

“Partnership is a verb, not a noun”

Documenting the Journey of the Kujichagulia Partnership

A government-nonprofit-community partnership of
Ramsey County, the Cultural Wellness Center, and the African American community
to address racial disparities

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“Partnership is a verb. It isn’t a noun.

It’s really about partnering, exchange, working through it.”

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Introduction

The Kujichagulia (Self Determination) Project is a unique partnership between Ramsey County, the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center (CWC), and the Ramsey County African American community to provide culturally specific services to African American participants in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). The project was undertaken after Ramsey County identified significant disparities in employment, sanction, and exit rates for African Americans utilizing MFIP for income support. The County acknowledged that its traditional service model was not working for African American families, and it approached African American community elders for guidance in creating a model that would increase the effectiveness of services and address outcomes disparities. Their work resulted in the Kujichagulia project.

Kujichagulia
[koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah]
(Self-Determination):
To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

Traditionally, Ramsey County uses a “top down” approach to partnerships in which the County identifies a service delivery strategy and issues a “Request for Proposals” (RFP) to select contractual partners to carry out the identified strategy. In this project, however, the County first went to the African American community to identify how to reduce disparities for African American MFIP participants. The Community, in turn, researched strategies and initiated a relationship with the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center. The Community then worked to create partnership between the County and the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center. The plan developed and recommended by the Community and adopted by County included community change, long term engagement strategy, and the underlying purpose of self determination: *Kujichagulia*.

Ramsey County and the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center together conceived a pilot to facilitate a process change in the African American community that would place welfare reform inside the larger community goal of creating more stable and stronger families. The purpose of the project is to help African American families move from dependence on government support to independence and self-sufficiency, and make sure they are able to define themselves, name themselves, create for themselves and speak for themselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others.

This paper, undertaken by the Humphrey Institute consulting team tells the story of the partnership between Ramsey County, the Cultural Wellness Center, and the African American community. Through interviews, focus groups, document research and the structured observation of meetings, it documents the partnership’s journey, discusses its challenges and strengths, and concludes by discussing the Kujichagulia Partnership’s small wins in the big fight to eliminate racial disparities.

Background

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP): The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) began in January of 1998 replacing the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) entitlement program. It is funded by federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant and Minnesota state appropriations. MFIP provides temporary assistance to help families move off of welfare. It provides cash assistance and employment services to eligible families. MFIP also provides a food support component replacing a former Food Stamp program. A person can receive MFIP assistance for up to 60 months. Some participants may continue receiving benefits beyond 60 months if they have significant documented barriers to employment. Studies published by Ramsey County in 2003 showed troubling disparities between MFIP participants from different cultural groups, including a proportionate increase in the number of African Americans on the program, and higher proportionate sanction rates for African Americans. These issues and others will be discussed more thoroughly later in the report.

Project Structure. The Kujichagulia project is a partnership between Ramsey County, the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center, and the African American community of Ramsey County to improve MFIP outcomes and strengthen the larger African American community of Ramsey County. Leadership in the Kujichagulia partnership includes stakeholders from Ramsey County and the Cultural Wellness Center, and other partners include staff from the Saint Paul YWCA, the African American Leadership Council, and the Council on Black Minnesotans. Members of the Partnership committee meet monthly to discuss operation of the project, evaluate the effectiveness of the project, triage any concerns or issues, identify areas of potential improvement, and make decisions that support the partnership. A collaborative unit of Workforce Solutions Employment Services Counselors and the Cultural Wellness Center Navigators team carry out the frontline work. (See Appendix A for an organizational chart of the partnership.)

Umoja (Unity)
To strive for and to maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

Government Partner: Workforce Solutions. Workforce Solutions is the administrative entity for the jobs and training programs operating under the authority of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. Workforce Solutions is expected to be a leader in effectively moving people into employment by managing a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of its two customers – job seekers and employers. It partners with many community-based organizations to provide services such as career counseling, outplacement, job placement and youth development services.

Nonprofit Partner: the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center. The Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center (CWC) is a 501(c)(3) that defines itself as a cultural community-based research and knowledge-producing institution. Its mission is to “unleash the power of citizens to heal themselves and build community.” The CWC was incorporated in October 1996 as the continuation of “Healthy Powderhorn”, a large-scale two-year community health

organizing initiative. At the time the Kujichagulia partnership began, the CWC was located in the Powderhorn Phillips neighborhood of south Minneapolis, Hennepin County. The CWC recently opened a Ramsey County location on the east side of Saint Paul.

The CWC’s broad definition of health includes economic, community, and cultural health, as well as physical. It views community health broadly as a resource for daily life. The work of the CWC is based on their “People’s Theory”, developed out of conversations with hundreds of people from different cultural groups. This theory says that “Individualism and loss of community and culture make us sick.” The CWC’s work is focused on creating healthy communities by reconnecting individuals with their cultural heritage and with practices that lead to wholeness and self sufficiency. Three strategies are used at the CWC to implement their approach to building capacity and reinforcing a community care-giving system: health education, Cultural Health Action Teams (CHATs), and community partnerships.

One model used by the CWC, included in the Kujichagulia Partnership, is Community Systems Navigators (CSN) approach, which aims to increase the effectiveness of institutions working to improve community health. Navigators are CWC employees who share the culture and experience of its members. They strive to help families reconnect to their culture and heritage as a resource for attaining self-sufficiency and self-reliance by connecting members to community resources and cultural elders, building Action Teams, cultural and kinship networks; participating in birthing teams; facilitating circles of support; and providing home visitation, consistent follow up, and community organizing.

Ujima
(Collective Work and Responsibility)
To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.

Community Partner: Cultural Consultants. Ramsey County contracted with two elders from the Ramsey County African American community, Mary K. Boyd and Kwame McDonald, as “cultural consultants” to facilitate their community’s planning process to redesign MFIP. Boyd was identified because of her long leadership history in the Saint Paul school district. In addition, Boyd’s work as an interim manager in Ramsey County Child Protection had shown her effectiveness in helping to bridge a gap between the community and the county. Boyd recommended Kwame McDonald as an additional partner in community consultant work. In their initial contracts, each cultural consultant agreed “to assist the African American community to develop a plan that includes strategies to help African American MFIP families reach the programs goals.” Because the consultants ended up playing an important role in sustaining the work of the Partnership, the County renewed their contract several times to provide services in convening African American community leadership in regards to the work of welfare reform in Ramsey County, and to help facilitate communication between the community leadership, Ramsey County, and the CWC.

Methodology

Consulting Group Composition.

