

2012 RACIAL EQUITY AGENDA

A Roadmap for Community Organizers and Leaders in Minnesota



MINNESOTA IS AT A CROSSROADS

We need a strategic plan for racial equity. As communities quickly become multiracial and multicultural, disparities persist in education, housing, employment, and other key opportunities. How do we begin to dismantle these structural inequities and build truly inclusive communities? What can we do at all levels of community engagement—from neighborhood leaders to legislators and the governor—to achieve the racial and economic equity that will make our state stronger?

2011 brought gridlock, a state government shutdown, and inequitable budget decisions. Let's look ahead to 2012 and make equity a priority. We have a vision. Minnesota's communities of color have solutions

that will move us all forward. These solutions require organizing strategies that address multiple layers of accountability, including local and county governments, school boards, state departments, the legislature, and the governor.

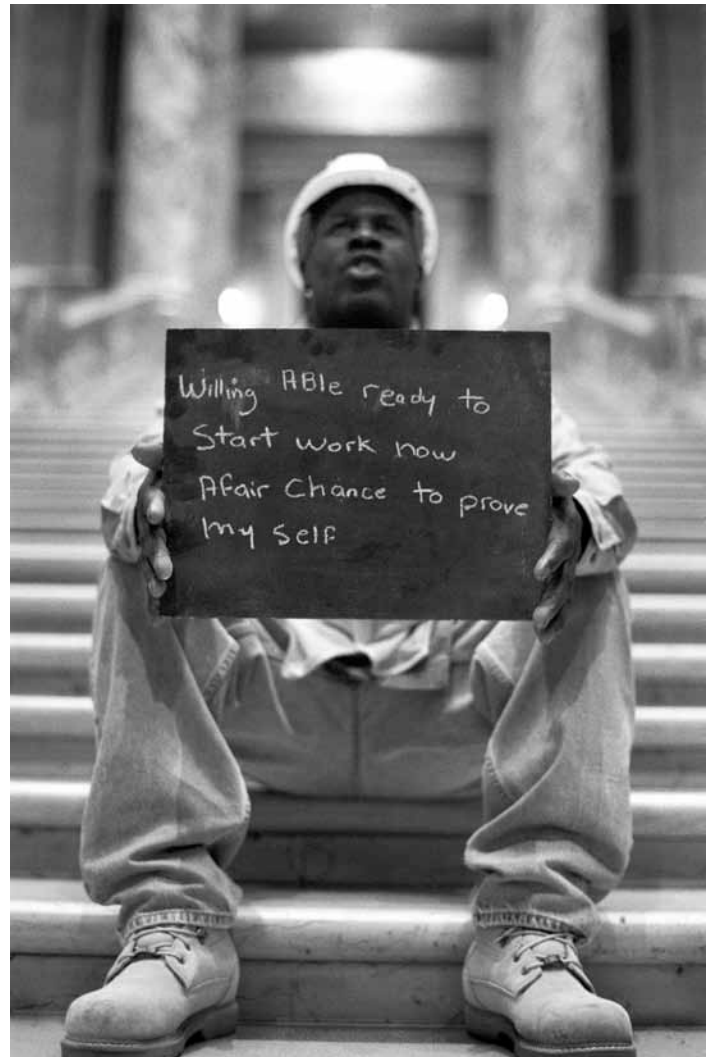
OAP's Racial Equity Agenda draws on the voices of communities of color and the agenda-building work of ally organizations. Our aim is to hold up those voices and make the connections between them. Many groups are thinking on the same page. We want to build the organizing strength, among individuals and organizations, to be sure we are also acting together.

CREATE JOBS AND BUILD THE ECONOMY BY INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL AND COMMUNITIES

- **Build more than a stadium.** If we invest public dollars in a Vikings stadium—any amenity or infrastructure, for that matter—ensure the participation of underrepresented communities in contracting and job development. The debate around the Vikings stadium raises questions about priorities and our ability to muster resources, even in a difficult economy. Could we devote that kind of creativity and energy to building equity? In the meantime, if a stadium project becomes reality, it must become an opportunity for creating jobs and opportunity for those groups most impacted by the economic downturn. Communities of color face disproportionately high unemployment rates. Let's take the opportunity if it arises and use it to close this gap.
- **Offer a true second chance.** An important opportunity for people with a criminal record is a fresh start. Having the chance to land a job and get on the road to self-sufficiency is the first step. Remove questions about criminal records from initial employment applications—and remove a significant barrier to landing a job.
- **Make transit work for communities.** As millions of dollars flow into the Twin Cities region for public transit development, let's make sure we get the full value of this investment. Development along transit corridors is an opportunity to build racial and economic equity through job and wealth creation, stable affordable housing, and business development. Do not allow transit to cut off opportunities.

CLOSE THE EQUITY GAP IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

- **Place equity at the center of measuring excellence.** OAP and the Education Equity Organizing Collaborative are working with the Minnesota Department of Education to develop standards and strategies for equity in schools. Changing how we define excellence to hold up practices that educate and nurture the strengths of all students will turn our attention to gaps in equity, rather than achievement. We believe the result will be better outcomes for all students.
- **Integration funding supports equity.** One element of achieving equity is being sure that education opportunities are truly inclusive. Minnesota's integration revenue funding program is about to end, to be replaced by a program not yet defined. Members of the state's appointed task force and the legislature should place a priority on integrated, inclusive communities—those that make opportunities available to students no matter where they live, and that build environments that respect culture and learning styles. Any new vision for integration revenue funding should support these equity goals.



