

PRIME (Practices for Reducing Infant Mortality through Equity)

Evaluation of the Undoing Racism Workshops

Focus Group Results

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Focus Group Results

The PRIME evaluation research team collaborated with the PRIME managing staff to host three focus groups of Undoing Racism Workshop participants. Each of the three focus groups occurred one month after participants attend the Undoing Racism workshop. The Undoing Racism workshops were held February 14-17, March 21-24, and May 16-19, 2011. Three focus groups were held in the on March 10; April 5, and June 1, 2011. There were 28 focus group participants (7, 9 and 12 respectively).

The purpose of the focus groups was to give a sample of the Undoing Racism Workshop participants an opportunity to reflect on their experience within a few weeks of attending the workshop and to report how they have applied what they learned in the workshop in their jobs at the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH).

Methods

MDCH staff who attended the Undoing Racism workshop were recruited to the focus group by the PRIME project manager and MDCH managers. The MDCH managers created a list of potential participants emphasizing racial, job classification, unit, and gender diversity.

A PRIME evaluation research team member facilitated each of the three focus groups. Each focus group was asked five questions about the Undoing Racism workshop. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed. A member of the PRIME evaluation research team coded the transcripts. Once all transcriptions had been coded and given themes, the group results were compiled by question.

1. What is your most memorable moment from the Undoing Racism Workshops?

SUMMARY:

MDCH participants in the Undoing Racism workshop most memorable moments were mainly focused on increased awareness or greater depth of understanding of the historical development of racism. There was a wide range of previous awareness, with some workshop lessons overlapping previous knowledge. However, participants commented on the further development of the breadth and depth of their knowledge of racism.

This **growth in knowledge** was a result of the workshop providing historical examples, using visual aid tools (e.g., movies) and exercises which prompted participants to process their opinions. Participants were able to establish connections between workshop lessons and their own work practices. As one participant reflected,

“And I think that when I, before I went into the training, when I thought about institutional racism, I never thought about public health and MDCH and it potentially contributing to that. And it’s kind of the first time that I was like, ‘oh, that’s some of our programs where we have the best of intentions, you know, might be unconsciously leading to that.’”

These workshops also provided an opportunity to reflect on the **participant’s own racial identity, and beliefs**. This seemed to spark participants of all racial backgrounds to process ideas which they had previously not done. A participant commented,

“I had a couple, but I think the one that I remember the most was going around the room and talking about what we liked about being white or black ... and I think I remember that because it was something I never thought about before.”

Including community members to help develop policies and practices was a welcomed idea by participants. One participant remarked,

“However, towards the end when she was saying this is how it looks when an institution is balanced. You know, we have the community involved, the community and she gave the example of her local community being involved and taking the lead instead of the institutions trying to lead them. And I thought, ‘That’s really cool.’”

There was **frustration** at not knowing how to proceed with the information given at the workshop. As one participant questioned,

“But then my question to her was, ‘Ok, how can I take this back- make it practical for me. How can I take this back to my job? How-What are some of the things I can do?’”

There were also multiple comments **critiquing the facilitation process**. It appears that the facilitation style distracted participants making it difficult to focus on the content of the workshop. Participants who felt that the facilitation style was confrontational became defensive. Others mentioned their disappointment in the workshop layout which did not allow for more discussion. Some also felt that their personal opinions were not valued or that the facilitators were not open to other points of view.

COLLATED RESPONSES:

Lessons from History

- But specific to that the documentary talked about housing and how the housing properties were automatically devalued when an African American moved into the neighborhood so to speak. And I found that interesting because it gave me some, a little more context, well really a lot more context to the old phrase, 'Well, there goes the neighborhood.' Well, people could be perfectly good neighbors but there's so much out of your control with something like racism when it's institutionalized.
- I liked the visual depiction that was done of the institutional or organizational structures and how learning more about how that historically was established and that was very helpful to me.
- I was kind of shocked how they didn't allow black veterans to receive the (inaudible) program after the war.
- They gave a historical account of a woman, um, because of her bloodline she was white by all indications but because of her bloodline her birth certificate reflected that she wasn't white and all of the things that happened as a result of that.
- I didn't really know the history and that cleared that up for me. I mean it made me understand better what that meant and where that came from.
- For me it was the history and the documentary as well. Because to me, especially when they talked about the red lining and GI Bill, it just sort of painted a clearer picture of how structural (inaudible).
- For me it was the documentary. I thought that a lot of the historical backing was really interesting.
- I just appreciate the overview of the history of how different aspects of government created some of the situations we have today. And the overview of how they defined race and how race played a role in those kind of policy and sort of institutional (inaudible).