The consulting group who undertook this project was made up of five master’s level students at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. Two students were studying public policy, two studying public administration, and one studying urban planning; two of the five students were also pursuing Master Degrees in Social Work.

The consultants came from a variety of perspectives:

- Two were mid-career professionals, three were young professionals.
- Two members were from India, studying in the United States during the academic year of 2007 -2008. Three students were from the Midwestern United States.
- Two members were women and three were men.
- Three were government employees, two were experienced in nonprofit community work.

The group kept their diverse perspectives on the table throughout the consulting process and expressed their differences in viewpoint throughout the data collection and analysis. As a collaborative group, the members tested alternative hypotheses, as well as compared and contrasted each one’s views and interpretations. The group used the diversity within its membership as a microcosm of the diversity within the Kujichagulia partnership and feel that this produced a balanced perspective of the journey of the partnership: marking milestones, and identifying what is working and what is challenging.

Main sources of data.

Through interviews, participant-observations of meetings, focus groups, and document analysis, the consultants triangulated multiple data sources.

Interviews: Early in the research design the consultants conducted a stakeholder analysis of the Kujichagulia Partnership: Partnership members suggested names of interviewees and the group supplemented with results from the stakeholder analysis. Consultants interviewed twenty-two individuals: County Program Managers, evaluators, community consultants and partners, frontline workers from both County (Employment Services Counselors) and Cultural Wellness Center (Navigators), Cultural Wellness Center directors, and County Commissioners were many of those identified as stakeholders and made up a large portion of the interviewees. (See Appendix B for interview protocol.)

Participant-observations: The consultant group also attended several Partnership meetings as participants. A portion of the consultant group attended three Partnership meetings. The group also met separately with directors from each organization (County and CWC) and recorded minutes from those meetings.

Focus groups: Two semi-structured focus groups were conducted in order to capture front line staff experience. One with Navigators from the Cultural Wellness Center and one with employment services counselors from Ramsey County who work with Kujichagulia participants.

Document analysis: Documents from both county and Cultural Wellness Center were collected and reviewed by the consulting group. Documents reviewed included: annual reports, minutes from meetings, internal communications, emails, evaluation reports and data. Over 100 documents were reviewed by the consultants with each member systematically going over each document to identify important themes and points in the evolution of the Partnership.

Analytical Process

The consultant group worked in collaboration with “clients” – both County and CWC – to determine research questions. At least two group members attended each interview – one as questioner, one as transcriber. Due to culturally-specific nature of the Partnership under study, the group determined the roles of interviewer/ transcriber by having group members from India (from non-dominant-U.S. culture) as lead interviewer as way to prevent replication of dominant U.S. power relationships from biasing results. Most of the interviews were conducted in the community, workplace or other location of choice of the interviewee. Two group members representing government and community lenses reviewed early documents and interviews to generate broad themes. Then each group member combed through data sources to pull out evidence supporting themes. The final result was a meeting of many minds describing the journey of this partnership, its strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Limitations

While the consultants feel that they completed a thorough study of the Kujichagulia Partnership and have exceeded the original expectations of the project, there are some limitations of the research design that should be acknowledged:

- The time period of this project was limited --- ideally, the group would have attended all meetings over the course of a year.
- Direct interviews were not conducted with Kujichagulia participants to get their perspectives of how the Partnership impacts their experience on MFIP.
- Interviews were not conducted with participants in traditional MFIP services to compare their impressions and see if any differences.
- All of County Commissioners interviewed were supporters of the Kujichagulia Partnership project in the most recent contract discussions.

Documenting the Journey, 2002 - present

For ease of understanding and analysis, the journey of the Kujichagulia partnership has been divided into three phases:

- I. Planning the Service Redesign (September 2002 – October 2003), which documents the planning process that led to the initial contract between Ramsey County and the Cultural Wellness Center
- II. Building the Partnership (November 2003 – May 2007), which describes the activities and events that happened from the signing of the first contract through the pivotal partnership retreat that took place in August of 2007
- III. Showing Results (June 2007 – April 2008), which details the workings of the partnership after that retreat, through the spring of 2008.

Phase I: Planning the Service Redesign

Initiating Service Redesign Planning. In September 2002, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and Community Human Services undertook joint planning to determine what had been learned in first years of Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) that could inform a redesign of services. County staff decided that part of the examination would include a look at outcomes by race and ethnicity.

Rather than interpret the results by itself, the County had the community respond to the data after it was analyzed. In October, the County convened two rounds of informal consultations with people of color who understood the welfare system, understood the County service delivery system, or worked in agencies that served low income families to get their response to the data showing racial disparities in outcomes. The purpose of these consultations was to consider what changes in operations and service delivery could better serve people of color on MFIP in Ramsey County. Many suggestions were put forth in the meetings, including:

- Hire more people who know these communities and how they operate.
- Hire a person to work in the community as a consultant between the community and the County.
- Contract with community people to begin to establish trust. Workers and leaders must shift their thinking away from long-term case management and instead think about nurturing, compassion, and spirituality.
- Utilize people in communities of color as consultants or as an advisory council, for further planning and redesign of MFIP.
- Get the system into the community.

- Utilize community-based agencies and organizations to assist with job services. Partnerships can be formed.
- Remember policy advocacy, as well as service delivery.
- Share power with other organizations trying to make a commitment. Peer to peer works. People trust others who look like and speak like they do.

The overriding message from these consultations was that the County must turn to the community for solutions that would address disparities.

In November 2002, County staff took a draft “Redesign Plan” to the Welfare Reform Team, a group of community members from outside the county with experience in the welfare program. Two key messages emerged from these meeting: the recent national elections indicated that plans should be built on fewer resources, and the proposed effort did not go far enough to turn the design of strategies over to cultural communities. It was suggested that the county would make more headway in connecting with the community if, instead of going out in to the community themselves, they enlisted some trusted people in the community to convene conversations about the issue. A County Planner and the MFIP Program Manager took the lead on the project. They began to connect with community members and get recommendations for individuals who had the good standing and respect within their communities to facilitate community-based planning for redesigning MFIP.

In January of 2003, the County published a document titled *Looking at outcomes in welfare by Race in Ramsey County*, compiled by its Office of Performance Measurement and Evaluation, which looked at how people of different races and ethnicities had fared under welfare reform in Ramsey County. The document detailed the following major findings:

- Comparing 1997 and 2002 caseloads showed that the proportion of white participants had decreased by 9 percent, and the proportion of African American participants had increased by 9 percent. The proportion of other major racial or ethnic groups as part of the total caseload did not change much in the five years.
- A lower percentage of African American and American Indian families were able to leave MFIP as a result of employment compared to participants overall.
- African American families made up the highest number of those nearing the five year time limit set by MFIP, with high numbers of extensions and closed cases.
- About half of the families denied extensions were African American.
- African American families had the highest number (35) of extensions for serious mental health problems and for illness affecting either the parent or a family member needing significant care.
- Sanction rates were highest for American Indians and African Americans.

