

## **2b.TS5 What Special Factors Should a Theory of Change that Addresses Racism Include?**

People's ideas about how change happens are based on their analyses, judgments and observations about how the world works. Data and other kinds of evidence help people make these judgments, but people often choose the data and evidence they examine, interpret data differently and draw different conclusions about what data from one situation imply about another. Different conclusions come in large part from the differences in people's individual experiences and the lived experience of their families and the racial/ethnic, class, gender and other groups with which they identify. For example, it is often said that there are at least "two America's," one experienced by people in dominant groups who have the benefits of racial and other forms of privilege, and one experienced by oppressed groups.

These differences will affect people's theories of change about, for example, whether or not anti-discriminatory employment legislation translates into more open access to high paying jobs for which people are qualified, or if diversity training of banking executives and loan officers results in a re-examination of credit granting policies of lending institutions.

In developing theories of change, it is important to look at all the available evidence about how change happens and for whom. It is also important for people to be open to new or alternative theories of change. This is particularly the case for white people who may be very steeped in dominant culture analyses and explanations that tend to blame the victim (for example, defining them as not credit-worthy) rather than to look for institutional or structural explanations of outcomes (for example, people being unable to pay predatory loan rates that result in home foreclosures). People will also vary in the extent to which they trust systems or leaders to do what they say they will do, or instructions to be racially unbiased. It is also important to listen to the voices of people who can talk about whether or not strategies designed to benefit them have benefited or harmed them in the past.

In addition, community change of any type is almost never a linear process. Changes in community norms, institutions, and patterns not only take a long time to unfold, but within any given time period there are likely to be changes toward the desired goal and those in the opposite direction. At any given point in time, if one took a "snapshot" of the community, one might see progress or retrenchment or stalemate. That is why it is important to look for overall trends, to use more than one way of observing and recording changes, and to evaluate strategies at several points in time.

Strategies addressing racism are especially likely to generate resistance in the community, particularly as they become more visible and more challenging to the status quo. For example, school district officials and school board members who initially support sharing of school achievement data may withdraw easy access to that information when it is analyzed to reveal differential levels of resources made

available to schools in different neighborhoods and the association of these differences with disparities in student outcomes. Collaborations working on improved

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access to health care may falter when strategies to insure undocumented workers become crucial to further progress.

The theory of change for anti-racism work should include strategies for anticipating, identifying and addressing resistance in the community. That will not only improve the work's overall effectiveness, but also allow the evaluation to include these strategies in its assessment.