



Building Capacity Through Diversity:

*Towards a more diverse and just
environmental movement in Michigan*

ACCESS

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
Environmental Program

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Participating Organizations

American Lung Association
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership
Children's Hospital of Michigan
Clare County, Michigan
Clean Water Fund
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
Community Action Against Asthma
Community Health and Social Services Center
Core City Neighborhoods
Council of Organizations of Asian Indians in Michigan
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
Detroit Summer
Detroit Water & Sewage Department
Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice
East Michigan Environmental Action Council
Eastern Michigan University
Ecology Center
Lake Michigan Federation
League of Conservation Voters-Education Fund
Mbaise Culture Organization
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength
Michigan Department of Civil Rights
Michigan Environmental Council
Michigan League of Conversation Voters
Multicultural Experience in Leadership Development – Wayne State University
National Lawyers Guild
National Wildlife Federation
Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program
Sierra Club, Mackinac Chapter
Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
Southeast Michigan Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision
United African Community Organization
University of Michigan Alumni Association
Warren Conner Development Coalition
Wayne County Department of Environment

Building Capacity Through Diversity

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About ACCESS

The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) is a community-based non-profit organization committed to the development of the Arab American community in all aspects of its economic and cultural life. Since 1971, ACCESS has provided a wide range of health and human services, and advocacy programs. The Building Capacity Through Diversity Project is an initiative of the ACCESS Environmental Program, a division of the ACCESS Community Health & Research Center. The work of the Environmental Program, established in 1995, encompasses community education, research, and advocacy in support of environmental health and environmental justice.



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ACCESS

September 2005

Dear Reader,

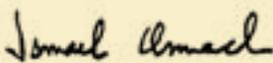
For the past two years, the Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services (ACCESS) implemented an innovative project called Building Capacity Through Diversity, a training program designed to increase the capacity of communities, organizations, and community leaders to work cross-culturally on issues related to the environment.

ACCESS has had a long commitment to promoting cultural awareness of Arab/Arab Americans, and building bridges across cultures, and we were very pleased to expand our diversity work into the environmental arena. The recognition that the environmental movement must reflect the changing demographics of the United States is taking place among environmentalists across the country. We have to examine the histories of the environmental field and other movements if we want to be effective in developing a more inclusive approach to our work, whether it is revitalizing our cities, conserving the land and natural resources, managing growth or other environmental issues. In partnership with environmental and environmental justice organizations, ACCESS implemented this project to address the need within the Michigan environmental community to examine the barriers that exist among communities and to begin building alliances beyond the traditional environmental organizations. This project brought together communities across all backgrounds to dialogue about the intersection of race and the environment through a 10-month long training program.

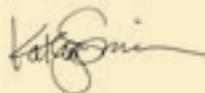
While seeking to raise cultural awareness, these trainings also challenged our traditional paradigms of environmental organizing, and began to lay the foundations of a shared understanding on how race affects our work. We explored the cultural differences of how communities define and relate to the environment. Through the trainings, we intended to plant the seeds of change on how we work on an organizational and community level, and perhaps it had its greatest impact on the individuals at a personal level. While organizational change is a very long-term process, each of us must continue to do the work within ourselves in order to connect with the external work we do with other communities and for the betterment of the environment.

ACCESS created this report to share our journey as we developed and implemented the Building Capacity Through Diversity project, and to highlight the stories and experiences of our participants. It is one model, not the prescription, to carry out this important mission of being more diverse and inclusive in our work. We hope this report will provide inspiration, and serve as a resource for environmental organizations and community activists that want to create a stronger, more equitable movement for environmental protection and social change.

Sincerely,



Ismael Ahmed
Executive Director



Kathryn Savoie
Environmental Program Director



“What I liked most about the training was the variety and diversity of the people who participated—where they are in their lives, what organizations they work for, what kind of work they are doing—I thought that was a wonderful asset for the partnership building there and friendships with the group.”

– **Nicole Rom**, *National Wildlife Federation*



Overview

Building Capacity Through Diversity was a two-year project of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) that brought people together in a series of diversity trainings to build capacity, both individually and collectively, and more effectively address the intersection of diversity, race and the environment. The project grew out of the need within the Michigan environmental community to develop a deeper understanding of diverse racial and ethnic communities in Michigan, including their perspectives on environmental, land use and related issues, and to build skills that will enable them to work more effectively with culturally diverse communities.

The Building Capacity Through Diversity project was unique in that it provided extensive anti-racism and racial/ethnic diversity training developed for individuals in Michigan engaged in environmental work, which we define broadly to also include health, land use, urban development, growth management, housing, and other related fields.

ACCESS believes that the Building Capacity Through Diversity project was an innovative project that may serve as a new training model for environmental groups, as well as other organizations and coalitions, striving to work on similar issues. The goal of Building Capacity Through Diversity is to “increase the capacity of community organizers and others to communicate effectively with Michigan residents of diverse races and cultures on environmental issues.” Program participants met approximately once a month for ten months to engage in anti-racism and diversity training as well as education about environmental justice in Michigan.

The Need

Since 2001, ACCESS has been engaged in a collaborative effort, working with a dozen other environmental organizations in Michigan, to strengthen the environmental movement in Michigan, through communications and community organizing efforts. Many of these organizations are working to address environmental issues as they affect quality of life at the neighborhood level, including land use, growth management, and environmental health. In attempting to reach out to new constituencies, many of these organizations discovered challenges in their ability to work with different racial and ethnic groups, because of limited experience, understanding or skills in the areas of race and diversity. A few examples cited by some of these organizations illustrate this point:

- Activists working on transportation issues tried to conduct door-to-door community outreach among a predominantly Arab immigrant community. Organizers were unable to speak to many households or came across barriers of communication due to the lack of understanding of cultural norms within the community.
- During a land use and transportation meeting, a participant cites the issue of race and racism playing a key role in how decisions were made in the region. Another participant disagreed and cited socioeconomic reasons instead. After some discussion, the group seemed determined to deflect the issue of race. A few organizers who were present recognized the importance of addressing the issue, but felt unable to diffuse the tension in the room or facilitate the conversation in a productive and respectful manner.
- In a struggle against the construction of a school built on a toxic waste site, miscommunication and lack of cultural understanding occurred often in the community, which consisted of Latino, African American and white residents. As a result, those involved split into factions divided by race, unwilling to work together.

The Building Capacity Through Diversity project was created to examine these kinds of situations, to create a common understanding of the problem, and to build the capacity of a broad array of groups in Michigan’s environmental community to be more effective in their work.

With Michigan being among the most segregated states in the nation, and the environmental movement largely white and middle class, it is not surprising that those working within the en-

SPOTLIGHT



Jamie Morton

Manager of Outreach Programs
Alliance for the Great Lakes
(formerly the Lake Michigan
Federation)
Grand Haven, Michigan

For the past 6 years, in her outreach effort with the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Jamie Morton has worked with grassroots groups throughout the Great Lakes basin. In addition to pulling together an annual Great Lakes regional conference, the Lakewide Summit, Jamie oversees a variety of programs that help connect people in their communities to their local environment, with the goal of “creating advocates for the Lakes.” Her work also includes outreach in inner-city Muskegon, educating people about pollution from contaminated sediment and its impacts on health, and engaging community members in pushing for clean up of contaminated sites in their community.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes is committed to diversity, and supported Jamie’s participation in the Building Capacity Through Diversity experience. Jamie notes that other members of the Alliance for the Great Lakes now see her as a resource person on diversity issues, and look to her to provide leadership to others in the organization in this area.

“As far as my work with the community,” Jamie says of the training, “it has really helped me ‘think outside the box’ to outreach to new communities, and better understand how to approach those individuals. And the networking was beneficial, even given the distance. That was really valuable.”

Environmental and related fields face serious challenges with respect to race and diversity. Such obstacles hinder our ability as a movement to effectively address environmental and quality of life issues that affect Michigan, particularly communities of color and economically poor communities that frequently face the worst degradation. This degradation and damage challenges environmental organizations in Michigan, as well as the entire nation, to deepen their analysis of the problems, redefine their visions and goals, and diversify to become more racially and ethnically inclusive in the makeup of their staffs, boards and memberships.