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved a plan in February 2003 that authorized the hiring of community consultants to lead community-based planning in the African American and American Indian communities, which were experiencing the greatest

disparities. By approving this plan, the Commissioners acknowledged their understanding that recommendations from the community would come back to the Board for action.

Community Planning Process. The community planning process was launched in the spring of 2003. The County asked two respected leaders from the Ramsey County African American community to lead community-based planning. Both were clear that they were willing, but also that they were risking their reputations if Ramsey County undertook a superficial or window dressing effort and nothing came of the planning and recommendations. Each of the two leaders signed a contract through which the County purchased the services of the contractor “to assist the African American community develop a plan that includes strategies to help African American MFIP families reach the programs goals” (see Appendix C for contract work plan). The services were to be provided by June 30, 2003.

The two consultants held many one-on-one conversations throughout the community before facilitating two community-wide meetings held at a historically African American community center in St. Paul. The meeting flyer listed the following sponsors: African American community members, Ramsey County, and the St. Paul Public Schools’ Family and Community Involvement Office as the sponsors. The meeting notice was titled, “A Call to Action,” and said,

“Ramsey County recognizes that African American families are experiencing much poorer outcomes than other racial and ethnic groups in MFIP. As members of the African American community in Ramsey County, we can work together to develop ways to more effectively serve our people.”

The meetings began with a half hour of food and conversation. Then one consultant offered words of welcome and an introduction, and the second consultant explained the philosophy of Kujichagulia, which is one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa that comprise a communitarian African philosophy. Kujichagulia is Swahili for “self-determination,” and it means, “To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others. Also, doing for self.” Next, a reverend offered an opening prayer and another community member led the singing of the Black National Anthem (“Lift Every Voice and Sing”). Finally, the large group broke into small conversation circles to consider the following questions:

- Have you received help in your life at any time? If so, who helped you, and how?
- What does it take for an African American who is on MFIP to move from welfare to independence?
- How can our African American Family and Community tighten up and pull together to support independence by helping one another?

In addition to these community-wide gatherings, a small group also met several times to investigate various approaches and develop a cohesive strategy to encourage MFIP participants to become self-sufficient. It was in the middle of this phase that the group heard about the work of Atum Azzahir, the Director of the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness

Center, and the culturally-rooted approach to social services she had pioneered in Minneapolis. After much discussion, the group agreed that, to be lasting, culture had to be part of the solution to the issues and problems presented. The group felt that Azzahir’s wisdom and ability to motivate people in her community to take responsibility for their own success, along with her experience working with MFIP participants in Hennepin County, should serve as a foundation for their recommended solution to moving African Americans in the direction of self-determination.

In August, the County Human Services Department asked for letters of support from the planning committee as tangible information for the Commissioners about who endorsed the proposed project and strategy (see Appendix D). A letter from the lead County planner to the CWC’s Director noted that the letters of support were critical because they were requesting to bypass the traditional competitive request for proposals process. African American leaders from the following organizations submitted letters of support for efforts of the community consultants’ process and for the work of Atum Azzahir:

- St Paul Urban League Fathers and Families Project
- Minnesota Education League
- YWCA St. Paul
- African American Leadership Council
- Council on Black Minnesotans
- Hallie Q. Brown Community Center
- St. Paul Urban League

These letters said the community consultants had heard, documented and presented the voices of the community to the decision-makers. The letters reiterated that, during the community meetings, the African American community had expressed a desire for nontraditional ways to address the issues of MFIP and self-sufficiency. The African American leadership believed that Azzahir’s work through the Cultural Wellness Center would bring “a fresh, effective, and holistic approach [to] dealing with welfare in the African American community,” and that “This effort is one that will succeed because the community is involved and accountable.”

The African American Self-Determination Project appeared as new business on the October 21, 2003 agenda for the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners meeting. The project was presented by both Workforce Solutions and Community Health Services as an initiative to address MFIP racial disparities in Ramsey County that would be funded with one million dollars, set aside in the MFIP redesign process to support culturally-based work in the African American and American Indian communities. County staff was requesting that the Board approve the agreement with the Cultural Wellness Center, authorize the County Program Manager to negotiate the contract and any modifications or extensions, and authorize the County Program Manager to make necessary budget adjustments. During the Board’s discussion of the proposal, one Commissioner raised concerns about the absence of details in the documentation regarding project outcomes. The MFIP Program Manager responded that the project is directed at the self-sufficiency outcome, which was consistent

with the State’s request that the County improve those outcomes. The Program Manager went on to explain that the planning process identified a multi-level strategy that works with African American families, but also works for system changes, and said, “It is very difficult to set outcomes for that.” Because the contract had not yet been drafted, the Commissioners unanimously approved the proposals with the stated caveat that County staff would follow-up to show them which outcomes and baselines were identified.

Phase II: Building the Partnership

The First Contract. The contract drafted by County Planners and signed by the Cultural Wellness Center was in the amount of \$375, 000 per year for the period of November 1, 2003 through December 31, 2006 (see Appendix E). It named two outcomes: an overall system outcome “for which the entire Ramsey County MFIP system is responsible,” related to the self-support index for African American MFIP participants, and an overall project outcome that Ramsey County services staff will more effectively engage African American participant women and men in services that are intended to lead to increasing self sufficiency.

The Cultural Wellness Center agreed that its Community Systems Navigators would provide culturally-based advocacy, classes, and one-on-one and group mentoring to 500 MFIP families who self-identified as African American. Additionally, the CWC would work with other agencies and individuals in the African American community to develop a network of support, as well as provide trainings, coaching, and feedback for County staff to enhance the approaches they used to work with African American participants. Finally, the contract specified that the CWC would assist Ramsey Count MFIP in meeting the overall system and project outcomes.

During the first quarter of 2004, Ramsey County management-level staff attended sessions at the Wellness Center facilitated by Azzahir that were intended to create introspection and help participants understand the fundamentals of the CWC’s approach. However, it proved difficult to keep attendance up because the County staff saw the CWC’s sessions as an “extra” to the already heavy workload they were experiencing after implementation of the Redesign plan.

