

Better Together

Research Findings on the Relationship between
Racial Justice Organizations and LGBT Communities

September 2010

Report



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APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER

Racial Justice Through Media, Research and Action

Funded by
arcus
FOUNDATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the Arcus Foundation, the Applied Research Center (ARC) has undertaken a study of the relationship between racial justice organizations and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) constituencies and issues, with the understanding that communities of color themselves, including their LGBT members, have a good deal at stake in strengthening that relationship. The inquiry included a survey of 81 organizations of color and interviews with 32 leaders of racial justice and LGBT organizations.

The study was motivated by three aspects of the national political landscape.

First, racial justice groups and LGBT constituencies would seem to be naturally connected. Significant numbers of LGBT people are of color, thereby comprising an important part of the racial justice constituency. Second, despite these empirical connections, the political and popular linkages are not widely known or acted upon. Such distance reinforces widespread assumptions, noted by activists interviewed for this study, that LGBT identity and politics are for white people and that communities of color, housing few if any LGBT people themselves, are disproportionately homophobic. Third, LGBT people of color are harmed by the perceived split between communities of color and LGBT communities. Dozens of young, local organizations serving LGBT people of color do exist, but they are virtually invisible, poorly supported and often too busy providing critical health and human services to engage deeply in education and organizing for policy change. Likewise, inspiring relationships between racial justice groups and LGBT constituencies also exist but are so little known that their models see too few replications.

In this study, ARC set out to answer four questions:

- How do racial justice groups currently engage LGBT constituencies and equity issues?
- What are the barriers to strong engagement of racial justice groups in LGBT issues?
- Where are the opportunities for greater engagement?
- What changes can funders and people working in the fields of racial justice and LGBT rights pursue?

Study Components

We answered these questions through two means. First, we surveyed 81 organizations, including 41 self-identified racial justice groups and 40 LGBT groups explicitly focused on people of color. We followed up the survey by interviewing 32 LGBT activists who are working to strengthen the connection.

Key Findings

In national, state and local racial justice organizations, important work is already underway that engages LGBT people and issues. The best work emerges from strategic political analysis. Most projects start with internal discussion and political education, and develop through issue campaigns to change policies and institutional practices. Some of this engagement is quite mature. Furthermore, there is significant interest among racial justice organizations in integrating LGBT issues, but they cannot learn from others' experiences because these stories receive relatively little attention from the media and other institutions.

We found large numbers of local organizations working directly with LGBT people of color whose influence could grow with proper investment. Some racial justice organizations made explicit decisions to work on LGBT issues (even at the cost of religious funding), and there was a general openness to exploring how LGBT people

experience traditional racial justice issues such as police violence and workplace discrimination. These are some of the things that funders and activists can focus on in order to strengthen the constituencies for both racial justice and LGBT rights.

A number of barriers to effective engagement also emerged. First, study participants, particularly interviewees, noted a lack of strategic clarity—and tools for getting to such clarity—that would help groups identify and act on the many opportunities for applying a sexuality lens to racial justice issues and vice versa. Second, community resistance, either real or perceived, was mentioned with a great deal of nuance. These concerns included the role of religious institutions, the seeming lack of demand from communities of color themselves, and the fear of causing division within racial justice memberships. Although this study did not primarily address the role of mainstream LGBT organizations in reinforcing the community’s supposed whiteness, it did arise enough that we included some thoughts from interviewees on this question. Finally, funding constraints arose as the most significant barrier for groups that do wish to engage.

None of these obstacles is insurmountable, and there are compelling reasons to address them explicitly over the long term. When racial justice groups, including those focused on LGBT people, take on the intersection of race and sexuality, they can build enduring political power to make the policy and practice changes that improve communities nationwide.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase support for groups of color

Funders should increase their support of LGBT organizations of color, as well as of collaborations between LGBT and racial justice groups.

- A. Fund and support LGBT organizations of color.
 1. Provide general support grants.
 2. Provide capacity-building grants.
 3. Raise the visibility of LGBT organizations of color in philanthropic and media venues.

- B. Fund established and emerging collaborations between racial justice and LGBT groups.
 1. Fund convenings, explorations and full-out collaborations.
 2. Bolster the evaluation and learning systems in the organizations that sponsor these projects to provide lessons for the field as a whole.
 3. Fill the gap for racial justice organizations that refuse funding from anti-LGBT religious institutions.

Recommendation 2: Invest in tools for strategic clarity

Changing national policies like the Employment Non-Discrimination Act; Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell; or state policies around same-sex marriage is important. But these are not the only important issues, particularly for LGBT people of color, and there are compelling reasons to expand the list of issues and to strategize around the specific experiences of LGBT people of color regarding employment discrimination, military policies and marriage laws.

- A. Support the generation of data that specifically address the needs of LGBT people of color.
- B. Support partnerships between research intermediaries and community-based organizations.

Recommendation 3: Lift up LGBT leaders of color

Clearly, the presence of LGBT leaders of color is critical to bringing these various constituencies, issues and movements together for authentic engagement. A full national needs assessment of these leaders would help the field craft interventions that ensure good succession systems, avoid burning out leaders of color and, ultimately, change the impression that LGBT means white.

- A. Support leadership development programs for LGBT leaders of color working in all kinds of organizations. Funders and field organizations might consider creating a fellowship for such leaders and supporting media projects that elevate the profile of these leaders.
- B. Assess the needs of LGBT leaders of color throughout social justice arenas.
 - How do these leaders get support in skill development?
 - How do they decide to come out professionally, and what form does that coming out take?
 - Who mentors emerging LGBT leaders? How can mentorship systems be strengthened?
 - What are the media skills of LGBT leaders of color in particular, and how can their media presence be strengthened?

Recommendation 4: Build the media and communications infrastructure

Foundations can support increased media visibility of LGBT people of color and the intersection of race and LGBT issues.

- A. Publicize the experiences and work of LGBT people of color within the philanthropic press and other venues such as conferences and briefings.
- B. Build media and communications skills into initiatives that develop the leadership capacity of LGBT leaders of color.
- C. Use their own communications capacity to bolster that of LGBT organizations of color or racial justice groups that address LGBT issues.

INTRODUCTION

This study was motivated by three aspects of the national political landscape.