MAKE HEALTH CARE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE

- **Support an equitable Health Benefits Exchange.** The planning for Minnesota's Health Benefits Exchange program required by the federal Affordable Care Act is underway. This program has the potential to open doors to accessibility and affordability by providing consumers with information about health insurance benefits and costs. But that promise depends upon whether policymakers are attentive to the details: using the tool to demand both high quality care and good value for consumers, and making sure that the system is user-friendly. With exchanges being developed in states across the country, let's be sure Minnesota's Health Benefits Exchange is a model for equity.

END FINANCIAL DISCRIMINATION

- **The foreclosure crisis is an equity crisis.** Communities of color have experienced generations of financial discrimination, from mortgage lending to insurance. The current foreclosure crisis is a culmination of that discrimination, and has hit communities of color especially hard. It is time to reform financial structures, both public and private, so that they work equitably to allow all communities access to financial opportunities and the chance to build wealth for generations to come. Lenders should be transparent in working with homeowners. Policymakers must ensure standards and accountability of our financial institutions.

LISTEN TO THE HUMAN STORIES OF IMMIGRATION

- **Exclusion destroys communities.** Minnesotans should reject efforts to adopt Arizona- and Alabama-like policies that create a culture of exclusion, result in racial profiling, and limit the ability of immigrants to fully engage in their communities. Immigrants are responsible for substantial economic growth in communities throughout Minnesota. Denying their full participation in society, denies these many gifts.
- **Recognize the reality of immigrant experiences and open the door to opportunities.** Programs like the Dream Act (adopted in California in 2011) would allow undocumented immigrants access to higher education at state institutions. Young people, undocumented or documented, seek life-changing experiences like education, and to deny them runs counter to our vision of a country built by immigrants and touting its many opportunities.

PROTECT PARTICIPATION IN OUR DEMOCRACY

- **Photo ID requirement would suppress voting.** The push for requiring photo identification for access to the polls may come up again in 2012, this time as a proposal for a constitutional amendment. Voter fraud is rare—no one was convicted of voter impersonation in Minnesota in 2008. But the ID requirement creates a significant barrier to voting for the estimated 140,000 Minnesotans without photo identification.
- **Notification helps people understand their rights, but opening the door to voting is even better.** Of the small number of mistaken votes, most are the result of former felons who wrongly vote while still on probation or parole, after having served their sentence. Fair notice of rights would help prevent this from occurring. But even more effective would be the end of disenfranchisement for people on probation. Participation in voting can be an important part of re-entering a community. Minnesota should join the trend of 21 states that allow probationers to vote.

USE RESOURCES TO OPEN OPPORTUNITY AND BUILD EQUITY

- **Raise revenues fairly.** Tax policy must reflect the reality that some Minnesotans can contribute more to a healthy state economy than others. Under our current structure, the wealthiest contribute a smaller proportion of income to the common good than do low and middle income earners. Progressive taxation would change this and build an inclusive economy that invests in our infrastructure, the moving parts that make our communities work well—good schools, health care, social services, transit. Increasing taxes based on ability to pay makes sense and supports the things that make a community whole.
- **Do not take budgeting responsibility away from the legislature.** Proposals for a Constitutional amendment to limit budgeting authority would result in less accountability on the part of legislators. Constitutionally creating spending limits or requiring a supermajority to pass tax increases takes responsibility out of the hands of elected representatives. Legislators would not have the flexibility to respond to constituent concerns or current issues, and could also hide behind a Constitutional mandate.



GIVE VOICE TO COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

- **Minnesota's state councils of color link communities to government.** In 2012, a review commission will recommend to the governor and legislature whether the four state councils—the Indian Affairs Council, the Council on Black Minnesotans, the Chicano Latino Affairs Council, and the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans—should continue. The legislature voted in 2011 for a presumptive sunset of each council in 2013. With political representation that is yet to catch up to population changes, all four councils provide an important voice for our growing communities of color.

DEMAND LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

- **Build support for confirmation of commissioners.** Several commissioners in key departments that are important to advancing equity, including the Commissioners of Education, Health, and Human Rights, face a confirmation process this year. We must remember the significant role of appointed Commissioners and speak out in support of those who are working to advance racial and economic equity.
- **Make equity a central issue in the election year.** 2012 provides an opportunity to hold legislators accountable for leading to dismantle structural inequities and for building a society where opportunities are truly available. It is also an opportunity to identify new leadership for equity. Organizing around shared strategies will give candidates the chance to hear the voices of communities of color.



Organizing Apprenticeship Project

Organizing Apprenticeship Project advances racial, cultural, social, and economic justice through organizing, public policy, and collaborative strategies by:

- Providing community organizing and racial justice leadership training for individuals and organizations.
- Creating research and policy tools that help community leaders and organizing groups address issues of equity.
- Convening multiracial strategy groups that collaborate to develop thoughtful approaches for achieving equity.

We are building capacity through a network of organizations, organizers, and advocates who care about advancing equity in Minnesota. We recognize that issues are interconnected, and work to promote an analysis that examines how community and policy decisions impact racial, cultural, social and economic justice. Education, economic opportunity, health, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, public transportation, criminal justice—these are issues that matter to all Minnesotans. We work with communities to build equity into all of these conversations.

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Photographs by Wing Young Huie