

## 19. Strategies for Creating Community Change Studies Programs

What's the best way to create a Community Change Studies program? What has CLP learned from helping develop more than a dozen local partnerships between community leaders and academic institutions, all of which now offer Certificates and Degrees?

Developing new college-based programs requires a systematic “organizing” process, whether it's initiated by community leaders or faculty-members. Like community organizing, creation of these new educational programs requires a step-by-step process including –

- Careful, continuing analysis of the landscape, the actors, the politics, the opportunities and challenges, the unknowns,
- Candidly assessing whether victory is possible and what it would require,
- Building the knowledge, relationships, strategy, and power to succeed, and
- Moving ahead step-by-step, planning and researching, acting strategically, continually reflecting on what you are learning and adjusting accordingly.

It is more than coincidental **that these are the “organizing” skills and knowledge the students themselves will gain** through courses in Community Organizing, Action Research, and Understanding Their Region's Politics, Economy and History, and through practical field experience with expert guidance. **They are central to success in getting a tough job done. They are also the cross-sector skills which many types of potential employers look for** as they hire and promote people.

Having worked with community leaders and academics in more than two dozen very different settings – ranging from major cities to the Mississippi Delta -- CLP has had an unmatched opportunity to learn strategies and tactics which help people design and create local Community Change Studies programs. CLP's approach has evolved over time, constantly adapting to local leadership, needs, priorities and opportunities.

## **Basics on creating institutional change in colleges:**

**In most colleges, there are many obstacles to introducing Community Change Studies programs and partnerships.** As large bureaucratic institutions, colleges are slow to adopt almost anything new and unconventional. Furthermore, they are not accustomed to partnering with others, especially groups representing communities of color and low-incomes; they have tough financial constraints; and they may not be comfortable stressing experiential learning and career preparation.

Community Colleges are somewhat more open to such initiatives than major universities are, and they offer the great advantage of reaching large numbers of students of color and other first-generation college students. Community colleges are also accustomed to creating programs to meet the needs of local employers, and it is very significant that CCS programs offer **career preparation in two rapidly growing sectors of the economy which colleges often overlook – the enormous and expanding nonprofit and public service sectors.**

City colleges and public universities which are particularly committed to place – to meeting the needs of local students and local communities -- are also good potential partners. So are Historically Black, Hispanic-Serving, and Tribal colleges as well as faith-based and private colleges with unusually strong civic or community commitments.

In exploring these institutions, CLP has usually found faculty-members and college administrators who are immediately interested in expanding education on issues of poverty, race, action civics and community-building. However, these people are usually scattered in different departments, perhaps teaching one or more relevant courses or involved in Service Learning or civic engagement. They may not know other people in the college who share their interests. Some are on the margins, isolated, perhaps frustrated and looking for opportunities to help students learn how to impact the deep issues facing the country. In these times, they may welcome new approaches to become directly involved with the growing number of students who are passionate about such issues as racial and economic justice, the climate crisis, DACA and immigration rights, and the students' own experience with poverty, homelessness, food security and healthcare and mental health issues.

**It takes a concerted, well-planned campaign to overcome the institutional barriers to creating a Community Change Studies program.** It requires identifying and then bringing together a significant number of actors inside and outside a college to collaborate in bringing about that change. And it's essential to be realistic about the challenges since it may, in fact, not be feasible to introduce a new program in their college, or there simply may not be enough energy or power to move such an ambitious effort forward.

### **CLP Network Experience:**

**Within our ranks, the CLP Network has extraordinary experience and skills in bringing institutional change to educational institutions, and many lessons to pass on to others.** Our sites have devised clever strategies to create new programs, replicate and expand them, and broaden their influence within institutions which often resist change.

Leaders within the Network have succeeded in changing Community College and university curricula, including establishing new Degree and Certificate programs, creating new partnerships between colleges and nearby low-income communities, and establishing new strategies for recruiting students. These successes have resulted from a wide range of creative strategies. These include catalyzing new alliances among administrators, faculty-members and students, and building strong ties with nearby communities and the nonprofit sector.