First, racial justice groups and LGBT constituencies would seem to be naturally connected. For example, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, affects African-American women disproportionately; therefore, racial justice organizations that represent African Americans should therefore take an interest in fighting the policy. In another example, anecdotal evidence suggests that young transgender people of color are particularly vulnerable to random stops and police violence. The National Black Justice Coalition reports that transgender African Americans are also disproportionately victims of hate crimes; about 70 percent of transgender victims are African American. These data suggest that both racial justice and LGBT groups would find new constituents if their strategies accounted for LGBT inclusion in framing traditional racial justice issues.

Second, despite these empirical connections, the political and popular intersections between racial justice and LGBT rights are not widely known or acted upon. Conservatives opposed to LGBT rights have engaged in campaigns to drive a wedge between communities of color and LGBT people. As noted by activists interviewed for this study, that wedge reinforces widespread assumptions, noted by activists interviewed for this study, that LGBT identity and politics are for white people, and that communities of color, housing few if any LGBT people themselves, are disproportionately homophobic. This wedge was used to great effect by conservatives during the 2008 Proposition 8 campaign in California, and it was then bolstered by LGBT reaction to inaccurate post-election data that suggested Black voters were to blame for the passage of Proposition 8. Through popular culture and the preponderance of white LGBT political spokespeople, these false assumptions have been furthered.

Third, LGBT people of color are harmed by the perceived split between communities of color and LGBT communities. If LGBT people of color are not well represented by the mainstream LGBT movement, neither are their interests well defended by the current racial justice movement. Dozens of young, local organizations serving LGBT people do exist, but they are virtually invisible, poorly supported and often too busy providing critical health and human services to engage deeply in education and organizing for policy change. Likewise, inspiring relationships between racial justice groups and LGBT constituencies also exist, but are so little known that their models see too few replications.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a combination of online surveys and telephone or in-person interviews with people of color who were identified as leaders of racial justice or LGBT organizations.

In January and February 2010, ARC distributed its online survey to relevant advocates in its extensive network of racial justice organizations and beyond. Eighty-one individuals completed the 20 questions on the questionnaire, which ranged from organizational demographics to specifics on levels and sources of engagement on LGBT issues and barriers to engagement. Forty-one of those responses were from generalist or anti-poverty racial justice organizations. The rest were from LGBT organizations of color. The typical respondent worked in an organization comprised of one or two races (as opposed to multiracial organizations) based on the west or northeast coast. While underrepresented in our sample, there were 10 groups from the Midwest and 17 groups from the South.

In late March and April, ARC used referrals from our online surveys and solicited names from ARC staff and allies to compile a list of prospective interviewees for the second part of this research project. ARC staff conducted 32 45-70 minute telephone and in-person interviews in May and June. Interview subjects were divided into two groups: those representing racial justice organizations and people of color representing organizations with an explicit LGBT focus. The interviews consisted of 15 questions divided into four sections: Organizational Structure, Cross-Issue Engagement, Closing the Gap, and Funding and Support. Interviewee responses were analyzed to confirm, complement, supplement or contradict/challenge findings from the online survey.

FINDINGS

Current work on LGBT issues by racial justice groups

Overview and national campaigns

Racial justice organizations across the country are engaging in the LGBT equality agenda from a variety of angles. Most of this work takes place at the local or state level, and has received little national attention from media or funders. Study participants have identified a number of elements that gird successful work, which will be named below. Many projects involving communities of color in LGBT issues would be replicable, given appropriate tools for sharing best practices and adequate resources for starting and sustaining projects. The work is most enduring and successful when it is motivated by a strategic imperative that goes beyond a moral argument. Most of these efforts started without funding, but it is unclear whether or not they can continue in the

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same vein. With substantive funding and other resources, the landscape of race and sexuality could be changed profoundly and permanently.

The forms of engagement cover a range of activities. First, there are clearly a great number of LGBT people of color working in the field of racial justice, whether generally or in LGBT organizations of color that address poverty and race as well as LGBT issues. Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents and nearly all of the interviewees represented organizations with LGBT people on the staff and board. Most of these organizations also have inclusive personnel and other organizational policies. A similar number of organizations had taken positions on key conflicts, such as ballot measures to ban gay teachers, adoption or marriage. Of the 64 groups that said they addressed LGBT issues, 45 did so explicitly and actively, and 19 did so implicitly (i.e., including LGBT issues in general analysis but not through program work). Only nine did not address LGBT issues at all. Forty-one respondents had been asked to take a specific political stance on LGBT issues; 30 had not.

Engaging in ongoing community education, participatory research, local issue campaigns and long-term political collaborations with LGBT

groups (both white and of color) requires more deliberation and greater investment of resources. Although fewer organizations take up these deeper forms of work, those that do generate enormous benefits.

Under pressure to diversify, mainstream LGBT organizations are also beginning to take small but deliberate steps to engage LGBT people of color. In general, outreach efforts such as these tend to focus on individual LGBT people or on anti-bias work rather than on building sustained relationships with established racial justice organizations or addressing structural barriers to inclusive and collaborative work. One national organization has a project focused on historically black colleges and universities. A family support group has started educating and advocating for families of LGBT people of color. The group offers workshops for parents, school personnel, students, social workers and psychologists who work with youth and families.

Some mainstream LGBT organizations take up projects with greater policy focus. For example, the research arm of one national LGBT organization has generated research and resources addressing the particular experiences and policy concerns of LGBT people of color and low-income LGBT people. In January 2009, they released an analysis of the California Proposition 8 vote that debunked myths about the African-American vote on marriage equality. They've also published research to support immigration reform, recognizing that these issues overlap.

In several instances, interviewees at racial justice organizations said that their initial forays into LGBT organizing work came from requests by staff or members to address LGBT issues explicitly, and the organization's willingness to respond has helped grow their program as a whole. Many of the groups surveyed had both LGBT staff and leaders who raised the need for inclusive organizational policies and practices. One organization thought they were an anomaly because they had had a string of LGBT executive directors, who in turn attracted LGBT staff. "Our policies talk not only about the lack of discrimination, but also extend benefits like providing health insurance completely free of charge even to [domestic] partners," said one respondent.

