBJECTIVES

1. What are you trying to do?
2. How is what you are trying to do going to benefit communities of color?
3. Is the work sustainable in a way that the community can continue it and be supported in that continuation of work.

To Start The Work You Should

1. An open mind
2. Be honest
3. Be ok with being uncomfortable to learn (everyone is uncomfortable at first, but it gets better)
4. Identify or provide safe spaces for learning, reflection, debunking and adapting to new things and concepts.

Heart Of The Work, Now You May Start

After you have done the foundation work you may begin to start the work. You

1. Before you start working with any community you should do your research on the community. What environmental issues are plaguing the community, what do we need from the community to eradicate or roll back the harm, and how can WE- not they, make the work sustainable? Can we provide jobs/stipends/workforce

programs or other opportunities?

2. Engage with the heart of wanting a long-lasting relationship with this community. Check back in and include the community in other opportunities the CPB is working on, especially grant funding. Find ways to partner with communities to funnel in grants to continue the work.
3. Thank the community for their time and effort. Acknowledging the community and its membership. Thanking community members and showing appreciation for them showing up. Finding ways for more community members to get involved in CBP work.

What does this do? This is authentic engagement. It is NOT transactional. We want to steer away from all forms of transactional interactions. By doing this you build trust and building trust is the foundation upon which long-lasting relationships thrive. We want engagement to be meaningful and beneficial to both the Program and to the community and its residents. Keeping in mind the goal of our work we must be able to educate community members on all things Bay. Some community members may not know anything about the Bay to appreciate it, to know what the Bay brings to their community and how beneficial it would be to take care of it so our job before we do anything else is to EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ON THE BAY AND ALLOW THE COMMUNITY TO DETERMINE THE BAYS IMPORTANCE. We can not and should not tell a community how to feel about the Bay, as they learn more they will grow to appreciate the Bay all on their own and in their own ways! This is a beautiful process if you cultivate space for it to grow.

The End Is Just The Beginning