DeAnza College, whose former President Brian Murphy is a CLP Board member and major resource, is nationally known for its stellar history of institutional change. Much could be learned from studying its two decades of massive and highly successful change. Other innovative strategies for institutional change developed by our Network include—

- Developing a full-fledged program in stages, gaining allies and influence step by step, perhaps starting with just one course, adding others, establishing a Minor or Certificate program, and then expanding it to become a Major,
- Linking a major program of Americorps Volunteers to a Certificate program to provide students with in-depth paid experiential education while they learn from courses and earn college credit, and

- Linking community colleges with high schools and four-year universities to collaborate in developing unified educational pathways into leadership and community change careers.

### **What are the key steps in CLP’s approach to institutional change?**

CLP’s approach to expanding Community Change Studies is emphatically not a rigid “model” to be applied in very different contexts. Instead, as mentioned earlier, it provides an “adaptable framework” for expansion. CLP’s strategic approach combines –

- Clarity on the mission and goals for a Community Change Studies program,
- A set of essential program elements (e.g. an educational pathway with stackable credentials, providing experiential and classroom learning, stressing organizing and reform, preparing people for careers and leadership roles in community change; and
- Strategies which adapt to local situations and help partners invent creative new approaches to getting a program launched locally.

### **There are seven steps in CLP’s strategy for institutional change and creating CCS programs:**

#### **1. An initial spark –**

Someone initiates a process of exploring what might be feasible. It may be a community organization or leader concerned about the shortage of people of color who are fully equipped for staff or leadership positions. It may be one or more faculty members or college leaders who want their institution to be more responsive to nearby communities, people of color, and low-income and working-class students. Or it may be some outside spark like CLP, an organizing network, a local support organization or local foundation.

#### **2. First steps in an organizing process –**

Two or three people begin outreach to develop the relationships, agreements, strategies, power, and resources needed to create major institutional change. This starts with step-by-step reaching out in both the college and the community to potential allies, conducting one-on-ones to learn whether they are interested and what they see as the goals, potential

allies, obstacles and opportunities for proceeding. Small group discussions or focus groups may also be helpful.

3. Quite quickly deciding whether, realistically, one or more people can devote sufficient time to deepen the exploration:

As these soundings go forward, the lead planners should constantly assess whether to continue the exploration and, if so, how best to proceed. Candidly, many community leaders and organizers, and many faculty members are too busy to invest heavily in this kind of exploration beyond the first two or three months of meetings. It quickly becomes necessary to find one or two people who can free up their schedule to manage the increasingly methodical process outlined below. Needless to say, it is ideal if funds can be found to finance a part-time community coordinator and/or a faculty-member's released time. (See Chapter 21.)

4. Deepening the fact-finding and analysis:

An essential element of a CLP program is a partnership which draws deeply from within both the college and neighboring communities. (Chapter 20 provides details on Partnership-Building.) During this feasibility study phase, the planners must explore and understand the priorities, concerns, strengths, and challenges which college and low-income community leaders would bring to a partnership and to a possible CCS program.

A. The college -- An inventory of all relevant courses, research initiatives, service learning and community engagement programs at the college; an assessment of potential lead departments, their current course offerings and experiential education, their interest in CCS, and their bandwidth and influence; how the CCS program could involve and complement other departments or multidisciplinary studies, and how it could avoid competing for students as college enrollment declines in colleges everywhere.

A "power analysis" of the college and its environment which includes --

- Identification of the potential early allies in the college, including faculty, administration, decision-makers, and student groups. (Sources include academics interested in civic engagement, community service, service learning, ethnic studies and race, community and political organizing, democracy-building, leadership studies, and nonprofit management; and academics teaching courses on specialized issues for which community organizing and change strategies are directly relevant – e.g. community health,

social work, criminal justice, environmental studies, community development, economic development, and education.)

- Analysis of the obstacles and opponents they face.
- Analysis of how decisions are made on issues which would affect CCS's future, who the key actors are, and what points of intervention are available for influencing key issues.
- Preliminary assessment of the college's institutional appropriateness, openness and capacity to develop a new program – Does it have a social commitment or commitment to neglected neighborhoods? If it's a community college, does it offer courses beyond vocational tracks? Is enrollment declining, increasing competition for students and blocking new initiatives? Could a CLP program attract additional students to the college? (See Chapter 7 on student recruitment.)

