

Purpose:

To create environments that serve as catalysts in order for sub-cultures of all types to appreciate, accept and leverage human differences.

Key Principles:

Large-scale societal transformation comes about when a small percent of influential members of a group (8-10%, according to some social science research theorists) change their behavior radically. In order to bring about this radical change, a process was designed to create “cognitive dissonance” within the participants. In this context, heart-to-heart exchanges are the most powerful ones. Therefore, the program required activities that would bring people together in new ways, causing them to question unconscious, pre-conceived notions. “Breaking bread together” was seen as the most elegant idiom for how hearts could be swayed towards new unity and warmth through simple, genuine interaction.

Organization:

The Mosaic Partnerships program was designed with three levels of interaction, each with different purposes.

- 1. Meetings between partners:** Individual meetings are the heart of the program. These meetings are up to the partners themselves to organize and enjoy. Dialogue questions of increasing depth, specifically designed as a catalyst in developing their friendship, are given to the partners to work with during the course of the year.
- 2. Large Group Meetings:** All participants meet for interactive programs on various themes
- 3. Cluster Group Meetings:** Each partnership belongs to a “cluster group.” Meetings of cluster groups are small, so that themes and issues that arise in Large Group Meetings can be discussed in-depth and with full participation. Cluster Groups are run by coaches, who are carefully selected by the program organizers.

Meeting Themes

Friendship: The Program is founded around the simple idea that *friendship and fellowship*—when supported by broader economic, political and social institutions—have transformational powers within society.

The entire program is therefore designed to put people in contact who might never meet, and to encourage interaction between them at increasingly deeper, more intimate levels. The success of the individual partnerships relies on the participants themselves, who are encouraged to be creative in their approaches and advance at their own pace.

In early Large Group Meetings and Cluster Groups, partners begin the process of getting to know one another. As part of the program design, partners are given sets of dialogue questions to create increasing degrees of depth and intimacy. In organized meetings, and then on their own, partners are encouraged to use these questions as a way of forming and nurturing trust. As we

have seen through our successful sister program, The Biracial Partnerships Program, (see page 3) many of those partnerships blossomed into true friendships. People shared ideas, they have broken bread, and their families have met and spent leisure time together. There has been laughter—and sometimes tears—as the partners shared their life experiences over the course of the entire year.

Culture: In the segment on culture, participants are offered the following views:

That the culture of a Community resides in the minds and hearts of its people and is intergenerational; that cultural differences *can* be the source of misunderstanding—and worse—between people. Culture, in and of itself, need not become an impenetrable barrier that blocks basic human connection; rather, that cultural differences should be the source of pride and joy, as we celebrate the things that make ourselves and others unique.

With the Mosaic Partnerships program, the issue of race is explored in *terms of the concept of culture*. The American Anthropological Association’s *Statement on Race* is offered as a theoretical framework for the treatment of race in society.

In Large Group, Cluster Group, and individual meetings, partners are encouraged to inquire about each other’s cultural worlds. People look at their own sets of preconceived assumptions, at language differences, and social differences. In Large Group Meetings, parallels are drawn between family culture, work culture (which they identify, for themselves, in exercises), and broader societal culture. Partners are given sets of questions on cultural inquiry to work with as they see fit.

“The Other”: In this segment, participants consult on the meaning of social inclusion and exclusion. Social science tells us that in every human society, there are ways of defining the “us” and the “other.” The “other” can refer to someone outside of any “category of belonging,” from outsiders to the family, the town, the ethnic or religious group, the racial group, or the country. Commonly, the “other” is treated with distrust and suspicion.

In Large Group meetings, partners are asked to reflect on how we see the “other” in our own society. In eliminating racism, it is explained, it is our goal to dissolve the barriers that keep the “other” out of the realm of the “us.”

Monumental Ideals: Participants are reminded that the United States is unique in the way it inscribes its loftiest ideals of democracy and equality onto public monuments.

In Large Group, Cluster Group, and individual meetings, the program includes in-depth dialogue about our country’s most powerful and important ideals.

Participants are asked to reflect on the forces that drive us towards and away from these ideals and how sharing societal ideals (in action) helps cement our relationships with each other and break down the barriers between us.

Celebration of Diversity: This is the year-end meeting of the Mosaic Partnerships program. The participants come together in one large celebratory meeting in which there is a multi-media presentation that showcases how far the participants have come and highlights their experiences within the program.

Our Success Story – The Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress

In 2000, in the city of Rochester, New York, the Mayor’s Task Force on Race and Ethnicity made some very ambitious plans based on the principle that the most effective way of combating the terrible legacy of racism in this country is through the medium of individual relationships, where people come together heart-to-heart.

The program that emerged, Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress, is based on a philosophy that depends on the fundamental goodness and nobility of every human being, and counts on the fact that societal changes are most effectively set in motion through the initiative and empowerment of individuals. The program’s stated goal has been the “genesis of a prejudice-free region by 2010.”

Today, in Rochester, the Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress involves 160 persons from the leadership ranks of business, government, education, health care, social services, religion, and the news media. Two people of different racial and professional backgrounds are paired. They meet to develop friendships, form partnerships, and engender trust.

As envisioned in its design, the Biracial Partnerships Program began with the participation of community leaders and will expand, in coming years, to *every stratum and sector of the Region*.

Organizers and Participants for the Biracial Partnership Program

- The program has served leaders in the region of the city of Rochester (the third largest city in the state of New York, an area in which approximately 700,000 people reside.)
- The participants in the first year were Rochester-area leaders in government, business, education, religion, the police and sheriff’s department, and social welfare institutions.
- The project was commissioned by the Mayor of Rochester, funded in part by Rochester’s city budget, and created and implemented entirely through Idea Connections.
- Within Idea Connections, the project design drew from specialists in multiple fields, including: business, education, socio-cultural anthropology, organizational and culture development, interpersonal/organizational communication, leadership coaching, and multi-media.
- Coaches for the program, whose job it was to work with small clusters of partners during the course of the year, were carefully chosen. They came from backgrounds in psychology, social work, education, “diversity,” and business.

Program Evaluation – Biracial Partnerships for Community Progress

Numbers: There were 80 intact partnerships (made of 160 people). According to coaches, close to 80% of the partnerships met with a good degree of regularity.

In *questionnaires*, partners rated the partnering process itself fairly highly overall: 4.0+ on a 1-5 point scale. Higher or lower ratings from quarter to quarter appeared to depend on the expectations and hopes of individual partnerships. Overwhelmingly, partners wrote in feedback forms that they were enjoying building a friendship with their partner. They also wrote of personal insights gained from their new relationships. Some of which reflected the level of friendships achieved by the program. In some instances partners even shared in each other's important personal occasions, including holidays, birthdays and family vacations.

In the course of the year, the process was revised to be increasingly more participatory. Participants had expressed some dissatisfaction in meeting structure (some desiring more structure, others, less) and in meeting frequency (again, some desiring more, others fewer). Nearly all participants said that they had difficulty scheduling meetings, given their busy lives. At the same time, many participants (and coaches) expressed the desire to continue the program beyond the first year and into the next phase.