



## NC Peoples' Coalition for Giving

### **“Opening the Gates of Giving: A Dialogue about Our Role as Gatekeepers and Allies”**

**February 4, 2008**

*“so the question is, how do we maintain a critical transformative edge to our politics when we are building that politics in an organizational environment that is shaped by institutions outside of our community that don't necessarily want to see us survive on the terms that we are defining for ourselves?” --Tamara Jones*

#### **Exploring Our Gatekeeper Roles**

Donna Chavis – lots of gatekeeping roles, including mother; just became board chair of Robeson CF

Pam Pompey – Ujaama becoming stand-alone institute

Irene Godinez – gatekeeper with Latino community and grassroots organizations

Darryl Lester – Hindsight and Community Investment Network

*As POC, we have internalized messages about who gives and who receives. What can be done to resist or interrupt these internalized messages and act from a place of power and integrity in our gatekeeper roles?*

DL – always think about messages I received growing up in rural SC. In order to participate in anything, had to go across the tracks. Grew up in neighborhood where people truly took care of each other. But also you get the message that POC did not make a contribution, to society even. From mis-education to education. Push back on those messages, and then you can talk about what you really gave. As a family, drove from SC to Alaska, also went to Africa – so I saw a lot and began to unravel a lot of those negative messages. It's an internal journey. Who am I? Whose am I? Where have I been? Where am I going? Seek support from others to unravel those negative messages.

*Organizations, as well as individuals, can serve as gatekeepers. What can be done to bring to the table the people who are most affected by your work, so their voices can be heard directly and not only through you?*

IG – that's the challenge with the organization I work with. Diverse crowd of Latinos we work with – documented, undocumented, generational. Challenges with each group. Think about those whose needs are most urgent. How to bring that population to the table. Undocumented immigrant. Facing so many difficulties and backlash, with political climate in NC and US. As a gatekeeper, first thing is identifying community with the most urgent needs. When we bring people to the table, we have to prepare them so they are equal participants. Undocumented youth, for example, might feel intimidated at the table with “power brokers.” So we give them training to increase skills and confidence – that their stories are the most important stories, especially when heard directly from them. Language can be another barrier, but we try to bridge those with capable interpreters. Also keep encouraging this group, and let them know that if change is going to happen, people will be most touched by hearing from the source. So just encourage people to speak on their own behalf.



*We want to move our projects further, beyond even our own tenure in gatekeeper roles. What can be done to groom other people to carry and continue the work?*

PP – gatekeeper role with young people in philanthropy and fundraising. Early in my career, people would ask me about POC giving; at first I was insulted. But then I got involved with GIFT, and I decided I should not feel insulted anymore. We should develop POC to be gatekeepers. Lots of growth in the field over the last few years to recognize POC in philanthropy. But part of my concern is what will happen as other things come to the horizon – I began to fear what will happen to the projects. What's so important is the mentorship, developing not just young people but all sorts. Training people in philanthropy, developing leadership, helping them build their own capacity, connecting folks – may be an opportunity to grow. In order for our projects to grow, we have to develop our own funds, especially in NC – then we have the capacity to help these projects develop to a new level. Sitting on boards is critical; being at the grantmaker table even though I'm not a grantmaker. Also, supporting each other's work. I've gotten a lot of support out of this room. I can pick up the phone and ask for help. The more we can support each other, the better. Utilize each other as resources, especially young people.

*Gatekeepers not only keep people out but also let people in. What can be done to support each other as we strive for our highest selves in our gatekeeper roles?*

DC – I have been blessed in my life. We were outhouse (vs. brickhouse) Indians. So I always asked, why me, how did I come to certain places? Being open to the possibilities. Who can come with me? Bannerman Fellowship, first chance to focus on Native Americans, previously always focused on multicultural work. Part of supporting each other is stepping up, when we see gaps we need to take the risk. I saw myself stepping into a void, tables where there was no Native voice. As we have access, getting the possibilities – not only about us, but who we represent, naming others as well. Not only our own affinity group. Joint Affinity Group – I feel confident that we'll all step up for each other, even if we are not there. Do we support each other when we are not present with each other? Can lose that when we are striving for a cause or issue, can forget about all those not in the room. After the Bannerman, I moved into more work with specifically the Native community. Navajo concept of "fourth mind" – come into the room with thoughts of all relations to the universe (each is related to all else); common good. When I see we are operating from dominant culture framework, positioning, I like to ask, how does this work for all of us? If truly coming from fourth mind, then no conflict of interest. Part of the colonized mind is feeling we have to fight each other in a competitive fashion. Feel that if you get something, then I will get less. Trying to break down the colonized parts of ourselves.