The urge for inclusion often comes from organization members as well. When this need is met, the entire organization grows. As one organizer of a workers' center said, "Our industry has an overrepresentation of LGBT folks, so our response where members are interacting with new folks has to be welcoming for everyone. We've made an explicit effort through the years to welcome folks who are LGBT." The director of a city-wide racial justice organization (whose members are mostly immigrants and "lots of religious people") described a committee that consists entirely of LGBT youth, many of whom were already members or had family who were members: "[We appealed to] young people who are gay or questioning. They come to us as a safe space." The committee has pushed the organization as a whole to work actively on LGBT issues and to partner with LGBT groups that have constituencies of color. "Our youth groups, when they are engaged in alliance with other groups on issues like policing and education reform, when they encounter homophobia, they end up being messengers on anti-homophobia."

A local network of South-Asian activists accommodated needs of LGBT members of their own community to "create a safe space for queer South Asians" by opening up facilities and providing political backup when necessary. They formed an LGBT advisory committee soon after their founding in 1990. In 2002, they initiated a two-year internal process that allowed members time and resources to understand the intersection of race and sexuality. A leader of this group said, "We really need to start with self reflection, otherwise the other remains the other. We needed to go through that internal process in order to talk to [the community] about homophobia." That then allowed the group to collaborate with an ethnic LGBT organization on a needs assessment of several thousand South Asians to ensure good participation of LGBT people. The organization has institutionalized a program to address such issues annually on National Coming Out Day and is planning events like town hall meetings on these questions.

Organizations also express their interest in LGBT equality through their issue choices and campaign demands. In places with significant organizational infrastructure, the most robust intersectional work is occurring between groups working on issues that impact low-income communities of color. This is possibly the most promising arena of strategic engagement. A worker's center has included the issues affecting LGBT people in its studies of discrimination in the industry. An immigrant rights organization decided to stop accepting money from the Catholic church so that it could support the family unification rights of gay immigrants. A national civil rights consortium incorporated hate crimes against LGBT people into the Shepard/Byrd Act that President Obama signed into law earlier this year.

When constituents recognize that police violence or exclusion from public benefits programs impacts LGBT people in similar and sometimes intensified ways, opportunities for collaboration are particularly strong. As the director of a LGBT organization of color said, "We're fighting for tenants rights, and HUD is the target for housing rights for people of color and LGBT housing rights. We are looking for those overlapping targets and angles constantly."

There is no shortage of issues that are high priorities for communities of color and that also have a substantial LGBT element. One organization has begun to work on Don't Ask, Don't Tell—both because it disproportionately affects soldiers of color, especially women, and because it recalls the historic mistreatment of Black,

Filipino and Japanese-American soldiers (a history that many of this group's members lived through). Groups working on education are looking at discrimination in school discipline policies and the effect of bullying on LGBT youth. Hate crimes and policing also generate significant interest. One respondent who is heavily involved in work against hate crimes noted, "We've had cases in the past where it wasn't clear if it was because they were gay or Asian. You shouldn't have to ask the question, which is why we were such strong proponents of including [LGBT people] in the legislation."

"We work on bread-and-butter issues because that's what our people need. These issues allow us to work closely with racial and economic justice groups who are also facing the same issues, though sometimes in different ways."

Family issues also provide openings for joint action. Themes mentioned included reforming foster care to support LGBT kids and children of color, changing adoption practices to enable LGBT parents and parents of color to get through the system, and dealing with the family unification elements of immigration policy. One interviewee said that "family recognition" would be a good frame for addressing African-American alliances. "If you ever did poverty law, you'd have spent forever arguing in housing court that this differently constituted family is a real family in relation to the IRS, benefits, etc.," he said, "This is something completely embraced by African-American communities because they have nontraditional families."

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Local innovations and initiatives

While national campaigns can be exciting and easy to join because of their large infrastructures, local issue campaigns are key to expanding relationships and commitment from people of color. Most people are educated and activated by immediacy, problems that they can see and changes they can make in their own communities. For the LGBT-supportive constituency to grow in communities of color, people need to experience the urgency of an issue, along with the power of making change. As one staff person at a northeastern LGBT racial and economic justice organization said, "We work on bread-and-butter issues because that's what our people need. These issues allow us to work closely with racial and economic justice groups who are also facing the same issues, though sometimes in different ways." A director of a multiracial LGBT organization noted that effective organizers work on a range of issues that matter to their constituencies, rather than a narrow set of issues chosen by someone else. "We can look for silver bullet issues, but the reality is that we have to be situated in the moment. Collaboration happens because there is a need that moves people. The issues we pick are not just the most ideal ones but also ones related to the economy and people's hardships right now. These are the issues that bring people together." By developing a clear understanding of how LGBT people experience traditional racial justice issues, groups will be able to expand their own constituencies and policy victories.

Over time, grounded local and regional collaborations can produce more power for all marginalized constituencies. For example, a collaboration between a farmworker organization and an LGBT group that started nearly 20 years ago has produced a mature statewide capacity for dealing with both anti-gay and anti-immigrant policy struggles. When conservatives placed an anti-gay ballot measure on the election agenda in the early 1990s, the leader of the state's largest farmworker group knew that similar attacks on his community would soon follow. When the LGBT community marched through his town in opposition to the ballot measure, a group of farmworkers met them on the outskirts and escorted them to a community dinner where they held "a real good, honest dialogue" about why the LGBT group had never reached out to farmworkers and where homophobia among Latinos came from. When the first anti-immigrant ballot measure appeared soon after, farmworkers asked the LGBT group for advice and defeated that, too. The LGBT group shared contacts and electoral, media, and fundraising advice, and the alliance beat back another oppressive initiative. They continue to work closely on anti-gay and anti-immigrant policies, share seats on each other's boards of directors and work jointly on a proactive legislative agenda at the statehouse.

Groups are also using diverse forms of political engagement. The major national campaigns—the Employment Non-Discrimination Act; Don't Ask, Don't Tell; marriage equality—have been fought largely in the courts and the electoral and legislative arenas. Local and state organizations in communities certainly work on legislation and elections, but they also use direct action, community-based research and even service provisions to generate action steps for their constituents to take. As one interviewee put it, “There’s a need for direct action that isn’t reliant on the stacked electoral and legislative systems to succeed.” Another interviewee pointed out the importance of organizing around local issues: “The only way to build the relationship is to do work; engaging in campaigns has to be coupled with education.”