Lessons about Institutional Racism

- But they looked like they had some interesting things in terms of the institutions and that's the part that really is the most interesting for me right now.
- I was pretty familiar with the history and I really think that racism is an institutional and (inaudible), and I was really happy with the kind of community approach. The sense of power and looking at the community I thought that was very powerful.
- example of the man that shot his wife. So we had the Caucasian male, I forgot what neighborhood, but somewhere in the city, um, shot his pregnant wife and he informed the authorities that it was a black male who shot his wife. And so the example, was to show how different institutions react, even when you have policies and procedures in place-

- they got the utility company to respond and in this, I guess it was like a project maybe area, they got the utility people to turn off the heat in this building so that all the people would come outside so they could start rounding people up and so it was another instance of, well how do you have a policy and procedure to allow someone to turn off the heat in an entire building? ... that was amazing to me to see how institutions can respond and then also how a community may view institutions.
- However, towards the end when she was saying this is how it looks when an institution is balanced. You know, we have the community involved, the community and she gave the example of her local community being involved and taking the lead instead of the institutions trying to lead them. And I thought, "That's really cool."
- And I think that when I- before I went into the training when I thought about institutional racism I never thought about public health and MDCH and it unintentionally contributing to that and it's kind of the first time that I was like, "oh, what's some of our programs where we have the best of intentions, you know, might be unconsciously leading to that."

Personal Racial Identity

- I had a couple but I think the one that I remember the most was going around the room and talking about what we liked about being white or black or- and I think I remember that because it was something I never thought about before.
- Mine was the 'what I like about being white'. And first I was like, I don't know. I've never, nobody's ever asked me, I've never had that.

White Privilege

- What I'm remembering is when they went around and pointed to any white person and said, "Are you privileged to be a white person?" And a lot of us white people got a little angry, 'oh no I'm not privileged, I grew up poor.' And I had some struggles of my own. Just because my skin is white doesn't mean I'm privileged. Then after a while you really had to say yes, you know, after you thought about it. You really did have to say yes, as a white person you are probably more privileged than some.
- And it was kind of the same thing you were saying about, "no, I don't think I'm privileged, we struggled." Because I didn't have it in my face to sit there and compare it to but then I went back and I drove back to Howell and never thought twice about it. You know that was my answer, I can just get in my car and not really think about, do I go there- is that safe? And so for me that was kind of like, wow, that is true, I can just get up and go.
- I was real fascinated by the exercise that started out with the white people what they liked about being white and the other races what do we like about being that race.
- I grew up in Northern Michigan so I didn't have that moment where {name} was standing in line and the black people were being escorted away and she got services after Katrina.

Learning from Visual Aids

- I liked the film as well.
- The first day I think it was, or the second, I don't remember, anyhow they made a diagram of how the building a neighborhood and how the community comes together and all of the influences and it was just that diagram and I found that fascinating how that impacted a lot of things that took place years ago and continue to impact (inaudible).
- The first one [memorable moment] was more about the content, I liked seeing the movie on the morning of the second day. Well, that's when we saw it. I thought that it was really enlightening and it really helped kind of pulled everything together.

Reframing Experiences

- And she told about what that felt like as a black woman and it brought back a lot of memories that I had being a teenager in my own white town where we had slave days and it- I think it was a moment where for me it kind of epitomized how a single event can be viewed so differently from different perspectives. It was one of the more thought provoking discussions.

Applications to MDCH Work

- I really want to see some movement before I leave. .. But the thing that struck me because of that hope, is when I was still struggling with all time trying to figure out how is this, how are we going to use this to make some changes in our institution?
- And so, I found that fascinating of trying how do we plan for that kind of, in what appears to be an impromptu moment to really push our institution forward and what does that mean for us?
- But then my question to her was, "Ok, how can I take this back- make it practical for me. How can I take this back to my job? How-What are some of the things I can do?"

Criticisms of the Workshop Facilitation

- And she said, "well, we'll learn about that." Well, we never did learn about that. She never did give us examples. And, so this was so frustrating for me because here you know I'm spending two days, I want to learn, I want to know how we can change but yet there were no answers. And I just thought, "This is another waste of time."
- And the fact that we have to be unyielding advocates and the question of, "How do you do that?" at the same time as you preserve some of your personal safety. And I don't mean safe in terms of someone shooting a gun at you, but in terms of growth in the organization. Cause I've know people who have been unyielding and they got, they've gotten labeled and professionally if they stay in this organization they go nowhere.

- she explained that because I'm white I have privilege and because I have privilege that makes me racist. And I was extremely offended by that because that's not who I am, that's not how I was raised, I treat, I try to treat everybody as I would have them treat me. And I don't care what color your skin is, I don't care what side of the tracks you came from everybody has hard times in life, some people have more hard times than other times. If I am in the presence of someone that is not treating someone correctly by calling them outta their race, by calling them outta their name, by disrespecting them I don't tolerate it. Not by anybody, not anywhere. And I was offended by that.
- it was hard to overcome and think beyond what she was trying to get across as far as institutional racism because she was pretty much in our faces. ... and I mean she just really was in our faces did not present it, I thought, I thought presented it inappropriately.
- She made a statement that all white people are racist. Whether they know it or not we're racist. And I think immediately I became defensive and it became clear that whatever I had to say or contribute wasn't really welcome.
- But so there might have been a few personal statements that, that I did have feelings about but I just accepted them as personal statements. Maybe it could be toned down a little bit.
- I was surprised that on the, I think it was the second day when we sat down and we had the discussion that there was a kind of a going around and asking the white people first what they liked about being White. And- because I thought that wasn't particularly effective and it set people against each other.
- But I think something that was a little negative about the process is kind of a shut down moment- is at the very, very, very beginning of the training day I don't remember which of the presenters it was that said, "This is not going to be an opportunity for discussion, that this was – they had done research, this is what they knew about – this was not-it wasn't going to be a give and take. And I don't, I don't particularly- that's not my style if we're having a discussion (inaudible) that was kind of a shut down.
- And we had a one-on-one discussion about some of the things that were covered in the workshop and I tend to like discussions and it was just nice to have that personal, face-to-face, one-on-one open and friendly discussion with her of the different topics.