Overcoming the barriers between different races and cultures, between urban and suburban divides, is essential to building a strong, diverse movement that can more effectively revitalize our cities, make wise use of land and other resources, manage growth effectively, and protect human health. It is significant that this new training emerged from those working within the environmental movement, recognizing that other approaches are needed to become more inclusive, and build broad public support needed to effectively address some of Michigan’s most challenging environmental issues.

Individuals who participated in Building Capacity Through Diversity cited a wide range of reasons for attending the training. Collectively, their rationale for participation was based upon a desire to achieve personal, relational (interpersonal), organizational, societal or community goals with respect to issues of racial and ethnic diversity and the environment. Many of these goals related to developing awareness, understanding, communication, collaboration, leadership, and action to affect social and environmental justice.

What We Did and How

Development of Goals

Being a primarily white and middle class movement prevents the environmental movement from achieving broader and stronger support to protect public and environmental health. Thus, overcoming the barriers between different races and cultures, between urban and suburban divides, becomes essential to building a strong, diverse movement that can more effectively revitalize our cities, manage growth effectively, and productively address other environmental issues. We wanted to develop goals at a number of levels: individual impacts, skills building, organizational impacts, and alliance and coalition building. By bringing together individuals from different organizations, the goals of the training were largely based on personal and individual impacts, though we wanted to also provide some initial tools for participants to take back to their organizations.

The Advisory Committee

Initially, ACCESS partnered with a handful of environmental and environmental justice organizations to develop and seek funding for the project: the Michigan Environmental Council, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, and the Mackinac Chapter of the Sierra Club. However, we soon determined that there was a need for a larger committee of advisors, so we expanded the initial group into an Advisory Committee, which brought greater racial diversity, as well as additional expertise in the field of anti-racism work, racial diversity, and environmental justice.

This Advisory Committee provided Building Capacity Through Diversity with strong continuity and momentum from its pre-funding period, through the project planning and implementation. The Advisory Committee met before the project began, providing input on the selection of trainers and advice on conducting outreach and recruitment for the first year’s group of participants. ACCESS continued to draw insights from Advisory Committee members on developing and evaluating the effectiveness of our curriculum throughout the two years.



Trainer Selection

ACCESS interviewed several organizations and consulting groups in the field of anti-racism and diversity training before selecting the Freedom Trainers to facilitate the training. We were looking for trainers with a record of excellent work with activists, an interest in integrating environmental issues, and an openness to incorporate local trainers within the curriculum. In particular, ACCESS chose to work with Freedom Trainers because of their philosophy and approach to the work using a multi-oppression analysis, which includes looking at racial and ethnic diversity, but also gender, age, ability, and other factors of society. The training largely focused on dealing with race and culture as factors in the environmental movement, but also drew parallels to other factors that impact the effectiveness and inclusiveness of our work. Freedom Trainers’ motto is ‘Beyond Diversity’, which is not just about understanding different cultures, holidays and foods celebrated in those communities, but rather about truly comprehending how our society operates, impacting whether or not a person can fully participate in society. In addition, Freedom Trainers was committed to bringing a diversity of trainers to provide participants with a wide range of training styles and experiences.

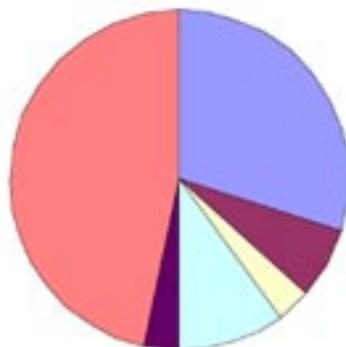
“The training is absolutely essential if we’re going to make any progress to the degree we want. If white folks are going to work in the environmental justice movement, they have to understand how racism works. It’s essential for people of color too because our experiences are limited.”

– Rhonda Anderson, Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program

Participant Recruitment and Selection

For a meaningful training around issues of race and diversity, it is fundamental to bring together participants that were diverse in race and ethnicity, as well as field of work and disciplines. Though the training grew out of the needs of the environmental community in Michigan, it is a field that is predominantly white and middle class. At the same time, we knew that there were many people of color and other community activists engaged in “environmental work”, though they may not define it as such. As a result, we used different strategies to recruit a diverse pool of applicants. These included utilizing organizational contacts through the Advisory Committee, and targeted local and multicultural networks. To inform our selection process, we asked applicants to respond to questions regarding their motivation for participating, type of work or involvement, and previous experience related to diversity. A Selection Committee composed of ACCESS staff and members of the Advisory Committee subsequently selected participants that met any or a combination of the following criteria: applicants who were engaged in environmental work (broadly defined), who came from organizations that helped to define the project and need, applicants of color, and applicants who held leadership positions in environmental organizations. Thirty participants (23 women and 7 men) were selected in 2003-04 training, and 26 participants (21 women and 5 men) were selected for the 2004-05 training. The racial/ethnic composition of the groups are shown in the charts.

**Building Capacity Through Diversity
Racial/Ethnic Composition, 2003-04**



- African American/Black (9)
- Arab (2)
- Asian Pacific Islander (1)
- Latino/Hispanic (3)
- Native American (1)
- White (14)

**Building Capacity Through Diversity
Racial/Ethnic Composition, 2004-05**



- African American/Black (8)
- Arab (1)
- Asian Pacific Islander (2)
- Latino/Hispanic (4)
- White (11)



SPOTLIGHT

National Wildlife Federation

Great Lakes National Resource Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan

It's about baby steps, like expanding where the office posts new positions, or designating a bulletin board of resources and articles in the office kitchen. Things are happening at the National Wildlife Federation's Great Lakes office, and it goes to show that a small group of people really can make a difference in the world, even if the world is just your workplace.

When ACCESS first offered the Building Capacity Through Diversity training, there was already interest among NWF Great Lakes staff in better understanding how to apply principles of diversity to their work, paralleling changes at the NWF national office which is beginning to implement various diversity initiatives. NWF sent Marisa Rinkus, Population and Environment Specialist, as a representative to the training in hopes of bringing back some resources for the organization. Marisa was personally motivated to learn more about diversity and other cultures and figure out how to apply it to the work place and her own personal life.

After her completing the Building Capacity Through Diversity training, Marisa made a presentation at an NWF staff retreat. She ended up speaking for two and a half hours, well beyond the designated hour for her presentation. The discussion stirred up many questions about race, racism and lack of diversity in the environmental field. Subsequently, the office had an internal examination of how they recruit for jobs and internships.

The following year, two more NWF representatives, Nicole Rom, a Field Educator, and Shell Rumohr, an Administrative Assistant, participated in Building Capacity Through Diversity.

The training gave NWF staff a new perspective on how they view their work. Nicole Rom explains, "I once thought that NWF was way ahead of the game in terms of diversity issues, but the training has given me a much different perspective. We need to create more space where people are talking about these things." Shell Rumohr reflects on the organizational dynamics that need to change: "Environmental organizations should give thought

to changing the culture of the whole organizations because that's what puts up roadblocks to being truly inclusive."

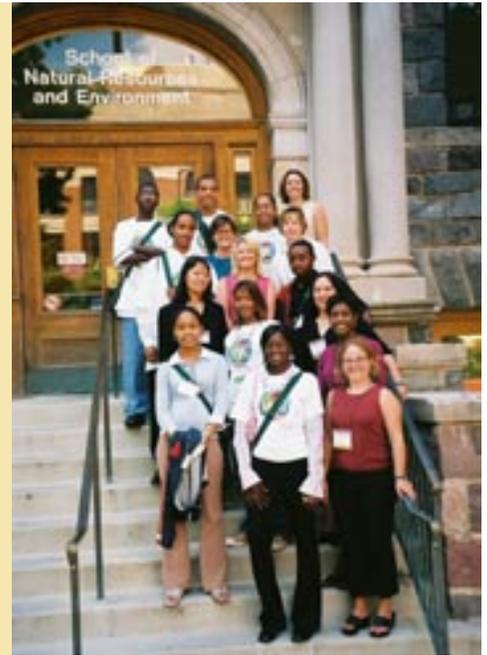
Creating more dialogue

Sharing the training experience with other NWF staff helped jumpstart other changes around the office. A diversity workgroup was formed. The workgroup organized an eight month-long Diversity Brown Bag series to encourage ongoing dialogue regarding among staff and programs. The workgroup invited guest speakers, including some from the Building Capacity Through Diversity training, to discuss the history of race and racism, white privilege and the environmental movement, and to learn about research findings on diversity within environmental organizations.