While national LGBT campaigns use fairly traditional civil rights frames, new issue work could add broader racial justice and human rights frames that go beyond current law. That notion of expanded rights will, in turn, generate more support for national issue priorities like marriage and employment equality. In short, on-the-ground issue campaigns will create a deeper understanding, owned and articulated by people of color, about the rights of LGBT people.

Elements of success

Several factors increase the chances that racial justice organizations will effectively engage in LGBT issues. Chief among these is an intersectional approach to defining racial and social justice. This means that leaders and members alike see systems of oppression and liberation as linked and overlapping, though not necessarily the same. Groups with intersectional analyses can imagine that people of the same racial community experience problems differently because of other parts of their identities. Such groups do not try to force everyone into a one-size-fits-all experience. An intersectional analysis is greatly bolstered by these additional elements:

- the presence of LGBT leaders of color;
- organizations formally sharing power and resources; and
- having a long-term approach to community education.

Although the lack of funding is limiting, most of the groups that engaged in LGBT issues did so out of membership demand and strategic thinking, not because there was some kind of funding incentive. As funders become interested in supporting similar work, they should place a high premium on the groups that have taken early steps.

A group’s ability to address the intersection of race, poverty, gender and sexuality makes an enormous difference in whether and how organizations relate to LGBT issues. “We don’t take the position that we do Asian stuff but don’t do gay stuff,” said one respondent. Another noted that a “real life” ethos helps his group strategize appropriately. “We can’t talk about racial justice and not look at a queer people of color, because then it becomes schizophrenic—you challenge white supremacy, but then you persist in discriminating against queer people of color. That’s why it’s important to look at queer rights not as issues, but as lived experience. Sexual identity and celebrating sexuality are part of the human experience.”

The first additional factor that advances intersectional strategy is the presence of LGBT leaders of color, who are critical to getting racial justice groups to engage in sexuality issues. These leaders cut very quickly through the notion that racial justice does not include LGBT liberation.

One respondent noted that heterosexual members of race-based groups often ask, “that’s a gay thing, what’s it got to do with us?” This person recalled the example of an organization she had worked with in which the board’s pro-LGBT position generated intense opposition at the annual meeting. The debate led the respondent to urge gay members to come out, “so that [your communities] know that there are in fact gay Asians.” Often the role of these leaders is simply to be available for dialogue and perspective. Another respondent said that political issues raised by LGBT staff generally received positive reaction from the organization “because we want to support our staff.” Someone else said, “Having key people in leadership positions helps make organizations resistant to pushback that they receive.”

The second key element is the willingness to formalize the process of intersectional work and to share concrete resources and structural power. The farmworker organization mentioned above reserves a seat for the statewide LGBT organization on its board of directors, and the same is true in reverse. When the two collaborate, they each contribute hard resources—money, time and contacts—as well as ideas. In another national organization, there is a joint staff and board task force charged with figuring out forward movement on LGBT connections. Many organizations have adopted formal human resources policies and recognize domestic partners for benefits.

All of these elements feed into a consistent community education process, which constitutes the third key element of success. Much of the political discourse on race and sexuality gives the impression that communities of color are unusually homophobic. “People think we’re culturally predisposed to be homophobic,” said one respondent, “but really we just need education like everybody else.” That education involves a long process of “de-toxification,” occurs in waves and is highly reliant on direct contact with LGBT people. Staying in such a process requires substantial emotional skill. The director of an LGBT youth group reflected, “It’s really important to be committed to the process, to listen to things that are painful, to be present and to just not abandon the process.” This long process is worth undertaking because it ultimately supports political goals. The farmworker leader said, “We don’t think because the relationship exists that we’ve eliminated homophobia in our community, but the farmworker movement has been able to recognize that homophobia exists, that it’s one of the isms we have to combat and have to educate ourselves about.” This and other examples led a regional training intermediary in the region to design a full curriculum for groups of color that wish to start dialogue on these issues.

Barriers to engagement

Building a robust movement for social justice requires collaboration among groups, their constituencies and issues. But a set of dynamic barriers often obstructs such engagement in issues that may not initially seem relevant to a particular constituency. These include:

- a lack of strategic clarity;
- fear of community conflict; and
- inadequate funding and material resources for projects and collaborations.

Although these are real barriers, they are both more complicated and less intractable than is often portrayed.

Survey respondents identified the following specific resource needs that create blocks to greater involvement in intersectional work:

| Barriers to LGBT engagement for all groups | Response % |
|--|-------------------|
| Small staff | 78.26 |
| Insufficient facilities/space | 45.65 |
| Religious concerns | 41.30 |
| Resistance or lack of support from national organization | 26.09 |
| Not central to organization’s goals | 23.91 |
| Lack of funding | 21.74 |
| Lack of community support | 15.22 |

One respondent said that “some of our constituents do not support LGBT rights.” Another wrote that “within our organization, all staff and leadership are recommitted to making LGBT equity central to our work; we do,

however, face occasional resistance/homophobia from community members.” Additional responses included: “our priority social justice issue is race and racism;” “LGBT work has not been brought before us directly as an issue for our organization to become involved with, even though it would fit within our mission statement;” and “it just isn’t talked about.”

Survey respondents also identified the following as resources they need in order to engage in intersectional, coalitional work (in declining order of significance):

| Resources for engagement needed for all groups |
|--|
| Additional funding |
| Leadership development programs that explicitly address race and LGBT issues |
| Additional staff/volunteers |
| Training and tools connecting race and LGBT issues and constituencies |
| Member/constituent support |
| Technological support |
| Training curriculum addressing religion and sexuality |

The following section presents these roadblocks in more detail. We start with the lack of strategic clarity about the ways in which an LGBT equality agenda might relate to racial justice and communities of color, and work toward the funding barriers. This approach follows the typical progression of roadblocks, from lack of knowledge to lack of funding, and how this affects those who need to take action: organizations of color, participants in the mainstream LGBT movement, and funders of racial and sexual equity efforts.

Lack of strategic clarity

The premise that racial justice and LGBT equality are fundamentally detached is the primary obstacle to effective engagement and collaboration. As long as people of color and LGBT people are conceived of as wholly distinct populations or constituencies, it remains difficult to build bridges. Despite the severe underrepresentation of LGBT people in the popular media and among mainstream LGBT organizations, communities of color contain the same diverse sexuality that every other community does. Issues of poverty and discrimination affect both people of color and LGBT people—negative policies create double and triple jeopardy for people with multiple marginalized identities. Moreover, the institutions and policies that marginalize people are often the same.