#### B. The Community

- What local community-based and membership organizations are interested in creating a CCS program? What would maximize the program's value and appeal to them? How should the partnership be structured to succeed?
  - Organizing groups, other community-based organizations.
  - Community-based coalitions or other joint vehicles for collaboration, e.g. an alliance of neighborhood groups, community land trust alliance.
  - Technical assistance or other support organizations.
  - Youth organizations and movements, youth development groups.
  - Neighborhood leaders, ethnic leaders, unions and other membership organizations.
- To what extent can they develop a shared vision and collaborate with each other, and with a college?

#### 5. Partnership formation:

Is it possible to build a college/community partnership which has a shared vision and sufficient breadth, cohesion, power, and skill to design a good program, gain approval for it and sustain it over time? (See the next chapter for details on Partnership Formation).

#### 6. Strategy development:

Development of a multiyear strategy – a concerted campaign with the following elements –

- Deepening exploration of the college – allies, obstacles, etc. –
- Deepening exploration of the community – different actors, interests and views, time and resources available, potential roles, what would maximize those.
- Clarifying common goals and commitments, assets.
- Identify potential resources, funding, etc.
- Financial feasibility – projections on students, costs, income.
- Labor market for interns and graduates.
- Current training programs.
- Availability of PLA, etc.
- Potential employer involvement, other stakeholders/advisors.
- Strategies for broadening involvement and getting higher level buy-in – college, community, funders, other partners.
- Possible phasing, building toward certificate, minor, major, etc.
- Building power and influence – movers and shakers, faculty senate, outside supporters, funders, student support.

#### 7. Launch and Start-up:

Launching 1 or 2 initial courses, perhaps tweaking one which is already approved. What's missing? How could it be added, and when?

Developing financial analysis and plan, and marketing and recruitment plans.

### **Examples of Very Different Histories of Successful Strategies from CLP Network:**

The CD Tech program in Los Angeles is an example of a **community-based organization taking the initiative** and being the lead in designing the program and curriculum, teaching, recruiting and supporting students, and successfully pushing the college for greater support. Over more than two decades it has added new dimensions and innovations to the program, including major partnership with Americorps Public Allies, and it has more than 3000 graduates.

Minneapolis College and Metro State University were unique. The combined initiative came from the Native American community linked with Syd Beane, an Indian organizer/educator who worked in Minneapolis as CLP's Field Director. He systematically identified and met with a wide variety of people in the college, and an allied organization pressed the College to work proactively with the neglected Indian community.



The organizer eventually convinced the college and then the college to create new courses which he would teach, and from that base he established a particularly strong partnership with Lena Jones, an African American political science professor who has directed the new CCS Certificate program for many years. Recently Syd led a successful campaign to rename Minneapolis' Lake Calhoun, honoring its Native history rather than the notorious proslavery Senator.

DeAnza is an example of faculty-members succeeding in creating massive institutional change over several years, which eventually actively recruiting students of color from San Jose, influencing choices of the last two Presidents, supporting student organizing on campus and creating a CCS program in Leadership and Social Change. A major addition to this transformation was creation of the Vasconcelos Institute for Democracy in Action as a center for student support and activism. VIDA is linked to opportunities for on-campus and campaign experience working on issues, internships and placements with many community partners.

West Chester University's Urban Community Change program resulted from one **faculty member taking the initiative and building broad support from other faculty and the administration. It was the result of very strategic organizing process** which resulted in creation of a Minor, then a Major, and strong relationships nearby and especially in Philadelphia.

The last example is **not a college program. In New York City CLP helped the citywide housing coalition (the Association for Neighborhood Housing and Development, or ANHD) plan and launch a program** to meet the need of the coalition's member groups for a new generation of trained organizers. The



coalition chose to do this without a college connection but closely tied to Americorps Public Allies. Coalition member groups helped to recruit and screen people from their communities, and provide on the job training, and, for many, permanent jobs after they complete the program. The result? Ten trained “apprentices” each year for ten years, a total of 100 graduates, heavily people of color -- a remarkable solution to the capacity gap.