NWF staff say that creating opportunities for dialogue is important. "Probably one of the most useful things [an organization] could do is 'caucusing'. It's important to learn how to acknowledge white privilege, how to be an ally and how white people should be checking each other. And scary though it might be, those conversations have to be had to make any progress at all," said Shell.

Building leadership among people of color

NWF is also taking steps to increase the number of people of color in environmental careers by closely examining their internship and work/study programs, being more inclusive of their outreach programs, and expanding their recruitment of interns beyond the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Strengthening the connections to Earth Tomorrow, NWF's community based program in Detroit for more than ten years that promotes environmental stewardship, career mentoring, leadership skills and conservation action projects among Detroit youth, is a step in the right direction as it moves to other cities including Seattle and Houston. Nicole comments on the importance and recognition of the Earth Tomorrow program, saying it "is the established program we have to work in urban areas and with people of color. There is now a greater interest in the office locally and



within NWF nationally to really build leadership skills among young people of color for positions of power in the future. At the same time, we have to figure out: how do we provide a good mentoring experience for people of color?" Part of the mentoring will include connecting Earth Tomorrow graduates to their internship and work/study programs.

A "Diversity Matrix"

Like many organizations, NWF conducts an annual evaluation or audit of its work to plan for the following year. As part of this audit, only managers were required to meet a diversity goal regarding the composition of their personnel. Measuring "diversity" beyond superficial numbers is hard, so the workgroup researched other models that would provide a meaningful basis for evaluation. Now, a "diversity matrix," which accounts for diversity in program goals, project implementation and method of evaluation, will be incorporated into each staff annual review. "The staff recognizes it's just a start and would probably need more tweaking as we go on," says Marisa.

What advice do NWF staff have for others to build diversity with their organizations? All agree on the importance of finding allies because the road alone is much more difficult, and it helps to have at least one ally who is in a position of leadership. Marisa concludes, "The key thing – and I think environmentalists can relate to this – is that you can't win everything, and you won't convince everyone, but it doesn't mean you should stop doing it."

SPOTLIGHT

Freedom Trainers

"Although we are facilitators, we are never neutral, we have an agenda. Our goals are always the same: to push people's analysis further ultimately towards liberation for all people."



Freedom Trainers brought a dimension to the Building Capacity Through Diversity project, unanticipated by ACCESS, but that pushed the training to a new, positive level of intensity. Freedom Trainers is a group of trainers around the country specializing in organizational change and development with a focus on community building and organizing.

While this training was focused on race and racism, Freedom Trainers brought in a holistic anti-oppression analysis, which is based in an understanding that racism, sexism, classism, and other manifestations of oppressions, are intimately connected to one another. Understanding how they are interconnected lies at the foundation of how to begin dismantling each oppression. Their approach, written and developed by each trainer drawn from years worth of training and organizing experiences, provided an insight to anti-oppression and anti-racism work that greatly enhanced the depth of the training.

A few participants commented that Freedom Trainers pushed their limits too far. Nonetheless, participants overwhelmingly advised ACCESS to re-hire Freedom Trainers for the second year of training. The trainers' passion and personal commitment to social justice was evident in the way they facilitated sessions. This helped foster camaraderie among participants, who frequently appreciated the trainers' sense of humor, often a welcome relief during the intense dialogues on personal and institutional racism.

What participants had to say:

"Very good, pushed us to really, really stretch ourselves."

"Great communicators with understanding and respect."

"Wonderful integration of personal passions and experiences into the work."

Contact the Freedom Trainers:

(347) 247-1147

beyond@freedomtrainers.org

<http://www.freedomtrainers.org>



SPOTLIGHT



Josephine Powell
Formerly the Director of
Compliance & Public Affairs
Division
Wayne County, Michigan

Located in southeast Michigan, Wayne County is one of the most diversely populated areas in the state. Josephine Powell knows first-hand the importance and challenge of being able to relate to a wide range of different communities and cultures. During the training, she worked in the Wayne County Environmental Division, developing programs to improve the environment and conducting public education, especially around water and lead. A large portion of her job entailed working with community groups and companies on compliance issues.

Reflecting on one example, Josephine recalls an effort to clean up the Rouge Park river area where a concentrated population of Hmong people lived. "The Hmong community had a culture of subsistence food gathering that involved collecting worms. We needed to discourage them from doing this because we believed that the soil was contaminated. We didn't understand what this meant to them, and just putting up signs to warn them of the soil wasn't helpful."

Josephine has participated in previous diversity trainings that she found to be ineffective because they involved someone lecturing in front of the room. "What [ACCESS] offered was impressive because it offered the opportunity to see each of ourselves, in addition to trying to work with our own organizations. It is so important to offer the space for us to look inside... you have to change people in order to change behavior."

Developing and Implementing the Curriculum

Curriculum development was an iterative process from the beginning. Surveys conducted among environmental activists revealed that they were mostly interested in "cultural competency" training – learning about different cultures, traditions, cultural practices and communication styles. ACCESS also sought input from the Advisory Committee and later on, Freedom Trainers, and the curriculum evolved to include discussions examining power, oppression and organizational dynamics.

In addition to incorporating sessions about communities of color, particularly communities with a history and presence in Michigan, our earliest curriculum also included topics on the histories of race and the environmental and environmental justice movements, and sessions on skills building and coalition building.

When the actual training program began, the curriculum continued to evolve based on evaluations by the participants after each session, and continual evaluation by ACCESS staff, in consultation with the Freedom Trainers and members of the Advisory Committee.

Lessons Learned

The Building Capacity Through Diversity project has been a learning experience, and ACCESS believes that our experience has value for others in Michigan, and elsewhere, in the environmental community and beyond, who may wish to undertake a similar training. In this section, the bulk of this report, we share our lessons learned in this effort: Guiding Principles and Best Practices, Challenges, and Outcomes. We hope that the experience we share will provide some inspiration and guidance for others interested in addressing these issues in their own work and organizations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

The following section highlights some aspects of the training, some of the practices and principles that guided our efforts, which we believe made the Building Capacity Through Diversity training valuable for participants.

Long-term training

ACCESS developed the Building Capacity Through Diversity training as a long-term process. We believe that a long-term training is not only more effective, but essential to meet our goals. Training sessions over a period of months allow participants time to develop a deeper understanding of racism, and its role in society and our organizations, as well as to build skills needed to work more effectively with culturally diverse communities, and to begin to understand their perspectives on the environment, land use and related issues. In addition, holding the training over a period of months, allows participants to reflect on what they have heard, and learned and experienced in between sessions. It allows time for trust to grow, and relationships to develop between individuals, as well as between the organizations involved in the training. These goals cannot be met in a one-day or weekend-long workshop.

The process of dismantling racism within ourselves and within our organizations, is a long-term process, and requires a long-term commitment. As we have said to Building Capacity Through Diversity participants, dismantling racism and other forms of oppression is a long process, and we hope that participation in this training is just the beginning of a life-long journey



“...I continue to work with a number of people who I met at the training and work with them at the professional level for exchanging information, for building relationships and coordinating our work on issues.”
– Brad van Guilder, *Community Organizer, Ecology Center*



Practice diversity

Implementing a diversity training requires a commitment to diversity, and we tried to model that through all aspects of the project: in the creation of an Advisory Committee, recruitment and selection of participants, selection of trainers, and development of the curriculum.

ACCESS formed an Advisory Committee to be involved in the planning process and to inform and enhance the training. Project Director Dr. Kathryn Savoie described the Advisory Committee, “We tried to have people who represented different perspectives: mainstream environmental groups, environmental justice groups, and different racial and ethnic groups. We wanted people who knew the environmental scene in Michigan, but also those who could provide technical expertise on anti-racism and diversity training, and what resources were available. We had a lot of different interests represented, and members of the Advisory Committee were able to provide different perspectives and different kinds of information in shaping the project.”