2. When you returned to work did you talk to your colleagues about your experience in the workshops? And if you did, what did you talk about?

SUMMARY:

Those participants who spoke with colleagues after the workshop were able **to clarify ideas** and talk more about the ideas of cultural and institutional racism. Participants spoke with other individuals and also in groups during departmental meetings. One participant described how a long discussion with a colleague helped to digest the workshop's key ideas:

"We spent like two hours talking about what I thought about the message about all whites are racist, and I don't know I think it was kind of like unpacking it or something."

Multiple participants also mentioned debriefing about their **critiques of the facilitation style** and the workshop as a whole. Those participants who did not speak to others about the workshop mentioned not wanting to bias the incoming groups, felt discomfort speaking about racism, or found that other colleagues were not receptive to speaking about the workshop in critical ways.

Several participants commented on **changes** which had occurred after the workshop which they attributed to the workshop and/or additional discussions with colleagues. A participant commented,

"So I spent part of this morning trying to read about birth certificates and how race is – how the history of how race is reported on the birth certificate which is I think something that came out of our training ... So that's like a direct result of the training."

There was discussion also on the **facilitation style of the presenters**. Some felt that the facilitators could have been more in tuned with the department and its programs. There was frustration over the lack of strategies or tools to take away from the workshop.

COLLATED RESPONSES:

Clarifying Workshop Ideas

- And so it became very helpful to have a broader understanding of sometimes how things get changed a bit to reflect terminology that doesn't clearly define what's always going on. So, I did talk about that when I went back to work with a colleague. Who is working on, a different project. That colleague I think listened and incorporated those thoughts into the work that they were doing so I thought that was very helpful.
- We spent like two hours talking about what I thought about the message about all whites are racist, and I don't know, I think it was kind of like unpacking it or something.
- But I mean people wanted to vent about the facilitation first and argue that actually we spent one of our unit meetings talking about it, like debriefing as a unit, the training, what we thought. And how we thought we could, you know, integrate it into our work.

Group Dynamics

- And the other-I talked with one other person, who actually brought it to me and was giving me their observations of the second training. Where they thought that the second day it seemed more divisive, the second day. Whereas I was sharing with this person that I thought in my, in the session that I was in, that the second day we came together more as a group.

Did Not Talk to Colleagues

- Well, I didn't really talk about cause we were the very first group and I knew the other groups had other people that would go through there. So I didn't really share.
- I think because there's so many in our division, personally for me that haven't attended that I don't want to give them too much of my opinion because then that would deter them from taking in anything. They would have a prejudgment already and I don't want that to happen.
- Yeah, I kind of avoided it like that too.
- I think you got to spend some time really processing over time and not- I don't think you're doing justice to the workshop if you leave and immediately everything just coming back out I think it's just, you got to, got to kind of mull it over and really take in, you know, apply it.

Difficulties Speaking with Colleagues about Racism

- Well, it's not a hard conversation for me to have [conversation about experiences at workshop].
- Because the topic itself is just going to automatically make some people feel defensive and it's going to make some people feel victimized and it's just not an easy topic to discuss.
- Well, I heard a lot before going because of the group that went before us. And it was all primarily negative and very- I heard that it would make you very- feel like you shouldn't be proud to be white or they target you and after I found that if you tended to say anything positive those that had said something negative prior to it didn't want to talk about it anymore.
- It seems like for the people that, I mean I had heard a lot about it too. And I was kind of dreading going and I was relieved that it wasn't that bad. I mean, like it wasn't bad.

Talked with Family Members

- There was a lot of discussion in my own family.

Applications to Work at MDCH

- So I spent part of this morning trying to read about birth certificates and how race is – how the history of how race is reported on the birth certificate which is I think something that came out of our training. ... So that's like a direct result of the training.
- And behind me is {name} who does the birth certificate stuff. And I heard her on the phone exploring that very thing- ... And so she was actually, put that, she had taken another step, I don't know what power she has to do it but that's powerful.
- What I appreciated about the training was that it just made me think about what I can do next. I don't expect to go to any one thing and expect to come out of there knowing the right, the wrong or the indifferent way to proceed. I want it to help me think about what I can do differently.
- And I think that I definitely learned some tools and some information to share with other people but it's not-that's not to me in my mind at least going to make a difference.

