Wednesday, November 30, 2016

EC2C Adopts Equity Statement, Considers Ways to Give More People a Voice in the Process

By Larry Gavin

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On Nov. 18, representatives of many partnering organizations in the Evanston Cradle to Career (EC2C) initiative met at Evanston Township High School and approved an EC2C Equity Statement. The Equity Statement, which was discussed and revised at previous partners' meetings, provides:

"Evanston Cradle to Career (EC2C) partners commit to acknowledge, confront, and eradicate the racial, social, and other systemic inequities within their organizations and in the community that undermine access and opportunity for Evanston's youth, particularly youth of color, to reach their life potential."

EC2C, which now has more than 40 partners, is built on the premise of collective impact. The plan is to address the needs of Evanston youth, starting at birth, in a holistic fashion and to focus on all factors that impact learning, health, and social and emotional development. The vision is: "By the age of 23, all Evanston young adults will be on the path to leading productive, satisfying lives."

Transitioning to a Multicultural Organization

Sheila Merry, Executive Director of EC2C, opened the Nov. 18 meeting saying, "The recent events for many of us have raised the level of the critical nature of this work, and why it is extraordinarily important for us as a community to stand up and say that we are committed to being an equitable community that embraces all of our citizens.

"That's really the spirit surrounding today. How are we as a community going to stand up and say we embrace all of the diversity that exists in our community? Everyone in our community has value, and we're committed to moving forward in a way that reflects that value in what we do every day."

Donique McIntosh and Eileen Heineman, Co-chairs of the Racial Justice Program of YWCA Evanston/Northshore, led a discussion on a method to assess equity within an organization, the stages of moving from a "monocultural" – or exclusive – organization to a "multicultural" – or inclusive, diverse, and equitable organization, and how EC2C could move towards a multicultural organization.

Ms. Heineman said multicultural organizations

• Reflect the contribution and interests of diverse cultural and social groups in their mission, operation, and product or service,

• Act on a commitment to eradicate social oppression of all forms within the organization,

• Include the members of cultural and social groups as full participants, especially in decisions that shape the organization, and

• Follow through on broader external social responsibilities, including support of efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression."

Ms. Heineman said in an inclusive organization "everyone's welcome, everyone's heard, everyone is provided for, people feel they're part of the process, access to the organization is easy, there's diverse representation in the decision-making process – all of this is what makes an inclusive organization."

"When thinking about EC2C," Ms. Heineman said, "We need to be thinking about who's at the table, who's missing, and is there representation at all levels? Everytime we're making a decision on the next task to be accomplished, are we thinking through all these levels of inclusivity?"

EC2C partners said transitioning to a multicultural organization requires bringing new people into the room and may require giving up power. It requires much more than bringing a "token" person into the room to give a picture of diversity.

While a number of people said they thought the mission and goals of EC2C were at the multicultural stage, they said the organization was still in a transitional stage. Karen Singer, executive director of YWCA, acknowledged that members of EC2C and its committees were reaching out to the community, but said, "We do not use those voices yet to guide our actions, our strategies, and our decision-making process."

Reverend Patricia Efiom of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary added, "We're not fully inclusive when you look at the leadership, for example." She added, though, "What I say is let's own where we are. I think the great place for us to be is transitional. That means we're going to push to get to multicultural."

How to Reach Out

Many of the 25 people attending the meeting offered suggestions on how to bring more people into EC2C and to make it more multicultural.

Katie Pacyna, Data Manager for EC2C, suggested that EC2C "simplify and get a clear focus about what it is we're trying to do, not just in the broad long-term, but be very specific what the goal is in the short term and how individual organizations can contribute to that. Make it relatable to the organizations for the buy-in."

She used an example, "increasing reading proficiency," which has been the focus of a solution design team for the last 18 months. "We can communicate that very succinctly and help organizations, every partner, think through what it is they can do to contribute just to that, and that's enough for now. … It will help people immediately see how they can be related and involved in the work.

"People in the community could also bring ideas of how they might contribute," said Ms. Pacyna. "It will end in a much more diverse picture of what this problem-solving process would be like and be less restrictive," she said.

Rev. Efiom said, "I love that." She added, We're looking at how do we get from transitional to multicultural. Let's see where we were to begin with and celebrate that. Then let's prepare short-term goals to figure out

how to keep moving while celebrating where we're at."

Ms. Merry said, "I think we've operated from an, 'If you build it, they will come' model. And I think we need to move from [that model] to very intentionally reach out and engage people in a very conscious way, within organizations, consciously choosing people we think may bring a unique perspective, but I think it's true in the community more broadly as well."

Several other people said it was important to communicate with a broader audience, so people would feel invited even though they do not get a phone call; that deciding on the time and place for meetings was important, so more people could attend; that millenials need to be attracted; and that enlisting youth whom EC2C is designed to help to take to become part of the system as "change-makers" was important.

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