In the meantime, the CWC sponsored various activities and workshops for community members and organizations. They conducted education sessions with low income African Americans at a St. Paul library and identified Ramsey County residents who were to be mentors and system navigators. The CWC also called together staff from nonprofit agencies to facilitate self-examination of the ways their agencies could help African Americans find support outside the public assistance system. Through the CWC’s African American “Heritage Keys to Self Care” class, elders gave participants “nurturing, but confrontational direct teachings to give up dependency on welfare to comply with a cultural law” which aimed to increase the self-determination of participants by connecting with their cultural heritage. While related to the partnership with the County in philosophy, it was unclear

whether these activities and the reported numbers addressed Ramsey County MFIP recipients, or a broader set of CWC participants.

In June of 2004, County staff held a workshop for the Board of Commissioners to update them on activities approved as part of the broad MFIP service redesign aimed at addressing racial disparities in outcomes. County staff presented the work as a partnership between Ramsey County and key communities within the county working together on the same goal: helping families leave welfare and thrive. Staff made a point to say that the partnership requires internal change to the County service system, external change to County government and within communities, and ongoing dialogue between the County and the community. The culturally-based community partnerships were presented as a way to help the system as a whole achieve outcomes, as well as to inform internal work. The CWC Director presented the “Theory of Health”, and the community consultants joined her to update the Commissioners. They reported that participant groups and a community group were underway, that they were reconvening the leadership who recommended this strategy, and that planning had taken place for CWC-led groups to be part of MFIP front-end services.

During the summer of 2004, the County and the CWC agreed that creating special staff meetings at the CWC was not working, and that it would be more successful to bring CWC staff into County working meetings. The CWC Director and a Navigator attended budget planning meetings, diversionary work program planning sessions, sanction policy review sessions, and other internal county meetings.

The CWC’s participation in the County’s planning around adjusting sanctions practices led to a proposal that the Navigators experiment with culturally-informed outreach practices to better connect with MFIP participants in danger of sanction. It was decided that the CWC would be teamed with one Workforce Solutions employment counseling unit to pilot the sanctions model, and other participants throughout the system would continue to receive standard public health outreach services.

During 2004, while the County re-signed the two cultural consultants through the end of the year to assist with communication and ease potential tensions, the Self-Determination project was primarily lead by the CWC Director, and the County Planner and MFIP Program Manager who had spearheaded the community-planning efforts. At one mid-year meeting regarding the project’s next steps, the question of defining success was raised, and the need was expressed to have a meeting and draw up some of the specifics around evaluation of the Self-Determination project.

By the end of 2004, the CWC had five Community Systems Navigators, five Elders, one graduating class of 35 people, 100 participating members, and nine new babies delivered with family and community support in place. However, it remained unclear whether or not the CWC’s participants were also MFIP beneficiaries.

The County signed another contract with the cultural consultants for the year of 2005. This time, the scope of services was to further the work in addressing racial disparities in MFIP by: convening African American community leadership in regard to the work of welfare reform in Ramsey County, and to help facilitate communication between the community leadership, Ramsey County, and the CWC.

At a January 2005 meeting, an agreement on how to proceed with the project for the year was reached between the CWC Director, the County Planner, and the new Program Manager. It was agreed that Ramsey County would bring together a group of cultural partners, including the CWC, to help craft a mission, vision, and values statement, and then meet with a group of Employment Services providers to get their input on what they would like to do with the vision.

During this time, the CWC Director continued outreach in the African American community by presenting to the African American Leadership Council and attempting to spur cohesive thinking about what they were trying to do. The CWC was also making an effort to track the 75 families with whom they had worked to determine which member, if any, from each family was on MFIP. The CWC continued to describe its role as an educating organization, and said their focus was on changing behaviors and attitudes, and on getting people to think and talk to each other. Ideas were still being generated for how to bring the CWC’s work into the broader MFIP system, and the CWC Director’s advice was that working together and collaborating as a team should be the key theme for staff to understand and accept.

During the summer of 2005, the previously proposed sanctions outreach pilot model was put into action. The relatively new County Program Manager who had not been involved with the planning of the project informed one of her Workforce Solutions supervisors that his unit had been identified to participate in this pilot with the CWC, but there had been no definition of how the pilot would be implemented.

The Workforce Solutions Employment Service Counselors were coming off two years of frustration with the larger MFIP Redesign of 2003. The planning staff had come up with a redesigned service process, but they did not figure out how to transition smoothly between the old and new processes. The Redesign had cut contracts with many MFIP vendors, going from 15 to 5 agencies, and overwhelming County staff with files from the agencies whose contracts had been eliminated. Additionally, the redesign had created a model in which public health nurses did outreach for clients at risk of sanction. In practice, this model left Employment Services Counselors dependent on the information gathered by the outreach workers, and created a time lag between a clients’ noncompliant behavior and the actual sanction. This made sanctions difficult to explain and left Employment Services Counselors to deal with justifiably upset and angry clients. In 2005, Workforce Solutions had begun to look at changing this process. On the surface, the proposed pilot project with the CWC looked like the Workforce Solutions Supervisor was being asked to replicate the previous lack of planning that had frustrated staff before.

Without a concrete structure for the pilot in place, and unwilling to ask his staff to revisit a model that had already frustrated them, the Supervisor devised a structure based on his interpretation of what the contract said the CWC and the County were doing together. The Supervisor and the CWC Director did not know each other, so the CWC was put off when the European American male Supervisor came to the CWC with a seemingly set structure for the pilot that had been created without their input. The Supervisor’s intentions were to provide clarity for his own staff, but in that process, he did not communicate well to the CWC that the model for the pilot could be a discussion and negotiation. Thus the working relationship of the CWC Navigators and the County Employment Services Counselors continued on shaky ground.

In late September 2005, a meeting was convened to prepare for the departure of the County Planner, who had played a key leadership role in taking the issue of disparities to the community and carrying out the work of the Self-Determination project. The meeting summarized the project’s current status. Several ideas were generated for how to proceed, but little action was taken. The meeting ended with “What are the next steps?” and “Who will do ‘the work’ of all this?” as open questions. The concluding thought was that the group needed “a breath of awareness,” and that they would reconvene to determine how to make the work more intentional.