Critiques of the Facilitation

- And we talked to three of them for a long time about it and my impression of it and a lot of it was focused on the process too.
- I just didn't feel like the way the facilitation worked was pulling out enough information that could help with some of that divide of feeling attacked or feeling like you know when they said on day one feeling about being all white or racist and you're like, "whoa."
- And I said, for me, I liked it. Because this person had heard that some of the people didn't. And I said, I could- I'm not surprised because white people might have felt attacked. And people of color probably didn't feel attacked.
- There were some parts I thought were really well done and some that I thought maybe weren't facilitated that great.
- But I actually told co-workers that other than being offended what did I walk away from? I had a basic history lesson.
- But I, I did talk about it with one person and it really- it was more about – a little bit about the facilitation, a little bit about, you know, more about the content then more about wishing more strategies had been given as we talked about how are we going to implement this.
- Cause if there were a different presenter, I think, I mean the subject and some of the stuff they said was great but then there was that in your face stuff that just how could you concentrate on the other?
- I think that [the classroom style of facilitation] was a big difference and for me I think that [including more discussion] kind of thing would be really useful.
- That we're really talking too long, preaching to the choir.

- Which is what I think a lot of people had a problem with is that something happened in their session with the facilitator that either caused them to shut down or someone got confronted and made people anxious and felt like they couldn't share.
- They didn't really give us anything to use.
- And when we would ask for it, they would get really worked up about it.

Suggestions for Improving the Workshops

- You left with having an understanding that racism may not be as blatant as it was historically, you know, in our history. But that it is very institutionalized but it came from more of a collective roundtable type of discussion over three days with involving external community stakeholders so anyway, just a thought to have a book to read that- to prepare , and to at least reference and you leave with that. And you know, just kind of the structure of learning.
- I would have liked to have seen was the trainers that were more knowledgeable about what we actually do.
- Because if they really knew what public health did or what our goal is in our programs I think they could have given us some more tools.
- How do I as an individual contribute to that dialog and you know some strategies for dealing with it. ... I thought it was a good two days. But if there was some more talk about strategies and approaches and that kind of stuff it would have been nice as well.
- Not feeling like there were a lot of strategies that were being used other than this knowledge base but taking that –using those strategies to look specifically at how are we going to do this, this and this. ... That was a piece that was missing.
- But similar to what [Name] was saying, I came away from it. You know, really feeling like, you know, now what?
- It really opened my mind to some of the issues, but I think that – I was hoping to take something back to work and be like 'this is what I'm going to do now'.
- how can we show the data differently or how can we organize people to show fact sheets or whatever it is, but how do you really make an impact?
- And that you weren't really effective and they didn't really give us anything. Tell us any ways to be more effective.
- Because we asked for that some tools to take back to our programming. And it was obvious that was-
- Not part of the program.

- It would have been nice to have a couple strategies. Just because it's like 'you sold us' that there's institutionalized racism and we're part of institutions and we feel like it's important so then what are just one or two things we can start the ball rolling?
- But it almost seems like it's good to kind of seize the moment [right after the workshop] and start talking about it while it's fresh in everyone's mind and where the experience had a big impact.

White Privilege

- I felt like it was focusing on institutions to break down as well as being aware that, you know, for white people that they have privilege and that the privilege came out of institutions setting up privileges.

Institutional Dynamics

- Well we talk about all these policies and these institutions but we make up the institutions. And so to get us in that mindset that, you know what, even though you're an individual, you can make some difference in your institution because you're a part of it. Even if it's a small difference. Now, what exactly that difference is I'm not sure yet. But it has planted that seed that you are a part of what does contribute to the problem.
- I mean there was that discussion about programs and the sort of comparison between the women's movement and the civil rights movement. ... And so that to me I think was part of the message, is that if you're part of an institution then you look at how the institution brings its power to- even as a African American who's trying to help other African Americans that sometimes you unknowingly are perpetuating – but you're intending to do a good job but you may be perpetuating the cycle without even knowing it.

3. The Undoing Racism Workshop facilitators encouraged each of you to learn about different ways to think about racism including cultural racism and institutional racism. What do those words mean to you now? And after going to the workshop?

SUMMARY:

The workshop participants had a wide variety of responses to this question. Some responses attempted to provide definitions for both cultural and institutional racism, but it is clear that the respondents had differing background knowledge of the differences between the terminology of institutional and cultural racism. The wide number of personal definitions suggests that participants have not developed a cohesive definition shared by the collective group.

Some participants focused on **government policies and segregation practices** that were highlighted during the Undoing Racism workshops. Other participants spoke of their understandings of **preferential treatment and privilege** that is prevalent in our culture and institutions.

Others spoke of cultural and institutional racism in less defined ways. Some, for instance, emphasized how cultural and institutional factors influence each other and change over time, but did not specify what those factors were. Still others focused on how racism can be unintentional or personal or involve thinking in new ways. While many participants stated that cultural and institutional racism was hard to identify or to define, others said these concepts were already familiar, but neither group provided definitions.