It is therefore important that racial justice groups begin to see and act on the gender and sexuality dimensions of the issues they are already working on, but this is clearly not a widespread perspective or skill. Almost a quarter of survey respondents, which means roughly half of the racial justice (non-LGBT) groups surveyed, said they did not engage in LGBT issues because they are “not central to the organization’s goals.” But if LGBT concerns are examined for their intersections with race, rather than as a completely different set of issues affecting a different set of people, this response would change substantially.

The director of an LGBT racial and economic justice organization said that most progressive organizations, including those of color, don’t have a thorough or nuanced understanding of the LGBT experience. “We see...very progressive racial justice organizations [try] to highlight a range of racial justice issues. And then they try to chime in on gender and sexuality. If our allies understood the LGBT movement, they would include LGBT stuff in all their issues areas.” Another respondent bemoaned the false division between issues: “If you’re a person concerned about education, how could you not be concerned about LGBT people not getting their education?”

From a strategic perspective, organizations often need help understanding how LGBT communities experience the institutional inequities and kinds of violence affecting racialized communities. One interviewee noted that

in his racial justice organization, “of the people who direct our policy work, none have ever thought about the LGBT part of this. In looking at homelessness or the criminalization of youth in schools, there’s no response when you ask, ‘Do you know the numbers of LGBT people affected?’”

Interviewees cited a general absence of data in this area and noted the dismissal of data that does exist. A staff member of a Native-American organization echoed the need for data that would provide a better sense of how LGBT issues affect her constituency specifically. She wants to be able to answer the critical strategic questions: “How can we take an [inclusive] position on legislation we’re already fighting for? How do LGBT issues translate into opportunities for our organization to engage in a way that produces benefits for our population? What are the big and small ways to integrate this into the work we already do on policy?” This organization currently takes positions on national LGBT campaigns, and it has strong internal policies, but that is the limit of its low-burden, low-cost engagement. Such data, accompanied by a process that would help her to address it, would be most likely to lead them to do something different. This person would be particularly open to new information about LGBT experiences around issues of public safety and the criminal justice system, which are of major concern to her constituency.

The executive director of a northeastern LGBT organization that is explicitly focused on economic and racial justice explains:

There is this undertone sometimes that queer work does not have anything to do with racial justice. Being able to conceive of the intersections is sometimes difficult for racial justice organizations formed on an idea of racial oppression that takes on a middle-class and often very male-gendered kind of framework. It becomes very difficult to collaborate. ... People may know gay people, but getting political on that is a challenge. What they see is *Will and Grace*, and they try to see the experience of queer people of color, and it’s hard because it’s hidden. I once heard a police brutality group saying that queer people of color are not getting street harassed or profiled. That’s just a lack of awareness.

The tendency to miss the relevance of racial justice to LGBT issues affects LGBT organizations and funders, as well. With few exceptions that resulted from joint membership in civil rights or general social justice alliances, none of the racial justice groups or LGBT groups of color had been approached by mainstream LGBT groups to support LGBT issues. One interviewee said that the mainstream LGBT groups assumed that civil rights groups would support their agenda but did no outreach to people of color organizations for any reason. One interviewee noted a severe lack of knowledge combined with hubris that led a white LGBT leader to comment after the passage of the Shepard/Byrd Hate Crimes Act: “It took the LGBT community coming in with its power to get this over the line.” In fact, organizations of color fought hard to include the LGBT community in that legislation—it would have passed much earlier without that element.

Fear of community division

Survey respondents said that a lack of support from the communities they represent was a significant reason that they did not engage in LGBT work. Some organizational leaders expressed a fear that their membership is heterosexist. Comments reflected their anxiety about introducing what some described as “a wedge issue” into an already busy organizational agenda. Survey results show that groups working in multiple-issue areas are less likely to engage in LGBT issues as compared to single-issue focus groups. The more interests an organization represents, the less likely it will explicitly engage in LGBT issues. For these groups, taking on an issue that might be particularly controversial poses too great a challenge.

A similar dynamic occurs within multiracial groups trying to determine how to balance the varying experiences and needs of different constituencies of color. While a majority of surveyed organizations composed of one or two racial groups did explicitly engage in LGBT issues, none of the surveyed groups with three or more races said they engaged explicitly. This finding was statistically significant and was supported by several interviewees,

including one who said, “Multiracial groups are struggling with their own internal issues...they have struggles on black and brown unity work because of systemic barriers.”

Other interviews confirmed this. The director of a midwestern coalition of community organizations said the multi-issue caution made sense. “People may think LGBT issues are controversial and focus on the lowest common denominator.” The director of a west coast racial justice and media organization said, “Multi-issue groups are already dealing with ‘wedging’ and are probably afraid to take on another issue. But you have to have a strategy for dealing with the wedges.”

This finding points to some potential limitations to taking an entirely issue-based approach to this relationship. There needs to be deeper discussion at the level of history, values and principles of systemic thinking. One interviewee pointed to actual ideological conflicts between racial justice and largely white LGBT groups, noting that the groups use similar language but mean different things. One interviewee suggests that leaders should avoid creating “polite narratives that are not true” by downplaying real differences at the level of values and political principles that emerge from the wildly different life conditions based on race, class and gender. Most LGBT groups, unless they are groups of color, have very little to do with poverty because their membership is simply too removed from that issue. The interviewee provided the following example: “When you look at pro-same-sex marriage materials, you can see that they are couched around the economic benefits of marriage. But poor married people have no idea what these economic coffers are like.” Racial justice and LGBT groups can all mean something different when they say civil rights, from voting concerns to police brutality to marriage.

Many people we interviewed, however, saw in communities of color real skill for dealing with so-called “wedge” issues. They provide strong counter-evidence suggesting that racial diversity within an organization can lead to an openness about building coalitions with LGBT constituencies or engaging the LGBT members they have. As the director of a multiracial workers rights organization in the South explained:

We already...organize around key racial wedge issues between communities of color. If you’re an immigrant rights group that wants to organize Black youth near by, that could be divisive. If you are organizing Black workers, and you want to organizing immigrants, that could be divisive. Anything could be divisive. I generally don’t buy the divisive argument, because we live in a divisive society.