During that meeting, it was also noted that the Sanction Outreach Pilot, which had been designed as a way for Navigators to reach out to parents who are out of compliance before they go into sanction, had become problematic. The CWC did not trust the County because of the way the Supervisor had handed them a predetermined model for the pilot. The CWC was very concerned about not being seen as an agent of the County, and the importance it placed on maintaining its independent status in the eyes of the community manifested itself in the Navigators’ reluctance to share information with the County Employment Service Counselors. Additionally, there were strong sensitivities among some European American County staff about the message of some CWC materials. County staff were told by their Supervisor to make referrals to the CWC, so they did, but the lack of feedback from the CWC about Employment Service Counselors’ clients impeded the development of trust between the two groups of workers who were supposed to be functioning as a team. Leadership on both sides agreed that addressing the tension was the very essence of the work the project was about.

The proposed 2006 work plan, which was seen as an opportunity to educate and re-orient people regarding the work, included the following activities:

- Public relations
- Talking meetings
- More orientations and overviews
- Expanded networking

- Presentations to key stakeholders, including the community, the Board of Commissioners, and other sectors
- Creation of education circles
- Development of partnerships that are focused on innovative entrepreneurial and workforce development strategies as a path to independence from government systems
- Continuing to look at the most effective way to capture the stories of the Navigators’ work

These activities were focused primarily around developing increased visibility in the community. However, very little was mentioned regarding the actual work with families.

Many of these struggles surfaced at a January 9, 2006 meeting between the CWC Director, a Navigator, the County Program Manager, and the two community consultants. The CWC stated a need to do some work outside of the box to address the legacy of hopelessness and despair that plagues the community, and that one of the challenges they faced was the Board’s desire for traditional outcomes from nontraditional work. The County Program Manager noted that people were getting impatient with new learning on both sides, and that it was essential to get back in front of the Board and continue to educate them. A cultural consultant said it felt like the project was after two different things: the system was after numbers, while the community was after cultural change that will move people away from dependence. The meeting concluded with the CWC, the County Program Manager, and the community consultants each committing to meeting separately with the Director of Workforce Solutions.

As tensions continued to mount, the Director of Workforce Solutions met with the Director of the CWC to help strengthen trust between the two organizations. The CWC responded positively to this meeting, reporting back the sense that the Director of Workforce Solutions was a reformist working to make change inside the system, and that she was very committed to the project’s efforts. However most of the goals named by the CWC for the project continued to include economic development and creation of a compelling message about what the CWC is trying to achieve in the African American community, rather than addressing the issues of data collection or working with the MFIP system in concrete, tangible ways.

Around September 2006, the Employment Services Counselors’ Supervisor proposed that the previous model for addressing potential sanctions be scrapped and the two organizations start over with a new model for working together. The CWC wrote the text of a letter that was sent to the entire unit’s African American participants informing them about the CWC’s work, that the CWC was not a County agency, and that the CWC might be contacting them. The letter was sent under County letterhead, signed by the County Supervisor, to hundreds of individuals. Then the CWC started to work the list. Another mailing was done in December of 2006, followed by a third in March of 2007. While letters were going out and the transition was being made to have all participants served by the CWC be referred by

Workforce Solutions, the CWC Director and the County Workforce Solutions Supervisor established a regular meeting between the Navigators and Counselors in which they talked through things together. Soon, the frontline staff were running the meetings, and it was agreed that Navigators and Counselors would meet with each other on a one-to-one basis.

This new model of working together guaranteed documentation of all participants, activities, and tracking through identification numbers. The CWC also began providing written reports of their work in 2006, improving upon the prior practice of relying solely upon verbal reports between Navigators, CWC, and County staff.

In December 2006, at the end of the first contract period, the County Program Manager extended the CWC’s contract for three months “based on a positive evaluation of the Contractor's services and the recommendations made by Workforce Solutions and Community Human Services.” During those three months, leadership from the County, the CWC, and the community consultants met with each of the Commissioners individually to update them on its lessons learned and accomplishments, and show them the goals for 2007. A Commissioner who did not meet with them raised questions regarding outcomes in the 2003 approval meeting.

In February 2007, the CWC hired a full-time data specialist. The addition of this position made it possible to share client level data between the CWC and the County. The Specialist spent the first half of 2007 setting up and implementing a data management system that was central to the County’s evaluation. This was a significant change in CWC information capacity because it enabled County evaluation of outcomes.

The contract came up for renewal at the May 1, 2007 County Board Meeting. Workforce Solutions and the Community Human Services Department requested for approval of a new contract with the CWC for the period from April 1, 2007 through December 31, 2009, for enhanced Project services, including reporting and training. After the resolution was introduced for adoption, the Commissioner who had raised questions regarding outcomes during the first approval process read from the minutes of the 2003 Board meeting when the Board approved the contract based on the assumption that staff would follow-up to show that outcomes and baselines were identified in the contract. The Commissioner then documented a request her staff had made in November 2006 for information regarding outcomes, to which the Commissioner thought no response had been received. The Commissioner stated, “I believe the staff has been aware since 2003 that measurable outcomes would be achieve in the previous contract and did not add those measures,” and moved for a layover of the resolution.

Another Commissioner spoke up on behalf of the Partnership. She said she knew that the CWC intended to be a partner with the County in reducing the disparities in the African American community, and intention to partner had been so strong that the sense of the work done during the first contract is of the work together between the CWC and the County, rather than the just the work of the CWC. The Commissioner listed the training of

Ramsey County staff, the review of information together, the understanding of the challenges, and a lack of taking credit for the fact that, at that time, the sanction rate for African American families was near, or the same as, other cultural communities in the County.

“That is no coincidence. We started at a point of extreme disparities, and we are moving toward an understanding of how to get this work done with the community, and to change that picture of disparity, and it is critical that this be moved forward. Any lack of movement in this area would be indicative of the County’s lack of willingness to continue that progress.”

After more deliberation, along with reassurance from County staff that the CWC’s data operation was up and running and that outcomes would be a significant element of the next contract, the Board voted 6 to 1 in favor of approving a second contract for the CWC for a maximum contract total of \$1,011,250 (see Appendix F). Within one week, County staff fulfilled their earlier commitment to send answers in writing regarding the questions from the opposed Commissioner about the projected quantitative outcomes for the second contract period.

Phase III: Showing Results

On June 4, 2007, one month after the Board meeting, the first official Kujichagulia Project Partnership Committee Meeting was convened. Staff from several County departments (Workforce Solutions, Evaluation, Planning, and Financial Assistance Services) were present, along with Directors, a Navigator, and the Data Specialist from the CWC. The community consultant was listed as absent from this first meeting, indicating the intention for consultants to be present at future instances of this planned monthly partnership meeting. For the first time, representatives of all technical aspects of the Self-Determination project’s work were gathered together around the same table.