Other group participants spoke of personal responsibility to address racism or new ways they were thinking about addressing racism. Finally, there was a group of participants expressing a variety of ideas that were not related to the other themes.

This variety of responses suggests that the Undoing Racism participants held a variety of understandings of cultural and institutional racism even after they participated in the workshops.

COLLATED RESPONSES:

Government Policies and Segregation Practices

- Institutional racism to me is how we as a government entity treats people that comes to us for services. That's institutional racism to me.
- And they were just segregated into this building, that building based on their dialect, the color of their skin. And a lot of them were stamped a liability to the public institution. That's what was marked on their paperwork if the inspector didn't like the way that they looked, or didn't feel that they would have enough money or just something about their being- the, the inspector just took that upon themselves to just stamp that on their paperwork and a lot of people were just sent back based on the way that they acted or that they looked. And I think a lot of the things we deal with, even today, are- they just go back, that far back. ... It just really brought back a lot of the things that we talked about in the training.

Preferential Treatment & Privilege

- It's the education system, and you know, for me it was eye opening of the whole it's catered toward female, whites and I'm like, "oh." But I'm a female that's white so it probably didn't bother me. You know?
- I think of institutional racism as the, like the powers that structure society to give different races and ethnicities, different access and choices in the world, things like that.
- To me, I view it as a system that's fixed for a target group to always come out on top. And to the extent of what goes on to accomplish that and maintain that status quo is- I came away with a deeper understanding of that but, you know, a fixed system where one group is going to come out on top.
- So when I think of institutional racism I've always kind of thought of things in kind of a historical context but it's more so for me now. You know I try, I think about, I just think about opportunities and how opportunities lead to different things and it's amazing to me how it can lead to you know, affecting your health. I think of it more as a historical context.

Interconnections and Mutual Influence

- And I thought they did a good job of showing that chronologically and just seeing how it [institutional racism] builds on each other to you know, where we're at right now.
- And whereas with an institutions I look at the policies, the norms, the services, the mission. And I see it more as circular. And how it keeps on reproducing itself. And so that's how I distinguish it.
- But when I think about cultural racism in my own mind I think of it as ideas, morals, values that go upward. It may start at a very base level but then a group and somehow it just continues to rise.

Unintentional Racism

- I think one of the aspects of institutional racism that I think was kind of new to me was the idea that we in effect can be a part of that institutional racism because I often would think of like, that's them, you know, who promotes institutional racism but we have all these great programs. And there was a lot of talk at the sessions I went to about how programs can actually be promoting it and made me think about what can we begin to do as people with a particular program to address institutional racism rather than inadvertently promoting it in some way. And that was a really good aspect of it- learning.

Reframing Messages

- Cultural , I think I started going outside the box and thinking about messages , like stereotyping, like maybe what {name} was saying, I think about that a little bit more.

Personal Perceptions

- Cultural racism is to me, how, it's on a more personal level. It's how, when I'm in public how I perceive things and how people perceive me. To me that's cultural. [1c]

Difficult to Identify and Define

- I kind of just think of it as it's so engrained you don't even think about it.
- It's kind of invisible.
- Where I think cultural racism, and again I'm not so sure that we spend as much time, kind of dissecting it but it's not always as easy to define.
- Growing up in Northern Michigan, it's just the way it was. There were I think there were three African American kids. They were on the baseball team with us. And I saw them get picked on and teased but I never was in a moment where I got treatment over them so I'm sitting there thinking , "Wow, I-" and it just is what it is. It wasn't there in my face to say the education system blatantly favored it so I'm feeling bad, like, "Wow." There's got to be stuff, I know it's out there but I just couldn't- and so right now I can't think of an exact example of being left out of social security or the black and white drinking fountain. So I think it's there, but I also think it's more invisible.
- Cultural is still harder for me, institutional I think I have a more of a sense but not necessarily a specific to what they said.
- I felt like we focused so much on the institutions and the systems, the governments, and the medicals and the education and all these different pieces that I honestly couldn't tell you cultural racism.
- I guess I don't. That's the problem.
- But still they had so many issues in that area and to hear that they were able to get community people involved in that area just spoke volumes. So I was very interested to hear, I just couldn't, I could never figure out from the training what our community was, you know?
- And I don't know if it's necessarily- I'm not sure that I'm on board with it being racism as much as it is targeting areas that could be impoverished and might have populations that are not having those services in the same ways. But it was something that was questioned, brought up. And something I've been thinking about so.

Familiar Concepts

- I just, I don't think that those were- that was terminology that I was either experiencing or reading about so those [definition of cultural racism] weren't new realities for me.

- Yeah, I just felt that maybe I came away with a deeper understanding of what institutional racism means and you know, just how far it could go, you know, kind of thing. But I don't, I don't think it was anything too different.
- For me, that one [cultural racism] was more familiar. [inaudible] it was easier for me to grasp, to apply that specifically to my life, my work. It wasn't so much an eye opener, like a 'whoa', that the other institution- the institution, I was definitely more affected by that.