Having a diverse set of trainers also exemplifies some of the values the training promotes. One of the things that ACCESS liked about the Freedom Trainers, who we chose to facilitate the Building Capacity Through Diversity training, was their commitment to reflect diversity among their own trainers. Freedom Trainers brought multiple trainers during the course training that reflected a diversity of ethnic groups, genders, class backgrounds, and sexual orientations.

We wanted to bring together a mix of participants that reflected the range of racial, social and economic constituencies that could make up the environmental movement. However, this training was oriented around the framework of environmental work, and we knew that many people of color and non-traditional environmental allies would not necessarily jump on board right away. An intentional process of trying to achieve diversity allowed us to enlist a wide range of racially and organizationally diverse applicants, who were interested in the training, while reflecting our core values and commitment to diversity.

A diverse body of participants helped to create an environment for learning, growth, and networking. According to one participant, “What I liked most about the training was the variety and diversity of the people who participated—where they are in their lives, what organizations they work for, what kind of work they are doing—I thought that was a wonderful asset for the partnership building there and friendships with the group.”

A unique curriculum

In developing the Building Capacity Through Diversity project, we found that while good diversity and anti-racism programs exist in Michigan and around the country, very few, if any programs or trainers offered a curriculum that was specifically intended for environmental and land use activists, or examined the intersection of race and environment. The few that existed were not readily available to us here in Michigan. So, ACCESS worked with the Advisory Committee and the Freedom Trainers to develop a curriculum that would incorporate discussions on race, the environmental and environmental justice movements, and presentations on various communities of color in Michigan.

This curriculum provided participants the opportunity to look at how these components intersect with environmental work. As noted by one participant, “It definitely helped me to be more aware of how race, class, culture play out in the environmental issues. In a way, dealing with environmental issues is just one venue through which we deal with racial issues in this country.”

Bringing together these aspects in one curriculum helped confront assumptions among some participants about environmentalism among people of color: “...The discussions around racism and oppression were similar [to past trainings I was in] but never with a focus on the environmental movement and specifically environmental justice. I think that I came in with a lot

SPOTLIGHT



Brad van Guilder
Community Organizer
Ecology Center
Ann Arbor, Michigan

As a Community Organizer, Brad van Guilder's work takes him to numerous communities around the state, working with groups in response to their requests for environmental assistance. Whether it's a municipal waste incinerator in Detroit, or a hazardous waste injection well in Romulus, or a land use campaign in Brownstown Township, Brad's role is to help communities gather the resources they need, provide help to participate in public the participation process, or help them figure out how to "get the word out" to members of their community. Brad's work has focused in large part in Wayne County, which has a high level of segregation. At the same time, Detroit and its surrounding communities have a rich mix of cultures.

As Brad says, community organizing is "context-sensitive" work....It's important for me to know how to appropriately deal with the groups engaged in the work, so I can help them with different possible ways of organizing... if you are dealing with a landfill in Van Buren township versus a landfill in Flint, each community has a different way of looking at it, and a different language to talk about it."

Brad says the Building Capacity Through Diversity project has informed and enriched his work as an organizer, helping him better understand the diverse communities in which he works. It has made him more mindful of who is affected by environmental hazards when he works on a project, and made him more aware that definitions of what constitutes "an environmental issue" vary greatly. Through the training Brad also met and developed relationships with new people in communities where he works. Going through the training together he says, has developed "a common experience, a bond, a trust, and that enhances our ability to work together."

of preconceived notions about people of color and the environmental community. You know, thinking that people of color, because they are oppressed, are not interested in environmental issues and are not working on it. I was very challenged...and learned a lot from that."

Making it relevant for Michigan

Like the rest of the country, the population in Michigan is becoming increasingly diverse. Environmental and land use activists, and other activists are often working in issues that are broad and impact multiple, diverse communities. Yet in many cases, there are barriers to working together across communities, especially when there are racial, ethnic and class differences. It becomes essential to understand and be familiar with the histories, culture, and issues affecting local communities in the area.

ACCESS believed it was important to tailor the training to the issues affecting local communities in our state. While we looked to the Freedom Trainers to provide an overarching analysis of oppression and facilitate the anti-racism process, ACCESS incorporated local trainers to round out the training and make it relevant to the Michigan environmental movement and communities.

We invited local presenters from environmental organizations, the environmental justice community, academia and grassroots activists to speak about their experiences and perspectives on the environmental movement in Michigan. We also dedicated portions of the training to local speakers from Native American, African American, Arab American, Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander communities in Southeastern Michigan. In these sessions, participants learned in more detail about the culture, histories and struggles of various communities they might not be familiar with, from people who are leaders in those communities. One participant found, "...when a person came in and spoke in detail about the history of the City of Detroit and what had happened over the last 60 years, there were a lot of people in that room including myself who did not know some of the details. Creating a context, an up-to-the-moment context, for the work that we are doing is very important."

Building a foundation of trust

Before attending the training, many participants felt that being open with a group of strangers would be one of the biggest hurdles to their participation. As one participant expressed, "I know that when you start talking about issues like race, class, and gender, we all have very strong emotions tied to our identities. Usually when a group begins discussing these issues there can be conflict or tension at times."

One trust-building method we used was to begin each year's training with an overnight retreat, allowing the participants to get to know one another and build a foundation of trust. In addition, we included various community-building exercises throughout the sessions for participants to break the ice and learn more about each other. Group bonding and informal interactions, such as conversations that occurred over lunch, campfires or carpooling, helped people be more comfortable with each other and find common ground.

Caucusing

Throughout the Building Capacity Through Diversity training, we devoted time over several training sessions to caucusing, in which the participants of color and white participants met for discussion sessions separately from each other. Caucusing provides a safe space for participants to express themselves openly, and allows participants of color and white participants to undergo separate processes of examining their experiences. The people of color caucus included discussions on internalized oppression and the collective struggles and challenges among people of color. The white caucus addressed internalized white supremacy, as well as the process, challenges and lessons of being white anti-racist allies.



“The most positive aspect of the training for me is that there are such limited number of forums to talk about how race impacts me and my work.”

– James Clift, Michigan Environmental Council



While some participants were unfamiliar with this intensive method of dialogue, caucusing became an important component of the training. We found that caucusing was an effective way to create a safe space for participants to talk more openly and honestly about race and racism in their work, and most participants found it valuable, as illustrated by the following comments:

“As an African American, it helped me immensely to hear directly from a variety of white people about their attitudes towards race. It was also good and important to be able to talk in a safer zone with people of color. In those caucuses I could process the bigger group discussion.”

“The training is absolutely essential if we’re going to make any progress to the degree we want. If white folks are going to work in the environmental justice movement, they have to understand how racism works. It’s essential for people of color, too, because our experiences are limited. The training allowed us [people of color] to talk to each other alone. We have to talk about why we don’t work well together, and our perceptions of each other. I looked forward to the caucus and felt it was a bonding thing.”

“...A few white people who I think had questions like, ‘I don’t understand how this is racist’ or something like that because it was the first time that they were hearing that [be] called racist. I probably also would not have felt comfortable asking that question in the mixed group, but then when we got to the caucus they felt comfortable enough to say, ‘I don’t get that, how is that racist?’ And we could talk about it as a group.”

Together in caucus, participants can form a community to help each individual along the way towards addressing issues of race, increase our accountability for each other, and ultimately improve our work for social justice. While most participants found caucusing valuable, caucusing is a challenging and intensive process that, at times, was met with resistance. We will explore this further in the “Challenges” section.

Popular education

Popular education was developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and promotes an inclusive learning process that draws upon the lived experiences of the participants to address the issues people face in their communities. According to the Freedom Trainers: “All of our training is done in popular education format, we consider it political education. We talk about social justice work in all of our trainings and how this theory is based in action. All of the issues that we’re talking about, it has to do with creating change.”

