



THE DELTA VISION

Building Capacity for and by Communities of Color

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Nonprofit Assistance Center, Wayfind, and Living Well Kent hold an open house to welcome community members to their new shared offices.

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Introduction

A world that is racially equitable and just can only be achieved if the communities most impacted by injustice are involved in shaping policies and practices.

With strong organizational capacity, communities of color are able to fully participate in civic engagement and advocacy around critical areas, such as environmental justice and education equity.

However, traditional models of capacity building tend to only be at the organizational level and focused on developing individuals. Traditional models often overlook the roles and responsibilities of funders, policy-making entities, and system actors, as well as the relationships these entities have with communities and organizations. Furthermore, traditional models of capacity building do not explicitly address racial equity, systems, and power, rendering them inadequate for communities of color.

A group of people of color-led capacity building organizations based in Seattle recognized these challenges and convened to create a model, tentatively called the Delta Vision.

The Delta Vision, which builds on local wisdom, focuses on strengthening community-based organizations (CBOs) led by communities of color and transforming the relationships with the systems that impact them. The long-term aspirations of this group are:

- to unify people of color-led capacity builders,
- to implement and live out aspects of the model, and
- to effectively build the capacity of ethnic-based organizations.

The Delta Vision is about changing ways of being with one another, rather than prescribing a set of checklists or strategies and tactics because every community is different. As a work in progress, Delta Vision participants are optimistic and eager to join with others seeking to enact a vision of capacity building for and by communities of color.

The Delta Vision is in its early stages and is poised to make further contributions. Planning team members and community partners have developed a tentative vision that is holistic, relational, and practical. That vision is detailed in this executive summary.

Who We Are

The Delta Vision is a unique collaboration of nonprofit organizations. **The planning group for the Delta Vision is composed of seven organizations** that provide capacity building services, such as leadership development, fiscal sponsorship, executive director coaching, legal assistance, grant writing support, and strategic planning facilitation.

This group acted as a core thinktank and vehicle to drive the Delta Vision forward, drawing on their collective experiences working with ethnic-based organizations to propose an initial model, coordinate and gather vital feedback from the community partner organizations named below, and then synthesize the community feedback to shape what became the Delta Vision presented in this report.

The **community partners of the Delta Vision**, who include providers of direct services to communities of color in the Puget Sound area, generously advised the Delta planning group at pivotal junctures throughout the year, providing feedback on the emerging vision based on the specific experiences, perspectives, needs, and aspirations within their communities.

The Delta Vision Planning Group



The Delta Vision Community Partners



What the Delta Vision Looks Like

The Delta Vision recognizes that the ultimate purpose of capacity building in communities of color is to **build the power to self-determine and to create the conditions needed to thrive.**

In contrast to other models of capacity building, the Delta Vision offers a new multi-dimensional perspective on capacity building that centers around issues of race and power, especially in how organizations relate to their communities, as well as the systems of policies, resources, and attitudes about people of color. The Delta Vision offers a holistic model that simultaneously develops three core components of capacity on multiple layers. We believe that investment in this approach will advance our mission and power.

The Delta Vision “Cake”

Picture the Delta Vision as a cake made up of three layers:

- Organization
- Community
- System

The Delta Vision has also three components or wedges:

- People
- Practice
- Place

This cake has multiple shared touch-points and intersections, and it represents an integrated and holistic approach to capacity building led by people of color for communities of color.



Power

Building and balancing Power is central to the Delta Vision. Power is defined as the ability to influence or enable the social change needed to achieve racial equity and social justice. It is both a primary ingredient and a goal of the Delta Vision.

As a primary ingredient, Power already exists in the inherent strengths of communities, such as internal leadership, indigenous wisdom, resilience, and creativity.

As a goal of the Delta Vision, Power is built for self-determination and community ownership of challenges and solutions that are essential for strengthening and sustaining communities.

However, as we build Power, it is critical to recognize and address the dangers of horizontal oppression in order to not replicate dynamics from the mainstream that have harmed communities of color for generations. The liberation of all communities requires that we exist in support of one another, rather than on the backs of one another.

As such, it is critical that we challenge and resolve manifestations of horizontal oppression wherever they appear, including at the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, age, class, and national origin.

Through building and balancing Power in these ways, **we create thriving communities for all.**



Youth participants in AGE UP, an organization investing in the transformative power of youth in South Seattle, especially young women of color. AGE UP participated in the Nonprofit Assistance Center's cohort program.

Definitions



People

People is defined as those who contribute to the Delta Vision include community leaders (formal and informal), board members, staff, community stakeholders, volunteers of nonprofit organizations, policy- and decision-makers, funders, and influential individuals within institutions and entities that allocate resources.



Practice

Activities, mindsets, and ways of behaving constitute Practice. Practices are not limited to programs and organizational arrangements, but also how communities are engaged and empowered and how systems are structured to promote equity.



Place

Physical spaces not only allow for the coordination of activities within geographic boundaries, but also embody perceived ownership by a community as well as foster an ideal of space within a social and institutional structure. While the Delta Vision primarily focuses on physical spaces, it also recognizes the importance of other forms of Place that foster connection and belonging within communities, such as the importance of virtual spaces in communities that are often in different locations, whether by force or by choice.



Power

Both a principle and goal of the Delta Vision, Power is the ability to influence or enable change at all levels to realize a racially equitable and just society.

Our Recommendations for Building Power in Communities of Color

These are our specific recommendations for organizations and funders in order to create change and build equitable power within communities of color.

