Adapting Prevention Efforts to Counter White Supremacy Culture to Increase Community Engagement

(Source: White supremacy culture, Tema Okun, [www.dismantlingracism.org](http://www.dismantlingracism.org))

In the table below, we listed the characteristics of white dominant culture identified in Okun’s document on white supremacy culture. In small groups, the participants in the community engagement track identified how this characteristic shows up in their work, and then considered how they could address the obstacle to increase authentic community engagement. The work of the participants is included below.

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| **Characteristic/ Category** | **Obstacle:** *This is how the characteristic appears in my office and in my work and serves as barrier to engagement* | **Antidote**: How I can apply an antidote to my prevention work to help support community engagement |
| Example: Only one right way | Our prevention coalition meetings have to be held the way they’ve always been held, for example facilitated in the same way, and held at the same time/same place as they always have | Identify alternative locations and times for coalition meetings based on conversations with people from the community who do not attend;  Identify other community members who can facilitate the meetings, based on conversations with people in our community;  Identify how we can compensate for others to facilitate our meetings. |
| Perfectionism | Meetings to determine the most \*perfect\* way to do our work - we spend a lot of time working on the small things, and not as focused on the large structural issues  For someone’s work who is not up to par not being directly talked to - not enough open and reflective discussion and vision  Feeling like you have to be perfect while in recovery | Not getting too focused on the small things, but looking and addressing more of the structural and systematic issues  Creating an environment where mistakes are expected; Separating the person from the mistake (we’re all human here) and being able to come in and assist when needed - all hands-on deck response to mistakes |
| Sense of urgency | once everything falls into place, it’s very fast-paced and urgent.  putting bandaids on things instead of looking at long-term outcomes, because it needs to be fixed immediately.  Don’t have time to have bigger picture conversations about equity  Funders crunch everything into a very limited time, fast cycle. Not doing justice to each cohort of Life Skills students. Hard to find time to reinforce skills with older cohorts | Develop a more realistic workplan and timeline by someone that understands how long the work actually takes  Develop short-term goals throughout to make sure we are being inclusive  Asking for feedback from participants who are in the programs to see what’s going well and what needs to change, so funder could be swayed from their timeline  Allowing for time in the workplan from the start for including feedback from everyone, |
| Defensiveness | It doesn’t allow for mistakes  Not open to help or criticism. People are reluctant to offer help because they perceive you as defensive  Sometimes you feel shame when you make a mistake, which makes you want to defend yourself  Makes it difficult to raise new ideas, or recognize mistakes.  “There’s no problem in my house”.  Nothing changes. There is difficulty in challenging ideas without feeling like you are hurting someone's feelings. Oppressive culture.  People not believing evaluations (YRBS, PNAS) are inaccurate: “why would they tell the truth”. | Practice talking about mistakes more openly and hearing criticisms helped  Constructive criticism-- make it a safe place for someone to express criticism and for someone to receive criticism without getting defensive  We learn from mistakes  Provide encouragement, which will help them take criticism to heart. Make it clear that the objective is to help.  Comment on stuff that is right, not just wrong  Ground Rules-Step up step back, respect new ideas, etc.  Go to people where they are, to have people feel safe. Demanding attendance at our table creates defensiveness, meet people where they are at-in their natural environment.  Start with curiosity and empathy. Ask questions. |
| Quantity over quality | The value of relationships is diminished, because it is harder to measure.  There has to be a product.  Not having enough time to develop relationships.  People feel that you are trying to get something from them when product and quantity is the goal. | Encourage and highlight storytelling.  Give those with lived experiences an opportunity to be heard.  Equate the value of qualitative (anecdotes, stories, relationships) with quantitative data. |
| Worship of the written word | Receiving instructions by word of mouth and then getting wrist slapped when they are misunderstood.  Need to always have everything written down and documented, rather than talking on the phone with colleagues | Sharing information in multilingual so folk understand what is happening  Reaching out by phone, or other means, to follow-up on email discussions or other documents. |
| Only one right way | Grant funded - grant expectations of data and strategies.  Coming from different types of organizations and having expectations of how an organization should function.  Sometimes the organization can be resistant to alternative ways of doing things. | Creating a culture of open mindedness from the start.  Welcoming people with different life experiences, breaking stigma/no shame over different work styles.  Be clear that you have learning to do about other people’s experiences.  Providers don’t have all the answers, understanding the needs of community members, and ensuring their voices are heard is important. |
| Paternalism | Bringing people in to be involved for show, but not in an empowered way  Grant funding being dictated by what the funder thinks is needed, and not what the community says that they need  Not enough people or civic groups to be surveyed and have a voice in community decisions | Actually making connections with community members and having them be empowered and able to make the structural and systematic changes necessary  Accessibility around surveying and community input groups (language, materials, visualizations, etc);  Providing compensation for their time;  Using survey data to actually address community issues  Discussing survey results with community members, to allow them to provide feedback, to help understand how their perceptions can be better integrated in a response to data. |
| Either/Or thinking | Binary thinking with our own expertise. School teachers might say this is the real truth and police officers may say that something else is the reality...and how do we come to come together with consensus in our coalitions. | Example of legal/commercial marijuana: what are their potential Pros and Cons? Can two realities exist at the same time? How does this shape how we put into action our prevention strategies?  Look at how opioid harm reduction has grown to be accepted in prevention of opioid overdose vs earlier when medication assisted treatment was only looked as perpetuating the problem of addiction. |