Personal Responsibility to Address Institutional Racism

- Institutional racism I'm at a loss because at what point do you get to where, you know, your hands are tied? And that part I struggled with.
- How the system is just set up to maybe where we feel that we don't have input, because this policy is here, that policy is there. I just see it more so being so much more complicated in terms of making an impact.
- I understood what they meant about institutional racism, I get that, but I didn't understand within my job and what I do already how I could go that step farther, to some, you know what I mean? To make something else, different.
- I didn't really view my role in trying to help people as one that would also be contributing to the institutional racism.
- And I thought, "man, do we ever go into our clinics and I review all of these records and these audits that we do, and do we ever go into the clinic and say 'what will be helpful?'"

Need New Ways to Address Racism

- A lot of the data we report is black, white and other. ...And you know it's really easy to say, "oh, it's just because the population size is so small so we can't have reliable rates." But we don't, I don't think put in enough effort to either you know, combine multiple years of data.
- Sometimes we get these poorly written RFPs and some community agencies don't stand a chance because they're just not savvy enough to write RFPs in a way that would make them acceptable to us.
- We just did that [provided technical assistance] and it made a huge difference. With a group that we knew was doing wonderful stuff. And they needed just that little bit of help to communicate it.
- That's what I came away with from too was how the grassroots could be involved in taking a policy and examining it or re-evaluating it and making it useful to, you know, situation where they lived or a culture.
- And they talked about bringing people from that community that you're going to serve into your meetings and your planning issues.... So I took that out of it, that's for sure.

- We have a lot of opportunities to start passing off some of the tools as we use and deal with the institution as we're trying to help people.
- But that would make a much better change if we were more proactive and we don't like to look at who we fund a little bit differently.

Other Statements

- We have a similar thing with an advisory committee with families involved with FASD (?) and one of the questions that some of the co-chairs and elders, if you will, in that group said, was that "has anybody taken a policy and looked at how it effects us?" And so one of the things in our training that was said was that many times to quote 'fix a problem', while it's like ok we'll do this from the top down as opposed to involving the group that would be effected. And how, just like {name} explained that policy could be re-examined or re-evaluated and then incorporate some of the cultural needs of that particular group whatever it might be. And so, I thought that was cool.
- I think of an example that someone gave before, you know, working at a clinic and how they expected that everyone come in person to make an appointment. I think about how the institution thought that that was ok. And how they don't realize that, maybe realize that in trying to service some of their customers that's not ok. But we go through life everyday, go to work and it's ok because that's what we said.
- the discussion of the communities that we work at or work with and looking at needs assessments and identifying by certain demographics the areas that we do our work in and it was kind of framed in a way it that was like, well, that's institutionalized racism.
- Yeah, some things are so minor. I mean just find a male nurse. It wouldn't take much but you have to take the time to look.

4. What are some examples of policies and practices at your work setting that you think might be related to this idea of cultural or institutional racism?

SUMMARY:

The focus group participants spoke of various examples of policies and practices, but they also spoke of other factors that seemed important for understanding the **roots of cultural and institutional racism**. For instance, many spoke about broader political barriers such as having access to political influence and power. Others talked about capacity barriers that many minority-serving organizations have in their efforts to secure funding and implement programs. One person also spoke about how surveys (typically conducted in English) may represent a language barrier for effective surveillance of health disparities. This quote illustrates one participant's frustrations:

"I worked in adolescent health and the goal was to reduce infant mortality. And the top ten is still the top ten and you can't- and if I get a little emotional it's because I just don't get it. We know, and yet somehow we haven't- I mean it goes down but the it will go back up. We haven't consistently impacted it."

The most prevalent practice cited was the ineffective support and technical assistance provided to community-based organizations (CBOs) serving minority groups. These statements concur that many community-based organizations **s need more support and technical assistance** in order to write good grant proposals and to implement state-funded programs effectively. This quote is an example:

"There are small organizations that are, we talk about this in terms of teen pregnancy, it's like there are small organizations out there that really have an in with the highest risk referrals, you know, are they even going to have a fair chance to compete for this RFP that we're going to reissue? When you're competing against people that have, you know, a grant writer who know how to do logic models, who know how to speak the language of grants. And so that's definitely an issue with the RFP that's kind of an inherent inequity."

Another set of practices that was cited as related to cultural and institutional racism were the **methods used for surveillance** of health inequities and racial disparities. Finally, several respondents talked about the need for more effective programs and policies that directly addressed race disparities. This participant suggests the current programs may hold minority groups back:

"You wonder, are we continually perpetuating people to stay in need so they can get our programs? "

Some respondents (perhaps in response to other comments) suggested that there have been broad cultural changes that have improved opportunities for African Americans. As one participant noted, this cultural change could be symbolized by the recent election of President Obama.