*What are some of the barriers to supporting each other? How to overcome those barriers?*

DL – people have to be realistic about how much time we have and how we want to connect. Don't have a lot of control over how we spend 9 to 5. But after 5, we may have more intentional time to do something differently. May need to pull something else off my plate to make time to connect.

PP – I have commitment to doing this work and doing it honestly. Self-interest in terms of who is leading some organizations, even those that claim to be about POC. Need to be commitment from you to understand there is a culture that requires us to network, and there's not always going to be something in it for your organization. In reporting to funder, should we report impact in family members – of course, that is our culture. For POC, family and community do count. Myths out there that because an organization says it's progressive that it respects our culture.

IG – triggers a thought about tokenism. How do we ensure that we're not bringing someone in just because we need someone who's Hispanic, for example. Used to think it was flattering to be invited into



meetings, but now I ask direct, clarifying questions, look to see if it will be a “speaking role,” and if not then it’s just tokenism. After so much institutionalization, we may adopt the “victim mindset.”

DC – in many places, I am the only one. Sometimes mainstream organizations, when they find one, they recycle them. So a gatekeeper role we all have to play is recruiting others. Frustration I have had is getting young Native women to step up. Those of us who have access and get invited to connect to others. Part of our challenge, we have to have those folks to put forward. “Revolution will not be funded” by conventional means, it never has been.

DL – saying from John Henry Clark, what people do for themselves depends on what they think about themselves, depends on what they know about themselves, depends on what they have been taught about themselves. We could have freed more slaves if they had known they were slaves. Only by the grace that I have a notion about myself and have not been totally lost. I had to get off some boards, turn down some things that feed my ego. Can I fly under the radar and do something at my daughter’s school, do something that has more impact, and not go home with a headache. Am I the token or am I the breakthrough person?

Avani – communities of color have a very different dynamic going on in terms of our sense of collective and sense of individual. Multiple identities vs. multiple hats. As a South Asian woman, not like I have one hat that I can take on and off; have 57 hats that you’re balancing, and a pot of water and making flatbread at the same time. This idea of compartmentalization does not work, breaking off a piece of yourself to sit on a board... Presenting ourselves as full people. I am all of these things, and to bring in that fourth mind into the room. If we want to change the paradigm, we have to bring our full selves and the fourth mind.

Barbara – token has such a negative connotation, but it’s what you make of it. I tend to blend, until I open my mouth and I’m not blending so well. Maybe they brought me in because I’m black, but... Opportunity to educate people. I always knew that the reason I was put on this earth was to educate people. Bring one in, create more room. All about bringing in more of us to fill the room.

PP – I was trained, this is what a board is, this is what you do. Can develop mentorship about what it’s like to be a POC sitting on board. So we don’t go into the form that is already set. We should have an agenda when sitting at the table about taking care of ourselves.

DC – challenge is being multi-cultural group, not just multi-racial. Get into routine and ritual, not relationship. Being multi-cultural is really doing things differently.

Barbara – important to infiltrate whatever our agenda is and look at the common good. Agenda of my community was to be brought into the broader agenda.

Jahan – we always have a voice wherever we are. Whose table is it? Am I trying to get grassroots people to the board, or do we need to change the board structure? I am realizing that the board table is not the most important table and where the most important conversations are having. Not going to be naïve that there’s not power at the system’s table, but also recognize power at other tables. Not just about training and equipping people for a system that may not be working for us.

DL – while we are at the table, notice how we are being marginalized. Causes so much dysfunction in the board room.

Omisade – I struggle with the word “gatekeeper,” feels synonymous with sentry. Do I see myself as a sentry? I do see myself as a vessel, portal, expander of bandwidths, code switching. Have a hard time with that word. In places where I have access, I stand in the gap, may be the only black woman – I am a



portal, driven by my values, divine and cultural imperatives. So when I get in that space, I know what my role is. Shift from transactions to energy exchange.

Barbara – instead of gatekeeper, conduit. Try to keep energy flowing. Know your audience.

DC – we may not see ourselves as gatekeepers, but others see us that way. How we define ourselves and how others react to us. Reserve judgment until we get to know each other.