Popular education emphasizes drawing upon the experiences of each learner and relating them to systems of oppression that have shaped them and continue to impact social relations, as well as peoples’ relationships to the natural environment. This approach blurs the line between “teacher” and “student”. The Freedom Trainers modeled this equal exchange of learning by drawing their own lessons gained from the participants in the trainings. For example, during the first year of the training, based on discussion among participants, the Freedom Trainers incorporated a new element to their analysis of oppression and included “species-ism”, to explain the exploitation of the natural environment and non-human beings for the benefit of human beings.

As facilitators, the Freedom Trainers strive to be learners, but they further explain, “Although we are facilitators, we are never neutral, we have an agenda. Our goals are always the same: to push people’s analysis further, ultimately towards liberation for all people.”

Feedback and flexibility

ACCESS encouraged and solicited feedback from Building Capacity Through Diversity participants as often as possible, and ACCESS staff and Freedom Trainers would change the curriculum when necessary to meet the participants’ needs, which was a key part of ensuring that participants had a positive experience, and that the curriculum was relevant and effective.

SPOTLIGHT



Andrea White

Counselor
Detroit Hispanic Development
Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

Andrea participated in the Building Capacity Through Diversity program because it was important for her to represent her community as an American Indian, especially in places like Detroit, where a Black-White context predominates discussions on race relations. Andrea works at the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, a human services agency and community development organization. She is a family therapist and counselor for substance abuse prevention and treatment, working mostly with many Latino and African American families in Detroit.

“It was an eye-opener when I found out what the environmental movement was about. I found out it was about ‘keeping your piece of property’, and I was just disgusted. When you really think about it, American Indians are your basic conservationists. It’s about trying to have a relationship with where you live. I compared our way of life with what white environmentalists are doing, and the inequities really angered me.”

Since the training, Andrea has been more assertive in talking about racism among the groups she works with, providing a larger analysis for people to understand how racism affects their lives and the opportunities they may or may not have. “Racism usually isn’t brought up in ‘polite’ conversation, so I learned how to show my general outrage at this stuff publicly because if you don’t say anything, people will think it’s okay to let things go.”

At the end of each training session, we conducted a “check-out” in which all participants had the opportunity to share their reactions to the day’s training. In addition, we encouraged all participants to complete a written evaluation form at the end of each session. We asked often what the needs were, how things were going, and what needed to be changed. During the first year, we also conducted a mid-term assessment about how participants felt about the training and where they wanted to go from there. At certain points during the training, we polled participants on changes that had been suggested by some participants, to get a sense of what adjustments were perceived as needed and desired by the group.

As a result of those evaluations and conversations, ACCESS implemented changes at various levels of the training. Sometimes the changes were small. For example, during some sessions, we made a decision that a certain topic or dialogue was important to continue, and therefore eliminated some other activity from that day’s schedule. A major change was the addition of a second retreat at the request of participants. In the first year’s schedule, ACCESS had only scheduled a kick-off retreat in the beginning of the training. Many participants expressed the desire and importance of holding a retreat at the end. So, ACCESS changed the final training session to be an overnight retreat, providing more time for the group to discuss how to take the training beyond its formal conclusion and sustain the network of individuals.

Challenges

ACCESS believes there is much in the Building Capacity Through Diversity project to inspire and guide others who wish to offer similar trainings. At the same time, we struggled with some challenges in the development and implementation of the training – key issues that required creative problem solving, and ongoing consideration. This section provides an overview of some of the key challenges we faced, and an idea of what issues we believe need to be addressed by others seeking to develop a similar training.

Challenges that come with diversity

Many models of anti-racism and cultural diversity training focus on a single organization. The Building Capacity Through Diversity project instead brought together a group of individuals, who represented many different organizations, persons working in different roles within their organizations, and different personal backgrounds, and levels of experience with the issues and topics covered in the trainings. This diversity of participants’ experience and backgrounds created a challenge in planning and implementing an effective training for all participants.

Stated from the perspective of one of the participants in Building Capacity Through Diversity: “Many of the people who participated in the training were in different roles and stages in their organizations and I didn’t think that we had enough time to really work with people about how to [deal with this].”

Different experience by age was noted by one participant who said, “I expected [people of different] races, genders and sexual orientations to have different perspectives...but the dramatic differences between generations surprised me...there were several young women who just had a completely different take on the [training] than some of the older people like myself.”

With regard to different participants’ level of prior experience on the topics of the training, one participant observed, “I did notice with a few people that they were coming from a very different level of prior experience. I thought that the caucusing time provided time for people with different levels of background...”

Another area of differences in the backgrounds of participants was their knowledge and experience with the topics covered in the training. This is illustrated by the following quotes from two different participants:



“Currently we are a very isolated elitist group of white people who, yes care about the environment and attempt to care about people, but until we start working with communities of color that bare the brunt of environmental contamination, we will never really be able to clean up the environment or garner widespread support for environmental protection.”

– **Marisa Rinkus**, *National Wildlife Federation*



“This is the first [training I have had] that specifically involved racism and other kinds of oppression within the environmental movement.”

“I don’t think I raised a new level of awareness toward the intersection of those three [racism, racial diversity and the environment] because I felt like I had that before from taking courses as an undergrad...”

Pre-training interviews by the Freedom Trainers with all participants helped the trainers to identify the participants’ experience and level of awareness with the training topics before the training sessions began. But according to the Freedom Trainers, one of the biggest challenges to making the training effective was “incorporating so many different people and organizations and making everyone feel they are getting something out of it.”

Caucusing was new and unfamiliar to some participants

The Building Capacity Through Diversity training curriculum used caucusing (that is, separate discussion sessions for white participants, and for people of color) at various times during the course of the training. Caucusing provided a safe space for participants to openly communicate and process their experiences, reactions and issues around topics discussed. While caucusing was the training activity most frequently cited by participants as “most useful” on written evaluations, caucusing as a structured means of learning was new and unfamiliar to many participants, and there was some resistance to this method, especially at the beginning.

One participant observed: “I know there were some people in the training who felt that the trainers’ view of how we ought to do this was too narrow and kind of bristled within this framework that the trainers made us operate within. Having run trainings, you have to have some real practical considerations. You have to give it some framework, and no framework is going to work for everybody...I think that I saw these trainers try to listen and be a little bit responsive, but did not veer too far off their path and their method.”

In addition, the experience of participants in the caucusing varied from individual to individual. One participant describes her experience: “One very personal challenge was that while I felt firmly planted with the people of color caucus, I have not suffered from as severe discrimination as many of the participants.”

Other participants felt that they wanted more time for dialogue between people of color and white participants, what a few participants referred to as “cross-caucusing.” Some participants felt that the separate nature of the caucuses interfered with their desire to network with new people they were meeting in the training: “Caucuses that happened during the training that was trying to promote diversity and end up going into separate caucuses were valuable. At the same time you are not building the kind of relationships that, to me, this training is supposed to promote because you are not spending enough time really hashing out issues with your colleagues from different organizations and backgrounds.”

On the other hand, a few participants felt that we did not devote enough time to caucusing. One said, “Thinking back over the year [of the training], I feel so strongly about the caucusing; it should have been included right from the start—more at the beginning.”

Organizational change on diversity and anti-racism requires an organizational commitment

The Building Capacity Through Diversity project was not aimed at changing any one organization. However, almost all participants in the program were currently working either as a volunteer or staff for an organization, and most were interested in applying what they learned from the training within their own organization. For many participants, heightened awareness made their experiences within their own organizations more challenging. They emerged from the training better able to identify issues as they arose, but not always better equipped to ad-

SPOTLIGHT



Anne Woiwode

Director

Sierra Club, Mackinac Chapter
Lansing, Michigan

Anyone who is familiar with Michigan's environmental community knows about Anne Woiwode's passion for the environment and social justice. For the past 25 years, Anne has been a volunteer or on staff at the Sierra Club, and currently she is the director of the Sierra Club Mackinac Chapter, which consists of over 20,000 members. Anne is strongly committed to the values of Sierra Club, and the recognition that the organization was not doing enough to reach out and involve non-traditional constituents compelled her to participate in the training.

Anne grew up in a white, rural community of southeast Pennsylvania. "I grew up in a family of privilege and have taken so much for granted. I never really questioned this, and when the training came up it seemed like an extremely important thing to do."