COLLATED RESPONSE:

Political Barriers

- And you know what I'm just going to put it out there I think it's political. I think it has a lot to do with the politics around health. Because they have a lobby that impacted change, but when you look at poor people, when you look at people who are – have other kinds of issues and they don't have the lobby. They don't have the voice.
- We know and we talk among ourselves about huge awful disparity in infant mortality, we see it in infant mortality, we see it all the chronic diseases. But yet we say that, but when you look at our plans to address the issue it never--never is a strong word-- rarely show that that is a major problem in any of the distribution of funds or effort or focus. The focus is always political one. Evenly across the state knowing that you've got these canyons of problems.
- And we know where a lot of the canyons [of problems] are but- and what an impact it could make if we could go to the canyon [of problems]. But there's usually different reasons why we can't. ... I don't think people [in policy] know about [the problems]. But maybe I'm wrong. But I mean, it is so shocking, it's shocking.

Capacity Barriers for Community-based Organizations

- Well, I mean those of us who have worked here for a long time, we have a hard time interpreting some of these requirements in public health and we're supposedly the educated and we don't have that ability to understand this, and so the other organizations don't even have the educational level to be able to begin to compete.
- There are small organizations that are, we talk about this in terms of teen pregnancy, it's like there are small organizations out there that really have an in with the highest risk referrals, you know, are they even going to have a fair chance to compete for this RFP that we're going to reissue? When you're competing against people that have, you know, a grant writer who know how to do logic models, who know how to speak the language of grants. And so that's definitely an issue with the RFP that's kind of an inherent inequity.
- We also have an administrative cap, so it's the larger organizations that can absorb that – absorb some of the cost of administering the program and I think right now a lot of our community based organizations are really struggling.

Language & Cultural Barriers

- I think that some of the questions that are used on the surveys like the BRFSS don't really adequately speak to other cultures and races.

Need for More Effective Support and Technical Assistance

- I mean, I'm not sure exactly how it will work but I think if we plan far enough in advance. To set aside some money for TA, or to say this is going to be a lot of work but we're committed to doing this next year. I think we could do it.
- But I think if you have that support and focus that time and energy with them it makes a really big difference, and building trust, like you said. Not being the State person coming out and saying you need to do this, this and this but they can come to you and you can have that dialog and be flexible. I think that makes a huge difference.
- So we as a State have money to fund communities. And we tell the communities what to do and how to do it. As opposed to working with very involved community members, community organizers I think they call them? Is that the term? And really working through them more closely. ...And how do we as State workers that have to blanket the state with different initiatives make sure that we are really engaging the community and involve community members.
- ... like they were saying that really empowering communities and getting that community leadership from the ground up takes time and that we maybe have, you know, like generally we get pots of money for three years, for five years or some finite period of time.
- You know, it's like grants to, to run programs, to see this many kids, to do this work. It's not to build leadership and empower- help the community, you know, and work on empowerment and things like that.
- It's just giving them [clients] what they need- so they can't understand the process, why A gets them to B and B gets them to C. We just go A, and yeah, we'll take this.
- I think it built that relationship of 'I value what you are saying.' I'm not going to be this state person saying it must be this survey that we're a team and so it opens up, it kind of opens up the door to being able to do new and creative things because you've built in that relationship. So we did that at this time and we're trying the instrument with revised questions and if we have to revise it again next year then- to me it's like we'll just have to keep on revising it until it's doable.

Need for More Effective Surveillance

- And we have to look at the ways of collecting this data too. You know? Because not everybody has a computer, right?
- When I hear several people mention, "no we don't always collect that data." I'm like, "Really? We don't collect- Really? Are you kidding me?" We're the State Health Department, what do you mean we don't collect it and we don't have a plan to do something about it. ...I'm surprised, I'm surprised that a State department hasn't done this.
- And so that's what I mean. I'm happy I think we need to get on the message, everybody – we have something to say, okay we got this, now let's keep building on to it. But then as I look at it and hear about it I'm like, "Really? We had to put that on paper?" In one sentence to say look at the disparity. Actually track it, report it, we're not doing that?

Need for More Effective Programs & Policies

- And we were, we were struggling with how to take, you know, the requirements of the feds agency that we have to do and yet we know X,Y,Z works but that's not what the money's for and so how to mesh those two worlds.
- Yeah, we provide them care and are successful in doing but we're not- unless we're going outside, above what we're being asked to do we're not doing anything to help them stand on their own.
- You wonder are we continually perpetuating people to stay in need so they can get our programs?
- And just the mindset in even coming for the help is, and the handout is- we're done. Until the next problem arises. We have all of these policies set up, and you know you have to look at all of your programs and make sure that you're getting all these different communities and your given all of these public awareness responsibilities and different guidelines and you know you're, you don't have any different income guidelines and you know don't have anybody [inaudible], you're still missing all these families that could be potentially eligible. I don't know, just, you know, where- where's that- what would it take to get us where we need to be? It's not just policy it's kind of a, I kind of want to say lack of a policy but also lack of awareness [inaudible].

