

Managing Community
Change Initiatives:
Bringing National Lessons to
The Kansas City Roundtable on
Access & Opportunity
(KCRT)

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**Experience from 20 years of
community change initiatives across
the country makes it clear that there
is no blueprint for an ambitious,
community-driven initiative to
improve community conditions and
outcomes for children and families,**

but...

...there are lessons about the principles that should guide the work and the challenges that will inevitably need to be managed in order for the initiative to succeed.

There are 5 important challenges that must be recognized and managed:

- ❖ **The Process/Product Tension**
- ❖ **The Race-Neutral/Race-Centric Tension**
- ❖ **The Inside/Outside Tension**
- ❖ **The Long-Term/Short-Term Tension**
- ❖ **The Pessimism/Optimism Tension**

The Process/Product Tension

On the one hand, we know that the success of the KCRT will depend on the sustained inclusion, participation and investment of a broad cross-section of stakeholders.

The Process/Product Tension

On the other hand, we know that people will get frustrated by excessive talk, meetings, committees, plans and outreach and will drop out if they don't see action, product or outcomes.

The Process/Product Tension

So the question is: How to gain and keep maximum stakeholder engagement and commitment while also being efficient in moving to outcomes?

The Race-Neutral/Race-Centric Tension

On the one hand, we know that if the KCRT effort is perceived as being targeted to people of color, we risk marginalizing it and we risk losing important constituencies, resources, and support.

The Race-Neutral/Race-Centric Tension

On the other hand, we know that if we do not recognize and take race into account -- specifically, the racial features of our history, public policies, and institutional practices -- we risk coming up with partial or inadequate solutions and neglecting the specific circumstances of people of color.

The Race-Neutral/Race-Centric Tension

So the question is: How do we address the racialized causes of the problems we are addressing, and the specific needs of people of color, while also keeping ALL constituencies on board and promoting universal policies and practices that will lift ALL boats?

The Inside/Outside Tension

On the one hand, we know that stakeholders in our neighborhoods, schools, and businesses sectors must lead and “own” the work of the Kansas City Roundtable on Access and Opportunity.

The Inside/Outside Tension

On the other hand, we know that the systemic nature of these problems means

that we need stimulus, political support, technical assistance and other resources from other sectors, from the larger Kansas City region, from the states, and from national entities.

The Inside/Outside Tension

So, the question is: How can we strategically include people, institutions and other resources that are beyond the schools, local employers, community organizations, etc., to help move us toward our goal, without losing local ownership, knowledge and commitment? How do we align insiders and outsiders for maximum impact?

The Long-Term/Short-Term Tension

On one hand, we recognize that the problems of poverty, poor education, low or lousy employment, and race have deep roots, and it will take a long time for the KCRT to make significant progress on them.

The Long-Term/Short-Term Tension

On the other hand, we want to see some change as soon as possible, both because each life is precious, and because we want to demonstrate to the community that change is possible.

The Long-Term/Short-Term Tension

So the question is: How do we simultaneously tackle the entrenched structural and institutional problems in our educational and employment systems while also achieving some early wins?

The Pessimism/Optimism Tension

On one hand, we all feel like we've been here before and we've seen efforts like the KCRT come on the scene, consume a lot of energy and good will, and then deliver less than they promised or fizzle out. So, what's different this time?

The Pessimism/Optimism Tension

On the other hand, we genuinely sense a new political, economic and social “moment” right now in Kansas City, and we know that this group assembled here CAN make it work if we believe in the process and maintain the sense of urgency.

The Pessimism/Optimism Tension

So the question is: How do we respect the what our skeptical side is saying and use it wisely and productively so that we all keep faith in this initiative? How do we all deliver on our responsibility as leaders of the KCRT to ensure that it achieves its enormous potential?

The commitment
and capacity are
here in
Kansas City,
and it CAN be done here.

THE END