| Power hoarding | Political systems in place for power hoarding. We value expertise vs those with lived experience. How do we value this more in our work.  Also, balance of power between Police and Drug user; Superintendent and Student. | Who is at the table and who do we listen to with more credibility? *(see bullet 5: those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at the hear and assume those wanting change are ill infomed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced)* How does the coordinator facilitate the discussion and how can we act on these various perspectives? |
| Fear of open conflict | Fear of their reaction to what you’re saying. Plays into defensiveness because you are fearing conflict that it might have caused  People are not open to other people, more closed off  People can take conflict more personally more often than they should. Not meant to be an attack, differences are normal.  Fear of “rocking the boat”  We’re kind to the point of not being able to do strong collaborative work | Communication, setting a tone that discussion is valued and welcome, all viewpoints are respected  Creating that safe space, express yourself without feeling like someone may attack you  Build up trust  Create group agreements  Accept that sometimes we just need to have a difficult conversation  Give people real, honest feedback as a supervisor to give them the best shot at success and growth- separate a criticism of the work from a criticism for the person, holding the person in a lot of esteem and respect while talking about the thing that was hard  Ensure supervisors are also able to hear feedback from their team members – two-way communication  Try to find times that both sides are ready and open to have a genuine conversation  Remember that getting hard feedback means that someone trusts you enough to say it |
| Individualism | Can feel like “I’ll get it done because it will get done the right way.”  “Top down leadership roles” …deciding what direction the organization is going. Inability to have a voice if not the top of the pyramid.  Really wanting the credit/ feeling like you want to be recognized or be in charge but also wanting to work with other people to ideally produce a better product with less stress.  Draining experience.  Do those of us not in leadership roles have a voice? “Frontline workers” get directives and realize it doesn’t really make any sense.  Prevention efforts focused on individuals. | Growing mindset to recognize that teamwork is more valuable than any personal credit you would achieve without your team.  Putting practices into place where when decisions are made, the voices of other people throughout the organization are included.  Giving people more time to do project so they can take time to do the project effectively as a team (to work through the “I can do it better/quicker myself” mentality)  Social/ecological model- prevention efforts need a broader focus to family and broader community focus. |
| I’m the only one | You’re not willing to share because you think you’re the only one  You feel like you can never take a break, no room for self care  Don’t trust in others  You think you are the only one with answers/solutions, not open to other points of view  Not ready for other contributions | Practice inclusion  Foster an environment that self-care and self-compassion are valued, it's ok to rely on others  Communication-- how else will I know I’m not the only one if people don’t speak out about their experience?  Training on how to improve  Be willing to listen to others going through the same thing-- absorb and take it in, while also then contributing your views |
| Progress is bigger, more | To get funding, need to demonstrate that you have the need, the numbers in the population: E.g., Casa Latina in Hampshire County couldn’t compete successful to get funding because there are not enough Latinos to be served compared to Springfield or Boston.  Coalitions report that they filled the gymnasium last night for the Heron talk. It is affirming because it feels “successful” but instead of looking at how many people came, did the right people come?  Now funders (BSAS, SAMHSA) are rethinking how success is measured. Funder is saying that we don’t want big numbers in reporting that are untraceable.  Also, our prevention model looks at policy and global, community-wide prevention as having greater and lasting impact, vs working closely with a group of 8 students intensely. Broad prevention work might include, community-wide social norms campaigns or set a policy. Thinking that these have more “Bang for Buck”. (this intersects with “either/or thinking” and “urgency” and maybe “power hoarding”) | 1. Funders needs to shift how they fund and how they measure success 2. Transmit that message to those in the field and know that they have received the message 3. Prevention models need to be explored--prevention science 4. Can think in terms of doing BOTH intensive work with youth and also do policy work and broad community strategies.   **Chris Bijoux shared this resource:** Pathways for Freedom” which is successful in the African American community for tobacco cessation. Programs created by Bob Robinson CDC Cessation. [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit\_smoking/how\_to\_quit/pathways/pdfs/pathways.pdf](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/pathways/pdfs/pathways.pdf__;!!Azzr!KgDCt_N8xMEP8sT9LAaqqlb-prCvNsa5Fe9gaQgKV2DO3YX3s6QIAv-b9EE$)  Defining what we mean by “upstream” prevention |
| Objectivity | Places importance on linear logic- ”if this then that.”  Discredits emotional responses.  Emotion and passion=hysterical. | Creating space for ideas that seem illogical, and give people an opportunity to talk about these ideas. Make it YOUR goal to understand someone's ideas and points.  Create safe spaces for people to speak and be heard-to share their own truth in an authentic way.  Work with the strengths of logic AND passion. |
| Right to comfort | Sense that we shouldn’t be criticized, at least in front of people, hesitance to be honest in peer reviews | Remind ourselves that other people are uncomfortable all the time.  Remind ourselves “this is why they call it work, it’s not meant to be easy” (job and racial justice work),  create anonymous mechanisms for feedback (but this feeds into the fear of open conflict),  remind ourselves that growth can require discomfort, allow the discomfort, sit with it so that the growth can happen in its time.  Really hear people, and lift them up because they’re being knocked down.  Remind ourselves that In trying to strive for perfection we’re being unrealistic.  Make space for people to share their stories and build strong relationships so that they’re going to share with you. |