One strategy that many groups found useful was to explicitly address heterosexism with organization membership. The executive director of an Asian-American Community organization in a northern city explained: “Among our members, especially straight members, we’ve had to do a lot of education around sexuality. It’s something we are continually trying to grow and challenge our members on. Without internal work, the fear of moving forward would stand in our way of doing necessary work and building natural connections.”

Political education is vital because many heterosexual members of racial justice organizations see LGBT issues as white issues. That, according to numerous interviewees, is because leading LGBT organizations in the United States tend to be led by middle-class white people and take on issues like marriage equality that are not of primary significance to low-income communities of color struggling with bread-and-butter issues or issues of structural inequity. It’s also largely a result of the fact that popular portrayals of gay men and lesbians in media and the bulk of funding for LGBT work are oriented around white characters or white-led organizations.

Interviewees cited the almost complete absence of LGBT people of color in the leadership of mainstream LGBT groups. This person noted that Black, Latino and Asian LGBT staff members frequently cycle through multiple racial justice organizations, but the same is not true of the mainstream LGBT groups. “Until you’re seeing people who ran the NAACP or La Raza active in the LGBT movement, you’re never going to have power or credibility, because you’re not part of the genetic code of that movement.” These factors reinforce the “whiteness” of the LGBT identity and the concerns that accompany it.

In addition to race, there's little question that religion plays a significant role in national discussions about LGBT rights. Homophobic and heterosexist positions taken by religious institutions and religiously imbued individual biases about LGBT communities erect barriers to organizational engagement in LGBT rights work and to collaboration between organizations. Many religious institutions or congregations are explicitly intolerant of

Religion is not a prohibitive barrier, as evidenced by the fact that groups do engage in LGBT work in spite of discomfort among some members or staff, and conflicts with religious institutions or funders.

LGBT communities, and the Mormon and Catholic churches have been particularly active in pushing anti-LGBT policies at the state and federal levels. This was nowhere more evident than in the context of Proposition 8 in California, where religious institutions funneled millions of dollars into a campaign against marriage equality.

Yet these barriers are more complicated than they are often portrayed. Our research indicates that religion is a dynamic factor that sometimes acts as a barrier to advocacy for LGBT issues, but not necessarily in the clear way it's often imagined.

The majority of survey respondents did not identify religion as a significant barrier to engagement in LGBT issues. In fact, only about a quarter of survey respondents believed it was a major barrier. Interestingly though, those groups that did identify religion as a barrier were far more likely to be already working on LGBT issues in some capacity. Only about 10 percent of groups that did not consider LGBT issues to be a core part of their work believed religion was a significant barrier to engagement.

One chapter leader of a national organization noted that when his chapter began to take explicit positions against marriage discrimination, others immediately disinvited him from local activities. An attempt to place a resolution on the national organization's agenda was stalled as the organization's leader received multiple irate calls from religious leaders. A staffer of a Native-American group said that while religion per se might not be cited in opposition to LGBT issues, "tradition" may act as a proxy. One interviewee reflected on the low number of survey respondents naming religion as a barrier with speculation that "many racial justice groups are not closely or primarily working with religious leaders." In Asian communities, however, she noted many congregations speaking explicitly against LGBT rights, particularly marriage.

There are several important and instructive conclusions about the barrier erected by religion that are further illuminated by our interviews. First, religion is not a prohibitive barrier, as evidenced by the fact that groups do engage in LGBT work in spite of discomfort among some members or staff, and conflicts with religious institutions or funders.

Second, that unengaged groups do not see it as a barrier suggests that religion becomes an "issue" only when groups actually attempt to do intersectional work. While this may seem obvious, it points to a critical lesson about the importance of real-life involvement as a means of surfacing and overcoming barriers. Just as barriers are only problems if encountered, they are only overcome if challenged, and that work can occur only if the political commitment is made to do so.

As a management-level staffer of a national Latino organization explained, "In some communities, religion does matter to this work. In their minds, they think it's not appropriate. But mostly it's an issue of the perception of how the issue will play out in the community." This perception "impacts whether groups take it on." But, if groups decide to engage LGBT issues in what the interviewee called "nuanced ways" — ways that mesh with community realities and are rooted in the hard work of organizing—religiously rooted barriers are not impenetrable.

An important distinction emerged in interviews between the role of individual bias that bases itself in religion and the role of religious institutions. Overwhelmingly, interviewees believed that while some religious institutions erect irreconcilable and often debilitating barriers to engagement with LGBT issues, individuals with heterosexist beliefs can be moved by organizing and public education.

The lesson here is that religion, like other barriers to effective collaboration, is an institutional problem, not an individual one. As the head of a national LGBT advocacy organization said: “We can’t talk about LGBT discrimination without fundamentally addressing organized religion’s key role in targeting and persecuting LGBT people. It’s their core organizing strategy.” The response, therefore, has to become a core part of the organizing strategy of those dedicated to building intersectional analyses and alliances.

The vital organizing work necessary to overcome community biases is already happening but it needs to become more robust. The head of a national network of organizers acknowledged, “In the South, it’s about religion, and you have to confront it directly if you are going to work on it.” The director of a northern LGBT racial justice organization added that it’s through direct engagement and actual work that these barriers can be overcome. “Building alliances and overcoming issues like homophobia or transphobia happen through actually doing the work.”

A number of groups have moved against institutional barriers in order to do intersectional work, even when there are individual biases within organizations. As one organizational director of a racial and economic justice organization with a predominantly Latino base in the South explained, religious funders can place significant limitations on grantees. This group receives 10 percent of its income from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which has begun to ask how they stand on LGBT issues. “Now the Catholic Church is going back to all their groups and asking what they think about gay immigrant unification, and there is now an internal struggle in the church,” she said, noting that in the past, this only happened around reproductive choice issues.

The interviewee explained that, in addition to the basic belief among the organization’s staff and membership that family unification in immigration policy should include all families, the group could never expect to be supported by local LGBT organizations if they refused to take explicit positions on LGBT issues. For this reason, the group has decided to stop applying for church funding. “Our immigrant board members agree that if we take a position against LGBT issues, that would be wrong,” she said. Many organizations, like the farmworker group described above, have eschewed Catholic funding for a decade or more given these limitations.

