

CENTERING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

The Power of Community Wisdom in Advancing Health Justice & Racial Equity

BACKGROUND

The Praxis Project and our community partners operate with the acknowledgment that the practice of traditional public health and allied professions has made significant and necessary progress in improving population health,¹ and yet is still not benefiting all communities equitably.²

As the traditional practice of public health continues to evolve, it remains largely focused on approaches centering research, surveillance, evaluation, and behavior-change interventions, often perpetuating inequities.³ Basebuilding, community organizing and power-building, however, remain largely untapped and represent an area of great opportunity

for advancing racial and health equity. The Praxis Project's work with basebuilding community partners consistently shows us that building community power through supporting community organizing is crucial to improving health justice and racial equity^{4,5} across issues, and that there are opportunities to strengthen collaboration with traditional public health and allied partners. **In honor of the collective community wisdom of our grassroots partners, Praxis is releasing a series of briefs with lessons learned and recommendations for centering community in public health.**

The knowledge from The Praxis Project's Centering Community in Public Health Brief Series was generated from basebuilding community organizations through Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded Communities Creating Healthy Environments (CCHE). CCHE is a national funding and capacity building initiative to support diverse, community-based organizations and Native and tribal groups in the development and implementation of effective, local, culturally-appropriate policy initiatives to advance community health and justice.

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Our participation in the Learning Circles, Roots & Remedies, and the data meeting came at a very important time for us because health was not on our radar in terms of how it linked to immigration justice. But over the last three years in terms of the intensification of ICE, the inclusion of trauma and healing has been a really important space for us to be and that integration came from the Praxis team, the cohort, and the facilitators.”

-March 2019 Learning Circle Participant

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2011). Ten great public health achievements--United States, 2001-2010. MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report, 60(19), 619.

2 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Mapping Life Expectancy

3 Lorenc, T, Petticrew, M, Welch, V, & Tugwell, P. (2013). What types of interventions generate inequalities? Evidence from systematic reviews. J Epidemiol Community Health, 67(2), 190-193

4 The Building Healthy Communities Theory of Change (The California Endowment)

5 Advancing Health Equity: What We Have Learned from Community-based Health Equity Initiatives' (Trust for America's Health)



Learning Circles at Standing Rock, October 2019

Community-based organizing and advocacy is key to healthy and just communities. In 2007 the Praxis Project, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), created CCHE to support diverse community-based organizations and Native and tribal groups to address racialized, structural inequities persistent in our society. CCHE grantees brought about sweeping changes in their communities through advancements in public policy, increasing access to healthy food, safe places to play and physical activity at school. Since 2007, CCHE has evolved, extending its support to community-based organizations addressing a broader range of community issues across the social determinants of health equity, including education, housing, utilities, family supports and economic equity, and reproductive justice.

COMMUNITIES OF PRAXIS

In 2017-2019 The Praxis Project convened four Communities of Praxis (CP) to make up Learning Circles, which are designed to emphasize grassroots organizers' strengths for putting ideas into action to address issues important to our communities' health and well-being. The CPs brought over 100 grassroots organizations together from across the country to share expertise, build relationships, encourage collaboration, discuss tools and experiences, and engage in capacity building opportunities. These groups are a platform to facilitate such collaboration, relationship building and peer-learning across all CPs.

WHY ORGANIZING?

The strength of the Communities of Praxis (CP) is built upon collective wisdom and authentic and lived experience, and supported by values deeply embedded in social justice and popular education. By centering on basebuilding community organizations, our learning is better aligned with today's community needs. The CP's collective efforts result in policies, practices, and environments that are deeply informed by residents' culture and value systems, and are contextualized to the local political and economic conditions. Further, basebuilding community organizing allows residents to see themselves in solutions (policies, practices, environmental change), and bolstering defense for those solutions against threats, repeals, or attempts to preempt their work for health justice and racial equity.



Each CP is grounded in one of the following four thematic areas:

- Early Care & Education
- Family Supports and Economic Justice
- Housing Justice
- Utility Justice—Water and Broadband Internet

Many of the CP members may work across multiple, if not all, of these areas.

METHODS

Using a modified focus group process incorporating popular education methods utilized by Paolo Friere, Praxis hosted ten topic-focused Learning Circles with basebuilding community organizers over the course of two years. Learning Circles were discussion-driven, revealing the everyday practices and knowledge community organizers hold. Our goal was to capture voices from those who work to build community power in a way that reflects their effort to balance surviving, winning and building; and to help disseminate this valuable perspective to a broader audience who seeks to join or support this important work.