At this first meeting, County Evaluation staff presented several alternatives for evaluating and assessing the success of the collaborative partnership and the improvement of services and the County’s relationship with project clients. However, there was resistance among some of the partnership members to moving forward on these proposals, so they were set aside to be revisited at a later date. The meeting concluded with the CWC’s presentation of the data on clients served and activities engaged in and an accompanying written report covering the period from January through May.

The Director of Workforce Solutions, now leading the partnership on the County side, worked with a County consultant and several partnership members to design a retreat that would enable the partners to work through their issues so they could refocus on the work with the families. She arranged for the retreat design team to meet off site at a local college, in a comfortable room where they sat in overstuffed chairs, had lunch together, and talked about how they could design a meeting in which they would engage each other with

questions and surface the shared values and motivations that all members of the partnership brought to the work.

On October 1, 2007, the partnership’s major stakeholders, including Navigators, cultural consultants, management staff and frontline workers from both the CWC and the County, and a Commissioner, met off-site for the “Retreat to Advance”. The retreat began with a welcome from the Workforce Solutions director, and a short statement on how this was “not your typical partnership.” Following that, five individuals representing five different perspectives each offered a 3-5 minute history of the partnership. The identified leaders then introduced the process, which was to engage each other with the following questions:

- What comes to mind when you think of a partnership that is working?
- What are the values you bring to this partnership?
- What would success look like if we achieved the partnership we have described?
- What would it take to create the kind of trust necessary to create the partnership we have just envisioned?
- What are the current barriers to success?
- What are the strengths we bring into this process?

People expressed strong emotions about the outcomes they were looking for, why work had been painful, and about who did or did not trust others doing the work. To the surprise of County leadership, Navigators expressed feelings that County leadership did not trust them to get the work done. The opportunity for all staff involved to give their perspective and express trust in each other was a breakthrough. Nobody wanted to see the partnership sink, so the group came to an agreement on how to move forth. The Workforce Solutions Director followed up on the retreat by meeting one-on-one with the CWC Director and the community consultants to talk about where go from there.

Since the retreat, the members of the Kujichagulia Partnership Committee have continued to meet regularly on the first Monday of every month. Initially, these meetings lasted for an hour and a half, and the time slot was later extended to two hours. The Director of Workforce Solutions, who continues to show strong leadership in the partnership’s work, chairs the meetings. Outside of the meetings, the CWC Data Specialist works closely with County Evaluators to coordinate data collection and analysis between the CWC and the State’s data system on MFIP clients.

Data reported by Ramsey County Performance Measurement and Evaluation for 2007 showed that the percent working increased by about 22 percent. While other agencies in the County had a higher percentage working during this time, they did not see similar increases. It remains to be seen whether or not the CWC’s approach will lead to a higher percentage of MFIP participants working than the more traditional approach used by other agencies.

The CWC continues building networks in the community by participating in monthly meetings of African American Leadership Council Education Committee. The Partnership

recently formed an evaluation subgroup, and plans are underway for a May 2008 workshop to update the Board of Commissioners on the Partnership’s progress.

Partnership Challenges

Many complex issues have faced this unique partnership in its five years of existence, including the complex nature of the racial disparities problem, collaborating within different institutional cultures of the County and the Cultural Wellness Center, developing and working in an innovative project, managing relationships at many levels, measuring the intangible aspects of the work, and sustaining political will for the Kujichagulia Partnership Project.

The Complex Nature of the Problem

“So many of these problems come from external pressures in society. And if we’re going to be outcome based, these systems need find a way to account for and address the fact that there are disparities in outcomes outside of the welfare system”

-Joe Soss, leading welfare scholar, co-editor of Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform

“Of course it’s not big enough --but neither is the County’s capacity. Even if we had more navigators or if the County had more capacity – we really don’t have the resources in terms of dollars, trained people, or time, and the depth of the problems is more than decades old”

-African American Community Leader in the Kujichagulia Project

The disparities in the MFIP program have historical reasons and there is a need for an understanding of the historical root causes of all these issues. No exploration of the issues surrounding this partnership and their work can be completed without first acknowledging the complexity of the problems they aim to address. While on the surface the partners work for the success of a few hundred families who participate in the Kujichagulia MFIP program, this work cannot be done without confronting a number of issues far beyond the reach of this program, Ramsey County, or even the state government.

Problems of financial success within the African American community do not exist solely within Ramsey County’s MFIP programs. Across the country, African Americans struggle to receive education and keep up financially with other cultural groups. African American children in the United States are more than twelve times as likely as white children to live in low-income families and poor neighborhoods (Acevedo-Garcia, 2008). African American persons often face institutional or overt racism when they look for employment or housing; and can be born into situations that for any number of reasons do not encourage success.

Studies suggest that African Americans are often disproportionately harmed by the act of going on welfare itself. According to Dr. Joseph Soss, relative to whites, African Americans are more susceptible to “stigmatizing markers” than the general population. While a person may not display any prejudice when working with other African Americans, when faced with someone who has a prison record, this marker will act as reinforcement of stereotypes and

reflect more poorly on the African American than on a white person with a similar record. Welfare itself is a stigmatizing marker, according to Dr. Soss. Because of the reporting requirement (a welfare recipient who is looking for work often has to prove they are actively searching, which means they often must ask the people they’re interviewing with for documentation) an African American job applicant who receives welfare may have his or her chances hurt by that fact more than an applicant not on welfare or from another race.

The Kujichagulia Partnership’s local level work to address racial disparities in MFIP takes place within this larger social context of the many factors that adversely affect the African American community. No matter how successful the partnership’s work is, many factors outside its control impact equality in the MFIP system. The challenge for the partnership is to continue finding the changes they *can* make, without getting overwhelmed by the changes they cannot make. The challenge for the partnership’s funders is to recognize that this work is an uphill battle, and monumental efforts by the Partnership members might show up in the numbers as seemingly miniscule improvements.

Fundamental Differences between Organizations

“If you stop to think about it, both the County and the Cultural Wellness Center are struggling with ethical issues---we get into trouble with each other because of that. As a County, we have that accountability, oversight and [need to be sure] the dollars are being spent well. When there is a question of if we are providing adequate oversight, then you get uncomfortable. From the Cultural Wellness Center, I’m sure they have ethical issues—they are coming to the table as an agent of the County, informing the County about [their participants]. [It’s] extremely difficult to walk across this boundary.”