The training opened her eyes in more ways than she expected; "the most valuable thing about my experience was being forced to remove my normal lens for looking at the experiences of others. . . With environmental or environmental justice issues, we've always said 'it's about them', but really, it's all of us." Anne believes that environmentalists must really examine themselves and question whether they are living the lives they think they are. "It's about learning to live your life consistent with the values that you hold. Transformation of our world depends on truly transforming ourselves...it's about taking risks and digging deep because if we don't do that the changes are superficial. John Muir talked about how when we seek to pick one thing out of the universe we find it is tied to everything else. His observation applies to all aspects of our lives, how they interconnect, and how we must learn to live in sync with the world we want to create."

dress them within the context of their organization. One participant describes this dynamic: "At a personal level I am very aware of racism. Personally, I would do what I can but as a part of an organization, I don't know how to incorporate it...I don't see how [to bring awareness] other than by choosing my battles and words very carefully...I don't feel like I have the capacity to practice any of this within organizations."

Those who were in leadership positions within their organizations, or whose organizations or supervisors were supportive of their efforts to bring about changes in their work were more successful. For example, one participant reported. "The thing that is very helpful for me is the position that I am in as a manager of the project. My boss pretty much [says], whatever you think you need to do, do it. So I have a lot of freedom to do some kind of work around racism and disparities of many kinds."

Another participant has moved into an organizational leadership position since completing the training and describes the difference this has made in applying the learning from Building Capacity Through Diversity within the organization: "...Now that I am in a position that I can actually make policies in my own institution, I will do as much as I can to make sure that we are trying to diversify our staff and our organization; prior to that I was not in a position to really do that, though I was certainly a voice within a larger institution..."

Obviously, this experience was more difficult for those who were not in a position of influence within their organization, or whose organization was not as committed to change. To address the sense of frustration and isolation these participants felt, the Freedom Trainers suggest "encourag[ing] them to be accountable as individuals within their organizations and networks...[and] also encourag[ing] them to develop a network so they don't feel isolated."

ACCESS believes that the Building Capacity Through Diversity project represents an important step in the process of building the capacity of environmental organizations in Michigan to effectively address the concerns of diverse constituencies in the state of Michigan. However, we recognize that ultimately, for our organizations to change, organizational commitment to diversity and combating racism is required, and we hope that the Building Capacity Through Diversity Project will inspire environmental organizations to join in this work.

Even a long-term training is just a beginning

The Building Capacity Through Diversity project was intentionally designed as a long-term project. We believed that a long-term, multi-session curriculum would be more effective than the one-day or two-day workshop that is the norm for many diversity trainings. A long-term training allows participants to reflect upon their experience between trainings, and build their awareness and understanding over time.

Initially, we were concerned that the large time commitment required by the Building Capacity Through Diversity training – 11 days over the course of 10 months – would keep people from applying. In fact, some potential applicants mentioned the time required as a barrier to their own participation. However, a common response we received in written evaluations after each session was "not enough time!" Those who participated described feeling the need for more time at various points of the training. For example, some participants felt that the one and a half sessions devoted to examining our own organizations, and how to bring about organizational change was not enough time. As one participant stated: "Wish it could have been longer so we could have had a couple of months for the organization piece. This was short."

In some respects, this contradiction is inevitable. Project Coordinator Michelle Lin offers her insights on this issue: "Don't be disillusioned by any quick fixes, it's a long process. Even to start the process is a step in the right direction."

A participant expressed a similar sentiment: "This [learning] needs to continue after the training, you can't just get over [racism] in a year. It's like affirmative action—it's only been in place for 30 years but we're dealing with hundreds of years of racism."



“An act of racism wasn’t just being hung, lynched, being persecuted, being denied rights, but was also being disconnected from your sense of the environment, being disconnected from your close relationship, close kinship with the environment.”

– James Embry, *community organizer for sustainable communities*

Post-training follow-up is critical, but hard

The Building Capacity Through Diversity training did not incorporate formal post-training activities, but the last training session each year was devoted to discussions of informal follow-up activities because it became apparent that this type of support was needed beyond the conclusion of the formal training. Out of those discussions, ACCESS put the responsibility with the participants to decide what kind of follow-up they wanted to see and make happen. The participants created a bi-monthly schedule, and 2-3 participants volunteered to plan and with the assistance of ACCESS staff, to bring the group together for an activity or discussion after the formal training ended.

One participant describes post-training activities: “Others who participated in the training and I will talk to each other but not in a formal way...The thing that I would really like to have happen is some ongoing support network where we continue...to get together regularly to talk about readings. Another [possibility] would be how to further promote the concepts in my own organization, so I do not feel so isolated because the more I feel isolated in my organization the less likely I am to speak out about the issues generally.”

For a few participants, others in their organizations also attended the training, which differentiates their experience. “I do have a support system here [at work]. It is nice that [two other people] are here in my office that have [completed the training]. I can easily communicate to them and they know exactly what I am talking about. When things arise, there are two people here in my office. This is good, though I don’t take advantage of it as often as I could or should.”

Some participants offered suggestions for follow up: “...I would love it if somehow people would continue to use the list serve, not just to post events that are happening, but also [to share] personal stories, ‘Gee, something happened to me today and I wanted to share this.’ Unfortunately, we don’t do that personal communication via the list serve, and I think it would be really great to get personal reminders and for people to share in that capacity. Another one would be case studies, continual stories from organizations or people that are creating change or implementing change.”

As suggested by the sense of participants that they needed more time, and the belief that anti-racism work is a lifelong process, we have concluded that post-training activities and follow-up are essential to provide support to participants so that they can act upon what they learned during the training sessions.

Outcomes

New relationships, new networks

According to Project Director Kathryn Savoie, “It’s been very important to bring people together who might not have ever made connections and to begin to understand some of the commonalities that they might have in their work. I see new partnerships being formed and new possibilities or projects coming out of it.”

Each year, participants in the Building Capacity Through Diversity Project discovered they are part of a network of like-minded individuals who share a commitment to diversity and racial justice. Friendships grew among individuals, and opportunities for professional working relationships developed as well. The comments below describe the value some participants found in these new relationships:

“...here is a chance to go through a year or more of meeting people and building your knowledge base on the people in the area who are working on similar kinds of concerns and who have a similar concern for diversity... I felt that people could benefit from knowing 25-30 other people in southeast Michigan who share a similar sense of work, direction and vision.”





“...There is a tremendous benefit in meeting these people. It opens up the possibility for collaborative work in the future.”

“Living in Detroit all my life it is the most segregated city in the country...There is no real reason for Black people to interact or integrate with other people of color or whites except for superficial reasons. We are not forced through housing, the work place or education to be among our brothers and sisters. This experience helps those of us who are not exposed to the rest of the world to our family. The most valuable thing is that it happened, and it should continue to happen for decades to come. We don't have enough of these trainings in all fields of life or work...This was an experience that I will keep with me forever.”

“It has helped to expand my network of contacts and raised my awareness and contacts with people and issues that I did not have before.”

“...I continue to work with a number of people who I met at the training and work with them at the professional level for exchanging information, for building relationships and coordinating our work on issues. Recently in doing our work, several of us were all at a [public] hearing and supported one another as we got up and made our comments...that sort of level of solidarity helped to reinforce us and also we demonstrated that level of solidarity to every one else who was there.”

Increased awareness

Increased appreciation of different communities and cultures

This outcome came directly from the cultural component of the curriculum, in which participants learned from local trainers about the history, cultures, social issues and collective struggles of communities of color in Southeast Michigan. These sessions usually took place at a local community or cultural center, bringing the experience closer to home.

Reflecting on this aspect of the training, one participant said, “[I learned] more about other people that are different from me, that have had different life experiences, come from different cultures, different religions, different places in the world and understand those differences and the struggles that other people have had so that myself as a white person in the power structure could better help change those things.” Another participant described, “Certainly people who weren't familiar with the story of different ethnic groups being in the US [learned about] their comings, their treatments, their rises and their falls, and particular laws that tended to oppress [them]. I'm sure that for many people that was important information and valuable insights.”