BRIEF SERIES

Resulting from the Learning Circles and community-led discussions, The Praxis Project is excited to share the following briefs in this 2020 series:

- 1.) **Community Centered Health Justice and Racial Equity: Innovative Efforts Towards Health Equity-Driven Policy and Practice**
- 2.) **Measuring the Impact of Building Community Power for Health Justice: What? Why? How? And How?**
- 3.) **Recognizing Healing-Centered Community Practices as a Complement to Trauma-Informed Interventions and Services**
- 4.) **The Role of Culture in Community Organizing and Health Justice**
- 5.) **Data 4 Social Change**
- 6.) **Community Centered Engagement: Organizing for Beyond The Ballot Box**
- 7.) **The Grammar of Health Equity: The Noun and the Verb**
- 8.) **Community Centered Policy: Ensuring Policies Meet Community Priorities, Build Infrastructure, Increase Agency and Dignity for All**

PARTICIPANTS

Participants represent over 100 organizations in rural, urban, and indigenous communities, working across the determinants of health equity. They are diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, age, and identity. Participants were recruited based on their organization's record as a strong basebuilding organization and for previous involvement with Praxis' work to build power in communities to address health justice and racial equity.

LEARNING CIRCLE VIDEOS

Watch interviews with Learning Circle grassroots organizers on The Praxis Project Website [www.thepraxisproject.org/learning-circles].



Many of the structures and social systems that basebuilding community organizers seek to transform (housing, education, healthcare, food access, etc.) are also responsible for persistent trauma that communities must contend with and respond to through healing and culture. Organizers work across generations, language and culture: they grapple with unique needs, barriers and strengths of their individual communities. **With this healing- and culture-centered approach, basebuilding community organizer-led work is at the forefront of transforming health inequity through the pursuit of health justice and racial equity.**

We are thankful for the wisdom and knowledge of the participating organizations (the brief series does not reflect the official opinions of the participating organizations):

- 4-Directions Development, Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise
- American Indian Farmers Association, API Coalition Advocating Together
- Asian American Organizing Project, Asian Services In Action, Inc
- AYPAL: Building API Community Power, Baltimore Algebra Project
- Bay Area PLAN, Black Alliance for Just Immigration
- Black Food Justice Collaborative
- Black Organizing Capacity Support
- Black Organizing Project
- Black Women for Wellness
- BLK Projek Board
- Boston Youth Organizing Project
- Brown Girl Recover
- CAIR MA
- Causa Justa :: Just Cause
- Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)
- Chainbreaker Collective
- Chinese Progressive Association
- City Life/Vida Urbana
- Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth
- Communities United
- Community Movement Builders
- Community to Community Development (C2C)
- Connect Your Community / Ashbury Center
- Cook Inlet Tribal Council
- Cultiva la Salud, Datule' Artist Collective
- Democracy at Work Institute
- Detroit Women of Color, Inc.
- Dine' Community Advocacy Alliance
- Dine' Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment



- DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving
- Empower D.C.
- Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)
- Fe y Justicia Worker Center, Freedom Inc.
- Fuerza Del Valle
- Genesee County Hispanic Latino Collaborative-La Placita
- Global Action Project
- Grassroots Leadership
- Gwinnett SToPP
- Home For All Nashville
- Housing Justice League
- InnerCity Struggle (ICS)
- Institute for Environmental and Energy Research
- Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization
- Khmer Girls in Action
- Koreatown Youth and Community Center
- La Plazita Institute
- La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)
- LABALink
- Latino Network
- Little Village Environmental Justice Organization
- Living Hope Wheelchair Association
- Love Not Blood Campaign
- Martinez Street Women's Center
- Media Mobilizing Project
- Menikanaehkem (Community Builders)
- Mesa Latina, Miami Children's Initiative (MCI)
- Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project
- Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Consultant
- Native Organizers Alliance
- Native Star, NBFA/AAIF
- New Jim Crow Movement/ Parable of the Sower Intentional Community Coop
- New Mexico Acequia Association
- Nollie Jenkins Family Center
- North Bay Organizing Project
- One Voice
- Organization for Human Rights and Democracy
- Padres & Jovenes Unidos
- Pan African Community Action
- Pan African Community Development Initiative
- Paz y Puente
- Philadelphia Student Union
- People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER)
- Prince George's People's Coalition
- Providence Student Union
- Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
- Racial Justice NOW!
- REDCO Community Food Sovereignty Initiative
- Right to the City
- RYSE, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), SEIRN
- Ser Bien, SHAPE Community Center
- Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)
- South East Immigrant Rights Network
- South East Texas Human Rights Center
- SouthWest Organizing Project
- Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
- Southern Echo. Inc.
- Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education
- Struggle for Miami's Affordable and Sustainable Housing, Inc.
- T.E.J.A.S Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services
- Take Back the Land Rochester
- Tenants Union of WA
- The Central Valley Urban Institute
- The Student Immigrant Movement
- U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives
- United for Justice in Care of Right to the City Boston
- United Native Americans Public Development Authority
- Washington Board on Native Organization
- Wind of the Spirit, & Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.





The Praxis Project is a values-driven, national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve justice and equity through partnerships to build community power. Praxis believes strongly that organized communities are critical partners in the struggle to create just and equitable communities.

Our mission is to build healthy communities by transforming the power relationships and structures that affect our lives and communities.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK

Visit our website, www.thepraxisproject.org, to learn more about our initiatives and explore our multimedia resources.



CONTACT US


Email: info@thepraxisproject.org


Phone: (510) 652-5250

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