—Ramsey County official

In the Kujichagulia Partnership, a government entity and a community-based organization have come together to change a system that both agree is flawed. However, the County and the Cultural Wellness Center have radically different institutional cultures, and forming a partnership between the two has not always been easy. Ramsey County and the CWC’s respective approaches to working with participants, program outcomes, tracking progress, defining progress, and identifying successes are among the many factors that the two organizations address differently. A Ramsey County Commissioner clearly framed this challenge by noting, “One of the difficulties is that as a County we want to be sure people are working and not being sanctioned. In the community we want to be sure we are building a community... and those goals don’t always match.”

Ramsey County acknowledged the need to do its work differently. A participant at a welfare reform meeting stated that “Six years ago Ramsey County started thinking outside the box...to use a different model, workers and leaders have to go through a shift. We all have to shift our thinking...long-term case management doesn’t work for these people. It is about nurturing, compassion, and spirituality”

While several County planning staff in the Human Services Department felt a change needed to take place within the County system, change is slow in a large bureaucracy such as Ramsey

County, and small efforts are not always widely visible. However, the Kujichagulia Partnership represents some of the County’s efforts at changing its institutional culture.

Definitions of the Problem.

An initial challenge in the Kujichagulia Partnership was finding a common purpose. The early struggles over data collection could be seen as a manifestation of the tension between opposing problem definitions. The County defined the problem by the numerical disparities between cultural communities in MFIP performance outcomes, so its priority was tracking standard MFIP performance indicators. The CWC defined the problem by saying, “Individualism and loss of community and culture make us sick,” which led them to resist reporting on individuals from their community to the County for fear of contributing to the problem. As one interviewee noted, “There isn’t any easy healing of that fundamental rupture [between CWC and County perspectives] because the county is mandated to get these people to work, and is punished by DHS and the Federal government if it does not get people to work quickly.” Ramsey County and the Phillips Cultural Wellness Center struggled to merge their different lenses on their work with the MFIP program. Patricia Brady, current director of Workforce Solutions, explained the early struggles:

Table 1. Different Definitions of the Problem and a Collaborative Vision for Working Together.

Ramsey County’s Definition of Problem. African American and American Indian families experience significantly poorer MFIP outcomes than other racial and ethnic groups.	Cultural Wellness Center’s Definition of Problem. Individualism and loss of community and culture make us sick.
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“In the first year, or first several years, because we are responsible to funders and because we are responsible to the County Board, our assessment of this [was] that we have to have information and outcomes that we can take back to them. Here’s where we began to have some issues. Because the Cultural Wellness Center is a community based organization they have kinship with these families ...their feeling was that we have to protect these families. ...From my perspective I think they wanted to protect those relationships so they could continue to help people. From our perspective, unless we know who you’re helping ...and have a way to track it, we don’t have anything to provide to our funders and the Board. We really were engaging in a struggle of everybody trying to do what they believed was the right thing and everybody thinking about the families and trying to keep partnership working and alive.”

Approaches to Working with MFIP Families. The approach that staff from each organization had towards working with participants in the MFIP program differed greatly. Impressions of typical County workers have been depicted in the following way: “...my job is not getting someone to the doctor. My job is not what happened to the children, etc.” The Ramsey County Workforce Solutions Director compares the work of the County staff and Cultural Wellness Center staff:

“...we have a traditional county way of delivering services handed to us by the state. The community has a nontraditional set of activities. They [CWC navigators] go places I would never allow my staff to go. They don't have an 8 to 5 job. They will help people after hours. My staff goes home at 6:00. They will work on evenings and weekends. We had a case where a mom was working, and the school kept calling her to get her child [because the child was misbehaving], this mother was in danger of losing her job, so the navigator went to the school and followed the child from class to class and made sure the child was behaving. Teaching some of these families on MFIP about what it is to be self-determined, what it is to rely on your community to take care of you...it would be very tough for my staff to teach [that lesson].”

A leader in the African American community phrased the stereotypical attitude of employment counselors in the following way: “folks lose a degree of sensitivity and the luxury of dealing with the clients as needed, and therefore you're kind of taping the problem as opposed to fixing it with a greater degree of assistance—that is more sustainable and longer degree of duration”

Definitions of Success.. In fact the ultimate outcomes of the project vary: when asked “when will you know your work is done?” Ramsey County and the Cultural Wellness Center had differing, though not incongruent, responses. The following is an example of a typical Ramsey County response:

“That person has an employment plan, is following it, and is showing documentation. That's the stable approach we want everyone to have. No alarms that they might be heading toward sanction. Another way we know our job is done is if somebody leaves MFIP. It doesn't take much of a job to leave MFIP, but about \$7/hr will take a family off. From our perspective, when they're no longer on MFIP, they're done. We close the file. Are they continuing to work with Wellness Center? We assume they are.”

On the other hand, this was a typical Cultural Wellness Center response:

“...when people start giving back that's the indication that there is an inner capacity —people have connected to that inner capacity. And when that happens, you can give to other people. Giving back...they start volunteering --there is some leadership qualities. There is no end point. We don't want people to stop working with us — we want people to expand their inner circle of support, and to build communities.”

Members of the Kujichagulia Partnership see these organizational and institutional differences first hand and sometimes struggle with the tensions. One County worker said,

“Being African American and a government employee, I'm torn because I'm hearing people say ‘They want us to stay on welfare. The system isn't working, doesn't support us.’ Yet I know on the inside [of the system] I'm hearing a lot of care and

concern and apprehension about what’s happening to African American families. I could feel their point of view, I understand what it feels like to be subject to a system with no control, yet I’m in the system now, saying ‘It’s not that way. We want people out of our system, self-determined.’”

Taking Time to Build a Foundation of Trust

“We must have relationships and trust, and the County in particular has to be aware of our tendencies, intentional or not, to co-opt people when we start to partner with them. We may be asking communities to do things they really don’t feel like they can do, and we have to try to work that through.”

-Ramsey County Partnership Member

Working with the community as a collaborative partner, as the County does in the Kujichagulia Partnership, is fundamentally different than working with the community as a vendor. In a vendor relationship, the County’s primary role is to monitor contract compliance; whereas a partnership requires County staff to engage more deeply with the community in getting work done together. The partners in this project began by diving into the work, rather than building a collaboration. This led to early confusion over roles and expectations. In interview after interview, people pointed to confusions about outcome measurement as an early stumbling point for the partnership. A pair of representative examples follows:

“After the contract was signed, the Wellness Center went out and did their hiring. When I became involved again, the CWC was interacting with the County, and they were feeling frustrated, I think. They thought they were coming in to work in their cultural way and would be allowed to do their work, but they were being more or less pushed into a box of traditional language and ways of viewing things.”