The exposure and awareness of local communities thus led participants toward action, as illustrated by this comment from a participant, “I'm making a bigger effort to support groups of color and to encourage my colleagues and friends to support them.”

Increased awareness and understanding of racism

The discussions on racism examined how racism and discrimination happens at the interpersonal, internalized, cultural and institutional levels. For many participants, an increased awareness of racism came with the desire to act to eradicate it, and the ability to talk openly about race and gaining the understanding of how racism operates was an important step to making change. According to one participant, “The most positive aspect of the training for me is that there are such limited number of forums to talk about how race impacts me and my work. Because of this I realized that until I can communicate answers to this [race and racism] that I don't really understand racism. [The training] was a process of internal review of my own practices – which is always positive, as is the process of reviewing my own organization internally and externally in relation to race. I was reminded of how much race impacts everything I do.”





Some participants noted that they have taken more steps to intervene with this heightened understanding. For example, one participant noticed a personal change in behavior, “I am more aware of how subtle it [racism] can be, and I am much more conscious of how I am inclined to say something that, in the past, I never would have thought of being racist...now [I am] very sensitive when other people say things, but also knowing they don’t even realize that they are doing it.” Another participant reported that she regularly uses, “the tactics for confronting racism and discrimination in the moment...and don’t let myself not speak up when I hear something that is offensive or a stereotype.”

Perhaps one of the most powerful impacts of the increased awareness of racism that occurred was the personal transformation among participants. A participant of color stated “I had to deal with how I have internalized my oppression and negative racist attitudes born in some parts of white society...it was challenging, but very important and necessary to openly come to grips with the racism of white people in the group who are ‘well intentioned’.” Another participant stated, “Personally I have learned I need to be more responsible for my own anti-racism work...I am really challenged and working on my racism when I am around people of color...In this program I got to see myself go back and forth...into my privilege and not challenge things. This was a part of me that I had not really noticed before, that it is really a constant struggle, and I need to take responsibility for doing my own anti-racism work even when I am not surrounded by people of color.”

Increased awareness of the need for more just and multi-racial organizations

Though the Building Capacity Through Diversity project was not intended to transform any one organization, many participants emerged from the training with a stronger awareness of the need and desire for organizational change. The sessions dedicated to organizational assessment were useful to some participants in gaining an analysis of organizations. One participant stated, “It is helpful when in working in an organization like my current job to know the different organizational types we went over [in the training]. I can now analyze any organization I work for and say where they are [in relation to race and racism] with regard to their staffing, their programming, and the type of organization they are and [determine] if I want to work with this organization.”

The need for organizational transformation was particularly noted for the mainstream environmental organizations. Several participants agreed that environmental organization would greatly benefit from organizational examination and expanding beyond its current boundaries, specifically through a similar diversity and anti-racism process:

“Environmental organizations need to work strenuously to achieve greater diversity and become more complete mirrors of society. Otherwise, the current almost all-white environmental movement will fall far short of its mission, partly on account of the increasing difficulty in mustering political strength.”

“The outcome of their efforts would be far richer if organizations truly understood the relationship between race and environmental issues...members could then really understand why environmental safety and quality is predicated on race and economics.”

“Currently we are a very isolated elitist group of white people who, yes care about the environment and attempt to care about people, but until we start working with communities of color that bare the brunt of environmental contamination, we will never really be able to clean up the environment or garner widespread support for environmental protection”

“Anti-racism training is important for environmental organizations because the communities that are most at risk are communities of color and low income communities. The ‘traditional mainstream’ environmental groups are realizing that urban environments are the most degraded and that these areas should be a priority.”





It's all connected

One of the impacts of the development of the environmental justice movement within the past couple of decades was the ability for movement activists to make connections between race and the environment, and transform the traditional approaches to environmental and land use challenges. In the same way, ACCESS developed a training curriculum that explicitly brought together race, culture and the environment in a way that few previous trainings have done. With the Freedom Trainers integrated philosophy and approach, the training brought out an increased understanding of the interconnections between racism, other oppressions and the natural and built environment. This participant's response was typical, "...they gave more information on the environment and they also told how everybody is treated in different environments and what you can do about it...[the training] helped me with situations involving the environment; which my previous trainings did not."

Just as notably, this interconnected analysis helped some individuals begin to see new connections and ways of improving their work. For example, one participant in the health field said, "As I am working to plan activities to address diabetes, we are looking at more environmental stuff than what we have done in the past. This is important to us because one of the things we want people in our community to do is walk more. They are not going to walk more when there are fumes because of the trucks in the area that we are in, or it is just unsafe because of no sidewalks or a lot of abandoned homes."



Looking at the big picture, one participant expressed that part of our work is to fix the disconnects that have occurred over the course of history: "An act of racism wasn't just being hung, lynched, being persecuted, being denied rights, but was also being disconnected from your sense of the environment, being disconnected from your close relationship, close kinship with the environment. We really haven't thought that way. We have thought that racism is separate from the environment, that racism is separate from sexism...this idea of seeing things as being separate is how we have come into the question of the environment...we need to create some kind of theoretical foundation that this disconnect, this taking of people and ripping them away from the environment, the water, the land, the plants, the animals, is as much racism as being persecuted and denied rights and so forth."

Conclusions

For any progressive movement, especially the environmental movement, taking time to examine how race and other social factors affect our work is critical if we want to build a broad movement for a just and sustainable society.



ACCESS believes that diversity training, and anti-racism work are important to the movement, and we welcomed the unique opportunity to offer the Building Capacity Through Diversity trainings to organizations in Michigan for the past two years. Along the way, we have learned many lessons. We hope that the experiences and perspectives ACCESS has gained and share in this report are useful to other environmental, land use, or community organizations who want to undertake this type of training. For those who want more information, the following section of the report, "Additional Resources" lists just a few of the many organizational resources and web sites available, and provides some suggested readings about race, diversity, the environment, and related topics.

The process of exploring the racial and ethnic barriers to building our movement, and transforming our organizations to be more diverse and inclusive, is a long-term project. It is challenging work, yet inevitably rewarding. We encourage and support each of you to take a step toward that goal.

Additional Resources

Compiled by Emily Nobel Maxwell

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

Action Resource Center

<http://www.arc.org>

ARC publishes ColorLines magazine and multiple relevant papers and curricula. Relevant publications include “Anti-Racist Work: An Examination and Assessment of Organizational Activity and Building Capacity for Changing Communities.”

Anti-Racist Environmental Coalition, York University, Canada

<http://www.yorku.ca/arec/biblio.htm>

This website offers a descriptive bibliography on topics dealing with race, racism and environmentalism, toxic waste, and environmental justice.

Center for Whole Communities

<http://wholecommunities.org/measures5.html>

Downloadable evaluation tool designed to integrate social values into conservation efforts and aid in decision-making and assessment.

Challenging White Supremacy

<http://cwsworkshop.org>

Challenging White Supremacy has resources available on white privilege, anti-racist organizing, and other information designed to help white organizers both to work for racial justice.

Environmental Justice Initiative, University of Michigan

<http://ejj.snre.umich.edu>

The website serves as a clearinghouse of relevant resources and activities in Michigan and beyond.

Environmental Justice Resource Center, Clark Atlanta University

<http://www.ejrc.cau.edu>

The Environmental Justice Resources Center, based at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia, offers a wide range of resources on environmental justice, smart growth, transportation, and health, including an annotated bibliography.

Freedom Trainers

<http://www.freedomtrainers.org>

Freedom Trainers is a group of organizing trainers around the country who lead anti-oppression trainings and specialize in organizational change and development with a focus on community building.

Leaven Center

<http://www.leaven.org>

Located in Michigan, the Leaven Center is a spiritual retreat center that offers workshops, seminars and trainings on diversity, anti-racism, social justice.

Michigan Land Use Institute

<http://www.mlui.org>

MLUI works to address issues of suburban sprawl and other over-development that causes traffic congestion, pollution, loss of community, rising costs, and deteriorating quality of life. Recently MLUI formed a partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and offers many locally relevant resources on their website.

Minority Environmental Leadership Development Initiative

<http://www.umich.edu/~meldi/>

MELDI is housed at the University of Michigan and serves as an information clearinghouse for environmental justice literature, employment and funding opportunities for people of color, current events, and more.