Cultural Changes

- I think that blacks have more opportunities than they used to have. I think our work with disparities has, you know, institutionalized, has improved some of the white people's acceptance of different cultures.
- Well, look at our president. I mean it never was even discussed we have a president that is black.
- Now, that [having a black president] was addressed in ours though and I think it was suggested as an example of how there have been some progress, but when you look at the disparities, and the disparities are so great there's still a lot more to do.

5. What are some ways that policies and practices in your work setting could be changed to reduce cultural and institutional racism. So what is it you imagine could feasibly happen here in your work setting?

SUMMARY:

The participants were most likely to imagine engaging community members and community-based organizations in discussions about effective policies and practices as a way to reduce cultural and institutional racism. The methods of **engaging the community** in these discussions varied from greater communications (e.g., distributing newsletters) to supporting more involved partnership efforts. Many suggested that communications and partnerships with local community agencies and citizens would increase the possibility that state-run programs and policies would more effectively improve the health in local communities with improve health outcomes for minority race groups.

Other participants suggested that MDCH staff conduct studies to learn more about the root causes of health disparities and strategies to reduce disparities. As one participant noted:

“To me that will be one of our first steps is to at least look at the problem and know what the problem is, isn’t that the way to solve a problem? Is to first recognize it? And make sure you understand what it is. And to be able- and to continuously measure if you’re making a change.”

Several people stated that MDCH needed to establish continuous and **sustainable efforts** to address racial health disparities. They suggested commitments to “keep checking ourselves...keep checking each other” and “keep looking at how we do things.” One participant suggested that MDCH “address all the cultural differences” in their programs.

The last strategy participants imagined was to be more creative in the use of State funding. Establishing policies and programs that used **flexible funding strategies** would allow MDCH staff to more effectively support local communities address their local health needs.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS:

Engage Community Members and Agencies

- Honestly I don’t know what’s happened with that because you don’t see the newsletters like we used to. I’m not seeing the communication that there once was.
- I agree with that [creative use of funds] and I think we need to spend more time in communities. We never ask communities or we rarely do, what they really need.
- Which says to me we’re trying to get their input on our terms.
- Because one of the things that struck me also from the workshop was that community organizing piece. That was a piece to really think about, try to figure out how to incorporate.
- I don’t know that we know how to get their input on their terms.

- I don't think we've ever done this but I wonder if somehow we could form some kind of partnership with some organizations in the community that we could nurture. ... One thing we never tried is maybe trying to form a partnership with them to advocate for them to get other funding from their local community. For example, getting together with the United Way office or a local foundation in their community and supporting them by even helping them to write a grant or meeting with those other funders and be an advocate for them.
- And from my point of view, honestly I still struggle with that because I don't- I guess I my vision of policy comes from here down. It doesn't come from down here and go over. ... And how do we incorporate all of that together so that we're all working together? And we're all getting on the same page?
- Well they are trying to do more coalitions, get into the communities but your average Joe doesn't want to.
- It [policy/programs] needs to come from the ground and go up.
- So one of the things that we're looking at is going into the communities and saying can we fund people [inaudible] in order to get more involved and there's more awareness in general than you have with a specific population.
- And have a pulse on the community, I don't know how but someone, maybe not each individual but that someone has a pulse on the community that we can have some communication.

Study the Problems and Strategies

- We need to look at other states who are doing – I mean, we just can't operate in a silo because it's not just Michigan. We're talking about a country, we're talking about group of people being so sick and having a whole set of health issues when – little things can happen just to turn, start turning the tables.
- To me that will be one of our first steps is to at least look at the problem and know what the problem is, isn't that the way to solve a problem? Is to first recognize it? And make sure you understand what it is. And to be able- and to continuously measure if you're making a change.
- It doesn't matter what the policy is but they're looking at the impact on health and I kind of like that concept that- we need to look at everything in terms of how it [policy] impacts health and I wish we could figure out how we could foster that more
- And we have to address all of the cultural differences with those programs as well.

Continuous Effort to Address Disparities

- We got to keep checking ourselves and we've got to keep checking each other. And just trying to see what we can do, how we can do it differently.

- Now we have money to try and address it. It's got to become a way of life for us. It's got to be interwoven in everything that we do and we can't just talk about it today or through June and that be it. We have to talking about it, we have to keep looking at how we do things and we have got to keep checking on ourselves.
- I think that it's important that we continue to talk about this and we don't let it die once the money dries up.

Flexible Funding Strategies

- I think we could try to be more creative about our use of the State funding that we have because we have more restriction on federal dollars and how they must be spent, they're so precise, but- and our program does have some state resources that maybe we could try to leverage more to use in capacity building in a way that we can't always use our federal dollars. So creative use of funds.
- I think if we had creative pots of money, if we really truly had pots of money for communities that could be pulled and we could go in there and really talk and figure out what it is that you need that this community [inaudible] may not have.
- I really feel that we do our best with the strengths that we have. But it's like if we had more fluid pots of money and we really could have that flexibility to tailor that money to what the needs of that community might be than I think that would go a lot farther than how we do things.