Omisade – that's important, if you know there's going to be the reaction, then there's an opportunity to make the situation different. Opportunity to flip paradigm on its head. Create a new one. So people can't find the script to match you. Be cataclysmic without being destructive.

### **Exploring Our Gatekeeper Roles**

*To whom are we accountable? In what ways has the staff of our organization become separated from the people we serve? Is the primary goal of our work to help people get ahead or to help them get together?*

- ⇒ Organization in some way separated from people we serve.
- ⇒ Focused on personal accountability. Desire to connect that with our career path. Feeling accountable to lots of people and also to a process. Personal reflection of accountability and how that relates to the work we do.
- ⇒ Aligning personal mission with organizational mission. Tiny little piece that doesn't align feels highlighted so strongly.
- ⇒ Darryl's fishbowl point about "who owns you." Where resources and time are being spent. Who's getting you, what parts are you giving out, who's receiving that.
- ⇒ I'm separated from my community because of all the privilege I have – documented, speak English, have education, I get paid. But why does having privilege take me away from the community I work with.
- ⇒ Without inclusive process, we may be free but also fragmented.
- ⇒ Not either/or, but prioritizing what you're going to work on first and then come up with the team to deal with it.
- ⇒ Where are your values – are you trying to win or do the most good?

*What can we do to re-build that connection with the people we serve? What would be meaningful and realistic ways we can support each other in our gatekeeper roles?*

- ⇒ Change the question – we are part of the community. Can't connect until we remember we are in it.
- ⇒ When you enter into a group, do you enter with the organizational hat or with the sense that you are part of the community as well. Some tend to walk in with power and privilege hat. Is my organizational lens my lens?



- ⇒ Importance of the front porch or stoop. SRDI works in rural south, but our offices are not in rural places (Raleigh and Asheville), but each person has a rural tether. So I don't have to walk in with my institutional garb, we do what we did back home – we tell stories. We eat and sit.
- ⇒ Maybe we need to take the van they won't take to come to us and go to them. Maybe then we can find out from their perspective what we're not providing for them, what we need to do to be effective. Apparently, I am imposing my brilliant ideas on some unwilling participants.
- ⇒ Memory recall – in my group, we go and sit with young people. Takes you right back, remember all your vulnerabilities. So helpful in keeping the staff grounded.
- ⇒ We have to de-institutionalize ourselves. POC who are doing this work have been assimilated, because we have to get paid. When I started this work, I didn't do it to get paid, but because I was passionate about my community. I'd like to see Coalition bring us together so we can re-train ourselves so I can incorporate my own community in my work. Re-training, re-connection – some kind of ceremony.
- ⇒ How to reconcile getting paid with maintaining connection and accountability to community.
- ⇒ We minimize what are skills to be taught and what are skills to be learned.
- ⇒ Power of voice... what happens when you professionalize our racial voices? How does that impact our connection to the community as well.
- ⇒ Importance of these intentional spaces. People need it so bad. Having a group that is attentive to creating intentional space – Coalition. Especially if you don't have opportunity within your organization, then are there external resources. Distinction between networking and reliance. Reciprocal relationship that creates that space.
- ⇒ In all my years as a social worker, I found that the conversation that happens here doesn't happen outside. At some point, this whole conversation about gatekeeping should be in the schools. Rarely do we get to sit together multi-ethnically and discuss anything. I think this should go on and on.
- ⇒ We should also be intentional about going back and communicating how vital this is for us.
- ⇒ I wrestle with the fact that I have more access and resources than my parents had, but also see what they were able to put in place. Sometimes when we push, we don't want the responsibility of the resources. Do we want someone else to put up the resources? Is there enough hope that we can really build what we are talking about?
- ⇒ Paradigm shift in consumer culture in which we live. Paradigm shift in how we spend our money.
- ⇒ With building our own institutions... people can put their money where their mouth is. That's a leverage point.
- ⇒ Don't always have to use the language – for example, black people have always adopted, though they say we don't adopt.
- ⇒ I really want to focus on what leadership looks like in NC. I know we have leaders in NC, but we haven't been lifting them up.
- ⇒ My group is on the recipient side of funding. Have to be able to translate your language so it can be heard.



### **Next Steps/Future Topics**

- ⇒ “Fourth mind.”
- ⇒ “Third space” – visioning new way and new world.