National Conference for Community and Justice

<http://www.nccj-mi.org>

This Detroit-based organization offers diversity training and dialogues to promote communities of justice where each person is treated with respect and understanding.

New Detroit

<http://www.newdetroit.org/>

New Detroit is a coalition of Detroit area organizations and interests working to promote positive race relations. They offer a number of resources, capacity-building workshops, a cultural immersion program, seminars, and initiatives related to diversity and racial understanding.

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond†

<http://www.pisab.org>

Based out of New Orleans, Louisiana, the People's Institute offers anti-racism training and community organizing workshops.

Student Environmental Action Coalition

<http://www.seac.org>, see “Resources”

SEAC has a listing of resources on general anti-oppression and environmental issues.

Western States Center

<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/resource/index.html>

WSC's work focuses in the Mountain States region. The website offers a series of documents from their “Dismantling Racism” program available for download.

† *As we go to print in September 2005, New Orleans is suffering the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond has lost its offices, and staff have lost their homes. Despite the crisis, they continue to operate, maintain their web site, and offer their anti-racism trainings. They welcome new training opportunities.*

SUGGESTED READINGS

Readings on Race, Diversity and Environment

“A Place at the Table: A Sierra Roundtable on Race and the Environment.” *Sierra*, May/June 1993, 51-58 & 90.

Agyeman, Julian, Bullard, Robert D. and Evans, Bob eds. 2003. *Just sustainabilities: development in an unequal world*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

*Bryant, Bunyan, ed. 1995. *Environmental justice: issues, policies, and solutions*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Bullard, Robert D., ed. 1994. *Unequal protection: environmental justice and communities of color*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Bullard, Robert D., ed. *Confronting environmental racism: voices from the grassroots*. Boston, Mass.: South End Press.

Bullard, Robert D. 2000. *People of color environmental groups: 2000 directory*. Atlanta, Georgia: Environmental Justice Resource Center, Clark Atlanta University, 2000.

*Bullard, Robert D. 1994. *Dumping in Dixie: race, class, and environmental quality*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Camacho, David E., ed. 1998. *Environmental injustices, political struggles: race, class, and the environment*. Durham [N.C.] : Duke University Press.

Cole, Luke W., and Sheila R. Foster. 2001. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: New York University Press.

Environmental Diversity Working Group. June, 2004. *Rising to the Challenge: Strategies for Enhancing Diversity within Environmental Organizations*. To obtain a copy or related information contact Alan Spears with the National Park Service, 202-454-3384, aspears@npca.org.

Faber, Daniel, ed. 1998. *The struggle for ecological democracy: environmental justice movements in the United States*. New York: Guilford Press.

Gedicks, Al. 1993. *The new resource wars: native and environmental struggles against multinational corporations*. Boston: South End Press.

Hernandez, Daisy and Kendra Field, “The Diversity Industry.” *Colorlines*, Winter 2003-2004, 23-25.

*Hofrichter, Richard, ed. *Toxic struggles: the theory and practice of environmental justice*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

*Katz, Judith H. 2003. *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman.

Kivel, Paul. 2002. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.

*LaDuke, Winona. 1999. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Boston: South End Press.

Mohai, Paul, “African American Concern for the Environment,” *Environment Magazine*, v. 45, no. 5, 2003, 11-26.

Pulido, Laura. 1996. *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Visgilio Gerald and Whitelaw, Diana, eds. 2003. *Our backyard: a quest for environmental justice*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Shapiro, Ilana. 2002. *Training for Racial Equity & Inclusion: A Guide to Selected Programs*. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute. http://www.knightfdn.org/research/civic/race_relations/TrainingForEquityandInclusion.pdf

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. 1999. “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” and *Other Conversations About Race*. Basic Books.

Taylor, Dorceta E., “Race, Class, Gender and American Environmentalism.” Portland, Oregon: US Department of Agriculture, Pacific Northwest Research Station. Downloadable link: <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/gtr534.pdf/>.

*Wise, Tim. 2005. *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. Soft Skull Press.

Readings on Coalitions and Collaboration

Bystydzienski, Jill M. and Schacht, Steven P. eds. 2001. *Forging radical alliances across difference: coalition politics for the new millennium*. London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Wondolleck, Julia and Yaffee, Steven. 2000. *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management*. Washington, D.C: Island Press.

* Copies available at ACCESS. Contact the Environmental Program at (313) 216-2225.

Local Trainers

Bunyan Bryant, PhD
University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor

Dave Dempsey
Michigan Environmental Council

Deana Rabiah
Arab Community Center for
Economic and Social Services

Donele Wilkins
Detroitters Working for
Environmental Justice

Karl Khoury
Arab Community Center for
Economic and Social Services

Lila Cabbil
Multicultural Experience in
Leadership Development (MELD),
Wayne State University

Maria Lucy Harrison
American Indian Health and
Family Services

Linda Housch-Collins, PhD
Wayne State University

Osvaldo "Ozzie" Rivera
Madonna University

Ron Scott
Community Organizer

Soh Suzuki
Community Organizer

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW*

1 **Community Building and Trust Building (overnight retreat)**

Participants engaged in building trust and community as a group undergoing a long-term process together. Participants discussed collective and individual expectations, established foundations for the training process and formed a shared analysis and language of oppression, particularly around race and racism.

2 **Foundation Work: Race and Racism in the United States and Michigan**

The session explored the history of race and racism in the U.S. and Michigan, and examined the manifestations of racism in our lives. Participants discussed power and privilege, multiple oppressions, and how an analysis of racism informs and shapes our social justice work. Participants were introduced to the process of caucusing.

3 **Foundation Work: History and Dimensions of Oppression**

Participants continued the discussion from the previous session on power, privilege and oppression, and continued caucusing.

4 **Culture and Race Caucus I**

Local speakers from the Latino/Chicano/Raza community and Indigenous/Native community presented on the historical, social, economic, political and environmental issues affecting their communities.

5 **Culture and Race Caucus II**

Local speaker from the Black/African American/African descent community presented on the historical, social, economic, political and environmental issues affecting the community. Trainers provided an overview on the history of White/European Immigration to the U.S.

6 **Culture and Race Caucus III**

Local speakers from the Arab/Chaldean American community and the Asian/Pacific Islander community presented on the historical, social, economic, political and environmental issues affecting communities.

7 **Environmental Movement: A Collection of Visions (overnight retreat)**

Participants discussed the various definitions of "environment" and examined the history of the mainstream environmental movement. A panelists of local environmental justice activists provided information on the history of the environmental justice movement and provided empirical evidence on environmental racism.

8 **Internal Organizational Planning & Skills Building**

Facilitators provided a framework on how to internally and externally evaluate organizations and group structures with regard to diversity. Participants examined the anatomy and life cycle of social justice organizations.

9 **Continuing and Transforming our Work**

To conclude the series of training, participants reviewed goals and objectives from beginning of process. Facilitators helped to identify personal and collective next steps, continued a dialogue on accountability, and encouraged alliance building strategies between organizations and groups.

* The topics presented here is a summary of what was offered in 2004-2005. The curriculum above slightly varies from the curriculum used in 2003-2004 based on participant feedback.



Participant Reflections

This was challenging, inspiring and life-transforming process.

After having been through a long term training exercise similar to this one (but not as intense!) before, I was surprised at how much I've learned and grown...

The most important work I've done – possibly ever...

This has been a growth experience that will assist in my personal and professional development.

The training has changed the way I view the world.

The training informed me more about racist systems and the importance of opening my eyes and ears to the things that support and promote these systems, and the importance of speaking out against these things.

This has been a much needed and pivotal opportunity to bring community groups together in a long-term focus on working together for integrated efforts.

Opened my eyes to racism happening everyday – gave me tools to understand and deal with it personally and in my organization.

I have a sense of support and meeting and understanding other cultures, and I am inspired to know this will continue.

This is one of the best experience that I have ever had... I only wish everyone I know could have the same experience!

This was an eye-opening, life changing, view-broadening experience that will affect the way I approach my life and work from now on.