Ultimately, our interviewees argued that while religiously based homophobia is real and exists within communities of color just as it does in white communities, these biases are not insurmountable obstacles to moving racial justice groups to engage in collaboration with LGBT groups and on LGBT rights issues. As one interviewee said, “Everyone has a gay uncle or cousin; everyone can be moved.”

Inadequate funding

A lack of strategic clarity also affects funders of both racial justice and LGBT work. Survey respondents said that they would be able to take a more active role in engaging their base or audience in LGBT issues with more funding, staff or volunteer capacity, infrastructure, and leadership development. According to the Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues’ *LGBTQ Grantmakers 2008 Report Card on Racial Equity*, funding to LGBT people of color organizations comprises only nine percent of all LGBT dollars (based on the latest year of available data, 2007). The Report Card also cited a 2008 study on autonomous domestic LGBT people of color organizations found most (57 percent) received no foundation support for their current annual incomes.

Groups of color have had a difficult time getting funders to step out of their issue silos, just as organizations have to do. Some racial justice organizations have tried to raise money from LGBT funders to educate and mobilize their communities. As one interviewee put it, “I got the impression that we weren’t gay enough.”

Others found that the community education process appealed to few funders. “I don’t think most funders have the appetite for the level of education that’s actually required.”

Organizations face mounting social issues with limited resources during the economic recession. Indeed, they were already feeling the strain before the downturn. All groups could take on more work if they were given more funding, had access to leadership development that explicitly addresses race and LGBT issues, and had additional staff and/or volunteer capacity.

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Multiple groups identified either small staff or insufficient facilities as a core barrier to engagement with LGBT issues. Though groups may be willing to engage in intersectional work, there’s often not enough staff with the skills needed to follow through. Of course, funding constraints are the main reason for this deficiency and that, says a racial justice organizer in the southeast, is because “most of the LGBT funding goes towards white LGBT groups.”

This comment was reiterated often in interviews. Funding for work on LGBT issues does not get allocated to groups of color or LGBT groups doing economic justice work, and racial justice funders tend not to fund work on the intersections of traditional racial justice issues and sexuality.

Capacity and funding barriers played out in numerous ways. Respondents explained that there is not enough funding to support the organizing work that’s necessary to actually move from narrowly-defined racial justice work to intersectional work. One reason for this lack of funding is LGBT organizations that work in poor communities and communities of color are strapped for resources, because LGBT funders don’t see “bread-and-butter issues” as LGBT issues. However, a reversal of that trend would not be the solution, with racial justice groups being funded to reach out to LGBT people, instead of LGBT people of color groups being funded directly. Funders should develop targeted capacity-building initiatives around this new and growing set of organizations of color.

Most LGBT work gets funded in the electoral and lobbying arenas. Engagement in smaller, on-the-ground campaigns would help communities of color build capacity and commitment. If marriage equality and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell do not top the list of concerns for LGBT people of color at the local level and in their day-to-day lives, it is understandably difficult to engage their organizations solely on these issues. A Midwestern organization director said: “Foundations can help support LGBT community organizing so they’re not just electoral or lobbying models...[and] help transform the field of community organizing to incorporate more analysis of racial and LGBT work and their intersections.” The relative absence of funder investment in on-the-ground LGBT organizing was mentioned by nearly every interviewee. Raising again the fundamental question of strategic connection, the field director of another Midwestern racial justice advocacy group said that it’s precisely at this point that many organizations need support. “We have the capacity to do organizing, but we don’t have the capacity to figure out how to better roll LGBT issues into this work.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future work will be most effective if the political landscape is changed in two ways. First, there must be a large, active and politically sophisticated constituency of LGBT people of color, with visible leaders who can influence both racial justice groups and mainstream LGBT groups. That constituency needs to have the resources—financial and analytical—to reveal and address a broad range of policy issues at the intersection of race and sexuality. Both funders and activists can take a number of specific actions to strengthen the engagement of the racial justice infrastructure in LGBT issues.

Recommendation 1: Increase support for groups of color

Funders should increase their support of LGBT organizations of color, as well as of collaborations between LGBT and racial justice groups.

A. Fund and support LGBT people of color organizations

1. Provide general support grants. The most critical starting point is to support the many small, local LGBT organizations founded to meet the specific needs of LGBT people of color. These organizations are generally quite small, with only volunteers or at most two staff members, and they are often providing services instead of or in addition to political activity.
2. Provide capacity-building grants. A Building on the work done by the Funders for LGBT Issues, a thorough study of young organizations, their developmental needs and their political potential would help to create a roadmap for further development, funding and other kinds of resources.
3. Raise the visibility of LGBT organizations of color in philanthropic and media venues. Foundations that support community organizing should continue to do so, while urging service-oriented funders to include these groups in the grant portfolios of community foundations, United Way chapters and other mainstream philanthropies. Funders should also use their substantial communications capacities to generate media visibility for these groups at local, state and national levels.

B. Fund emerging collaborations between racial justice and LGBT groups.

Groups need sustained opportunities to educate and engage each other first at the level of values and principles to build basic understanding of the relationships among racism, patriarchy, homophobia and economic exploitation. Because we know that direct engagement with LGBT people breaks through individual homophobia, high emphasis should be placed on relationship building and education while groups are crafting joint political strategies.

1. Fund convenings, explorations and creative joint projects that forge the analytic and emotional unity necessary for real engagement over the long term. Early work in this arena would allow groups to attend each other's activities, to conduct research that reveals new angles on existing issues and ultimately to develop the capacity for collaborative campaigns and alliances.
2. The evaluation and learning systems in the organizations that sponsor these projects need to be robustly staffed and developed so that the field as a whole can learn from these promising early efforts. As groups that do choose to engage reveal religious concerns or other forms of community resistance, what methods work best to close divisions and build unity? While intermediaries can play an important role in that work, the originating group must also take on evaluation and learning tasks, so developers of these evaluation systems need to account for additional staff and leadership time.
3. Fill the gap for racial justice organizations that refuse funding from anti-LGBT religious institutions. Increasingly, organizations with funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human

Development will find it untenable to meet the requirement that they take no positive positions on LGBT rights. While LGBT funders don't need to be solely responsible for making up the difference, they could collaborate with reproductive health funders (who face similar issues) and others to strategize around this question. One short-term option may be to create a pool of money to help groups make a transition to new sources over two or three years.