### **Building on Service Learning and Community Engagement Programs:**

On many campuses, the Service Learning Program may be an important ally for establishing a CCS program. “Service learning” has grown rapidly over the years. It responds to many students’ strong interest in community service as well as a deep concern among many college leaders’ concern about student cynicism on the value of voting and participating in civic life and politics.

Does service learning provide an opportunity to prepare students for careers as community organizers, developers and change agents? Does its combination of direct service to low-income people and related studies provide the stimulus, knowledge, and experience which people need to become community workers? Does it reach large numbers of low-income and working-class students and students of color with backgrounds from communities like those receiving help from service learning students?

The answer varies from campus to campus. It is clear from CLP’s work with colleges as well as interviews with college faculty members and leaders in the service learning movement that ***most “service learning” programs offer little structured “learning” in connection with their volunteer experiences.*** Most programs simply provide volunteer opportunities for college students whose learning is limited to what they gain on the job. Most colleges offer no courses linked to the community service experience.

However, at some colleges, faculty members link courses on issues like education or public health to placing students with organizations which are addressing those issues locally. Their students can contrast what they learn on the ground and in class, mixing experiential and academic education to deepen their thinking and understanding. They may also meet frequently with others involved in

service learning for structured reflection on what they are learning about the issues and about working with community-based nonprofits.

Many have established centers to help students find placements with local nonprofits where they can tutor or mentor children, help the elderly, or work on a community improvement project.

***Several community colleges and universities have taken “service learning” considerably farther.*** The most fully developed offer students a combination of (1) volunteer experience on the ground with (2) opportunities to study the issues they are working on and (3) the chance to reflect on their experience doing community work. Campus Compact, the national alliance of university presidents who pledged their support for service learning, provides teaching materials and seminars to help faculty incorporate service learning in the courses they teach in fields as diverse as economics and philosophy. Nevertheless, it is clear that the great majority of service learning programs are still not very serious about “learning.”

***Some academic programs link service learning with “civic engagement”*** to address the growing worry that our democracy is threatened by cynicism about politics and government and prospects for building a better society. Those colleges have shaped their service learning programs to encourage students to learn about public issues and become involved in addressing them.

***None of these service learning programs, however, are geared specifically to preparing people for careers in community change, and many of them have no “change” focus at all.*** However, the strongest ones may provide a good base for developing an undergraduate major or minor in Community Change Studies as they combine rigorous coursework, experiential learning in the community, and reflection and mentoring.

***Rarely, if ever, do service learning programs provide students with stipends or other income for the time they devote to service.*** This severely disadvantages low-income and working-class students who must work long hours to earn sufficient income to stay in school and minimizes their participation.

***One central problem for service learning is the difficult relationship between universities and their neighbors.*** Universities are focused internally on their

students, faculty, facilities and programs. Many have little interest in their neighbors except when they stand in the path of university expansion or threaten the campus in some way.

Some critics of service learning argue for major changes in the relationship between academic institutions and their neighbors. Dick Cone, the former director of USC's Joint Education Project, for example, raised serious issues about "hit and run" assistance from students. He and others point to many placements as poor matches, made without sufficient concern about whether students would bring useful skills to the nonprofits and whether there would be sufficient continuity in the students' assistance to be really helpful. They point to the off-and-on nature of when students are available to help and the frequent turnover among student volunteers as presenting major obstacles, and they are critical of many of their academic colleagues as not being well informed about the groups where students are placed, their needs and priorities, and the extent to which the placements will be satisfactory to either the group or the student.

Cone advocates **"inreach" rather than outreach from the universities**. He believes there is such a strong inherent power imbalance between any major educational institution and a small nonprofit that the usual "outreach" process should be reversed. Rather than a university deciding what it needs and can offer, Cone advocates that funders first help grassroots groups decide what help they need from students and faculty and to raise funds for tuition or contracts which will enable them to reach into a university (or other institution if that would be more useful) for that specific help.

Informal "inreach" programs are, in fact, quite common. Some result when strong grassroots groups see a need for assistance from a particular faculty member as they analyze or tackle an issue. Others emerge when a professor or instructor has the sensitivity and background to build a real partnership with a nonprofit, and then shapes service learning in response to that organization's needs and priorities and its ability to provide a good learning experience for students. They can be a strong component of a broad Community Change Studies approach.