Fund the Whole Cake, Rather than Just a Layer

Provide financial support that brings organizations, communities, and system entities together — that also seeks to build and balance power for communities of color at the Organization, Community, and System layers.

ORGANIZATION

Give multi-year, unrestricted, core support. Communities of color must determine their own needs, solutions, use of funds, and staff development.

COMMUNITY

Develop leadership in communities of color to strengthen the pipeline of future leaders with deep relationships in communities.

Restore community places to serve as anchors for communities and neighborhoods. Examine policies, including rent and housing development.

SYSTEM

Develop people who hold power in funding and policy agencies to adopt a racial equity lens and who can advocate for allocating resources that advance social justice.

Fund collaboration, as well as individual organizations. Funders must support systems of organizations to learn, plan, and implement activities with and among one another, in addition to funding individual programs and projects.

Fund people of color-led nonprofit organizations directly. Fund nonprofits that have direct connections to the community, as many of the more mainstream intermediary organizations do not possess the same direct connections and may pass on only a small fraction of financial resources to service providers.

Have Funders and Policymakers Hold Themselves Accountable

Funders and policymakers should engage with community and nonprofit leaders in authentic conversations about how funders are perceived and ask the following questions, both externally and internally:

- “How am I accountable to the community?”
- “Am I working with communities and nonprofit leaders to identify needs and develop solutions to local conditions?”
- “Is my own institution taking the initiative to question our practices, policies, and impacts on equity?”
- “Are we pursuing continued learning to strengthen our equity lens?”

These questions are the beginning of forging authentic, accountable, and transformative relationships between systems and communities. While funders will put out RFPs for policy and systems change, they often do not see that the change needed applies to them as well. This very funding system perpetuates and reinforces inequity. By engaging in deeper conversations about institutional racism, inequity, power and privilege, white fragility, funders and policymakers will be more accountable and impactful in advancing equity.

Strengthen Solidarity and Prioritize Equity

The Delta Vision recognizes that the current funding system forces competition among nonprofit organizations serving communities of color. Nonprofit leaders need to build relationships, collaborate, and identify opportunities to support one another’s goals, while also building the capacity of their own organizations. These leaders should be vigilant of counterproductive tendencies to compete. Funders and community leaders need to collaborate to design a new system of funding that is more equitable and less competitive.

Advocate for Systems and Policy Change

Organization, Community, and System leaders should think deeply about what the future of the nonprofit sector looks like, one that inclusive of action, advocacy, and policy change. Systemic change may take time, even generations; however, policies that impact fair housing, neighborhood development, access to healthy food, quality schools, and immigrant rights are all being enacted on a daily basis now.

Lessons Learned

Some of the richest results of developing the Delta Vision came in the form of learned lessons in the process of working together. As the planning members engaged with one another, community partners, and funders to build and actively practice the Delta Vision, complex issues arose around power and relationships. We share these lessons in hopes that they may be helpful for other communities attempting to pursue a similar goal. While we do not have the answers for all the issues below, we have found the effort invested into grappling and learning from them to be well worth it.

Live the Values of the Delta Vision: Power, Racial Equity, Culture, and Caring

Delta Vision planning team members intentionally sought to cultivate and sustain authentic relationships among themselves that aligned to the Delta Vision values: self-determination, being community-led, racial equity, social justice, valuing culture, caring for one another, and balancing power. Practicing these values is very challenging, as they are in direct opposition to many of the mainstream values operationalized in our society, such as competition, the prioritization of self-interest, independence, and white supremacy.

Challenge Ourselves to Think Deeply and Beyond the Traditional

Delta Vision team members sought to think beyond what is traditionally defined as capacity building — in particular to think beyond organizations and to consider how systems and larger structures, which are significant drivers of inequity and competition among communities of color-based organizations, can be transformed. This requires examining and shifting the power dynamics between funders, policymakers, and organizations, as well as between organizations themselves.

Have Challenging Conversations About What it Takes to Work Together Equitably

The realities of working together while also advocating for our own individual organizations, challenged our aspirations to be non-competitive during this project. A powerful learning opportunity occurred when a Delta Vision planning member applied for funding from a foundation that was already considering a proposal from another planning member. The proposals seemed similar enough to raise concerns around duplication, lack of communication, and lack of coordination. This required the planning team members to engage in challenging conversations around communication, trust, expectations, and power differentials between organizations.

Speak to Funders and Build Bridges

Funders have a lot of power in the development and sustainability of nonprofit organizations that serve and are led by communities of color. Speaking candidly to funders can be challenging and risky, especially when it comes to matters of racial equity. Organizations must be supported in speaking honestly without repercussions. Similarly, capacity building organizations are also often gatekeepers, or bridges, between direct service providers and funders. This kind of power needs to be used to increase access for communities, not controlling it.



Latino Equity Network Retreat

The Future of the Delta Vision

The Delta Vision is an exciting and needed exploration of capacity building among people of color-led organizations and the communities they serve. Delta Vision planning team members, community partners, and consultants have identified some options for future steps:

1. **Refining the vision**
2. **Developing and specifying strategies, as well as tools, rubrics, and checklists**
3. **Piloting and testing**
4. **Evaluating**
5. **Funding**

As detailed in this report, the initial phase of the Delta Vision has focused more on identifying the conceptual framework of the Delta Vision and offering early illustrations as well as some strategies. Additional suggestions, refinements, and inquiries are welcome as we work to define what may come next.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DELTA VISION,
PLEASE EMAIL INFO@THEDELTAVISION.ORG.

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