Recommendation 2: Invest in tools for strategic clarity

There are compelling reasons both to expand the list of issues and to strategize around the specific experiences of LGBT people of color with employment discrimination, military policies and marriage.

- A. Support the generation of data that specifically address the needs of LGBT people of color such as health (including the implementation of healthcare reform), violence (family and institutional), workplace discrimination, child welfare and immigration. Groups need to be supported with funding, research and other resources to study and act on the sexual nuances of these issues.
- B. Support partnerships between research intermediaries and community-based organizations. The sexuality dimensions of traditional racial justice issues can be explored through participatory, community-based research projects like matched-pair testing projects that have the added benefit of increasing interaction between racial justice activists and LGBT people of color. This work will necessarily involve research institutions with the technical capacity to design credible processes and analyze complex data sets.

Recommendation 3: Lift up LGBT leaders of color

Clearly, the presence of LGBT leaders of color is critical to bringing these various constituencies, issues and movements together for authentic engagement. A full national needs assessment of these leaders would help the field craft interventions that ensure good succession systems, avoid burning out leaders of color and, ultimately, change the impression that LGBT means white.

- A. Support leadership development programs for LGBT leaders of color working in all kinds of organizations. Funders and field organizations might consider creating a fellowship for such leaders and/or supporting media projects that elevate the profile of these leaders.
- B. Assess the needs of LGBT leaders of color throughout social justice arenas.
 - How do these leaders get support in skill development?
 - How do these leaders make the decision to come out, and what form does that coming out take?
 - What happens when LGBT leaders in racial justice organizations come out, and is there a difference in reaction to coming out individually versus raising a point that affects the organization's program and political agenda?
 - Who mentors emerging LGBT leaders? How can mentorship systems be strengthened?
 - What are the media skills of LGBT leaders of color in particular, and how can their media presence be strengthened?

Recommendation 4: Build the media and communications infrastructure

A key intervention for bringing together the racial justice and LGBT equality agendas has to involve media and communications. While the major national LGBT organizations have substantial communications capacity, the same is not true for most racial justice organizations or for LGBT people of color organizations. In addition, popular culture outlets generally characterize LGBT people as white.

Foundations can support increased media visibility in multiple ways.

- A. Publicizing the experiences and work of LGBT people of color within philanthropic press and other venues such as conferences and briefings. At least a dozen national funder conferences take place every year, and they could all include workshops and plenary speakers who highlight these issues, whether the conference itself is about immigration, education, violence or sexuality.
- B. Building media and communications skills into initiatives that develop the leadership capacity of LGBT leaders of color. Fund media training organizations such as the Women's Media Center, Smartmeme or the OpEd Project to provide free or low-cost opportunities to this constituency, especially at the regional or local level.
- C. Using their own communications capacity to bolster that of LGBT organizations of color or racial justice groups that address LGBT issues. They could, for example, pitch stories about the numerous LGBT organizations of color that have to fight their way into their local ethnic parades, like the Gandhi Day parade for Indian Americans in New York.
- D. Publicizing important data. Compelling research is too often not widely disseminated in either the LGBT world or the racial justice world. As a result, vital facts such as the disproportionate impact of Don't Ask, Don't Tell on Black women or the interest of LGBT people of color in addressing employment, health, safety and housing issues are not commonly known to racial justice organizations.

CONCLUSION

There are many excellent reasons to build strong connections between racial justice movements and movements for LGBT rights, not the least of which are the needs and potential of millions of LGBT people of color. By coming together, each movement can expand its numbers, sharpen its political agenda and educate the public more effectively. Activists and advocates for justice for all disempowered people—no matter the race or sexual identity—can work with a number of assets, including strong LGBT leaders of color, hundreds of LGBT organizations of color and over a dozen sophisticated collaborators in the racial justice field.

Yet much of this promise will be wasted unless substantial resources are moved into the field as quickly as possible. Groups face enormous barriers in fighting racism, poverty and homophobia together. A sustainable resource base will allow the most innovative leaders in the field to advance their strategic thinking, to become effective at addressing homophobia in communities of color and to raise the visibility of LGBT people of color so that issues accompanying being part of a sexual identity minority do not appear to affect only white communities. There will never be a better time for such an influx of intellectual, moral and material resources.

INTERVIEWEE LIST

| First | Last | Organization |
|----------|------------------|--|
| Maura | Brown | Alliance for Metropolitan Stability |
| Oona | Chatterjee | Make the Road NY |
| Chhaya | Chhoum | CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities |
| Malkia | Cyril | Center for Media Justice |
| Dan | Daniels | California NAACP |
| Walter | Davis | National Organizers Alliance |
| Lautaro | Diaz | National Council of La Raza |
| Ejeris | Dixon | Audre Lorde Project (Safe OUTside the System Collective) |
| Belinda | Dronkers-Laureta | Asian & Pacific Islander Family Pride |
| Kenyon | Farrow | Queers for Economic Justice |
| Jessica | Flaherty | Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc. |
| Bob | Fulkerson | PLAN Nevada |
| Malachi | Garza | W. Hayward Burns Institute |
| Sarah | Hicks | National Congress of American Indians |
| Hamid | Khan | South Asian Network |
| Sharon | Lettman | National Black Justice Coalition |
| Danielle | Mahones | Center for Third World Organizing |
| Rickke | Mananzala | FIERCE |
| Karen | Narasaki | Asian American Justice Center |
| Beth | Newkirk | Organizing Apprenticeship Project |
| Jose | Oliva | Restaurant Opportunities Centers United |
| Joseph | Phelan | Miami Workers Center |
| Harlan | Pruden | NorthEast Two-Spirit Society |
| Amita | Rao | Raksha, Inc. |
| Russell | Roybal | National Gay and Lesbian Task Force |
| Graciela | Sanchez | Esperanza Peace and Justice Center |
| Amar | Singh | Sikh Coalition |
| Saket | Soni | New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice |
| Alvin | Starks | Open Society Institute |
| Vega | Subramaniam | South Asian Americans Leading Together |
| Maxim | Thorne | NAACP |
| Eric | Ward | Center for New Community |

Total interviews: 32

Funded by:



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Produced by the Applied Research Center with support from the Arcus Foundation