-Leader in the African American Community

“Friction came up between the CWC and management here, and there were a lot of misunderstandings. We didn’t know how to work together. I don’t believe we had the trust necessary to build on relationship. The frontline staff were concerned; ‘They’re [the CWC] in the community, working with our participants, what does that mean for us?’ It was easy to see that conflict would come up. But we started working together. Started looking at what the contract said. [The CWC Director] would say ‘The contract does say that, but we thought we were doing this. [The County Planner] and [MFIP Program Manager] are translating what we’re doing for the Board and we don’t have to be bothered with the political stuff.’ But the Board wanted to see outcomes, and as elected officials, they had the right to see outcomes.”

- Workforce Solutions Management

After the approval of the original contract, different understandings of what that contract meant, from people at almost every level, meant time and resources that could have been

spent elsewhere were tied up clarifying points that could potentially have been addressed earlier in the process.

While having clear information about expectations of individuals and organizations was a common thread in interviews, there is another side to this coin. Many of the same people also pointed to a need for trust in one another as important to the continued success of the project. While it may seem contradictory to the need for explicit clarification, employees of Ramsey County and the CWC, as well as community members and consultants seem to believe that trust is an important issue here. This issue also extends from, and expands on, the difficulties created when two organizations with dramatically different organizational cultures are working in close partnership.

“The most difficult part has been trying to build trust between the two sides. Within unique projects you can’t compare work of one to another. As I look at the partnership, we probably didn’t spend enough time in beginning building relationships and trust we needed to make it work. It wasn’t until we got to second phase of project that we paid attention to the fact that it isn’t going to work if can’t establish relationships so we can talk to each other and trust each other to do the work.”

-Ramsey County Leadership

“People showed some strong emotions about the outcomes we were looking for and why work has been painful, and who trusted who. I was surprised to hear my name come up as not trusting. People said, ‘I don’t think that [the Director] trusts us to get our work done.’ I thought, ‘But I do trust them. Something is missing if they think I don’t trust them.’ There was an opportunity for us to heal after that meeting. Painful things were said. But we came to an agreement on how we’re going to move forward because nobody wanted to see partnership sink”

- Ramsey County Director

While dealing with the trust and communication issues has been a hindrance for the partnership in the past, it appears that a corner has been turned. The partnership retreat (which will be discussed in detail later in the report) seems to have been a turning point in this respect, and people at all levels are very cognizant of the need for open communications. And this communication can be a benefit not just between people working at the same level and with the same clients. As a Commissioner illustrates:

“For me, it was the meeting I had with leadership in the community that convinced me to renew the contract. It was sitting down, expressing my concerns about what happened to last million dollars. They didn’t know. But their commitment to change that, I believed it. I believe there is a huge disparity in meeting needs of different communities in County. We need to continue to be bold and courageous to do a better job in these communities...To be able to rely on a community that says “This

is what we need from you to be able to take care of ourselves.’ When the community comes to us and says ‘This is how you can help us raise ourselves up,’ we give a lot of weight to that. But they have to show me results, accountability, and a willingness to be partners, share, and work together.”

-Ramsey County Commissioner

Developing and Working With an Innovative Project

“One of the challenges is that the Board is expecting traditional outcomes from non-traditional work... We are working with the descendents of the legacy of hopelessness and despair. We cannot continue to do the same thing the same way because it is not working.”

-Kujichagulia Partnership member

Instituting a service delivery model that has never been done before presents both a great opportunity and a great challenge for the organizations involved. While not going off a previously built and tested system offers freedom to take a fresh look at problems and focus the effort exactly where is needed, it also presents an additional set of hurdles that need to be cleared.

The challenge of innovation appears to be felt at every level of this partnership. As one Ramsey evaluator put it,

“It’s challenging because you are experimenting with the climate, the project, everything. You don’t know where you’re going...at every level of the partnership, it’s very important to have smooth communication, working relationships, and trust, because it’s not like you can say ‘Let’s take this road.’ You know what the end result is, but you don’t know how you’re getting there.”

One of the most visible examples of this uncertainty in charting uncharted territory appeared with the issue of measurement and recording of outcomes. Even when creating a new path, and having to attempt a variety of methods before finding what exactly works, the recording and reporting of results is of great importance when dealing with taxpayer dollars. These conflicting needs, for both innovation and measurable outcomes, were put into context by Program Director Patricia Brady:

“My assessment was that we didn’t think we would get a lot of measurables from the Cultural Wellness Center at first. We saw that it was a new relationship, we have to build it. We don’t know why the [MFIP] program isn’t working. We’re not sure the Cultural Wellness Center knows what’s not working. They’re going to have to spend time figuring it out.”

“Someone said to me, ‘We spent a million dollars. What did we get?’ I said, ‘What we got was a really good start.’”

There are issues not only with outcomes, but with getting to the outcomes in the first place. Before you start to see the fruits of innovation, some would argue there is great importance in getting staff to buy in to the ideas you’re pursuing. Not having a proven template to work from means you have no proof that what you’re doing will work, no matter how sound the theory your program was based on. While doubts about the validity of the basic model don’t seem to be widespread within the Kujichagulia Project, they are present. At least one person we spoke with believed that the link between what the CWC is doing and the goals Ramsey County is hoping to achieve is weak at best. Another wondered out loud if the actions of the CWC navigators were actually enabling the clients by hand-holding too much, thereby *worsening* their performance within MFIP. This may not be a chronic problem, but is always a risk when a new method is attempted, and can definitely become an issue if these feelings spread among the partners and people begin questioning the value of the work they are doing.

What we have seen in this study suggests a partnership that has thus far handled the issues that accompany innovation very well. The fact that this project is still running after 4 years speaks to the willingness of everyone involved to take this particular risk and commit to finding a solution when trying to address a difficult problem. Moreover, partnership members appear to understand, and are openly dealing with, many of the problems that could have plagued this project. Whether it be the Commissioners granting a contract renewal after an initial three years of activities and exploration, but no hard outcomes; or partnership members coming together for a retreat to hash out the concerns of each side (an event which will be discussed in detail later); there is a noticeable ability to adapt to change and accept new ideas.

However, though the innovative nature of the project is being managed, there are very real challenges that lay further along. Successfully managing expectations and balancing risk and outcomes accomplishes nothing if the program isn’t implemented at the client level. As one Ramsey County staff person put it,

“Sometimes, we leaders get this notion that we’ve figured something out, and we’re patting ourselves on the back, and we lose sight of what’s happening on the ground floor. What we’re doing doesn’t matter unless the families start buying in and working at these services. It’s something you need to keep focus on.”

Measuring the Intangibles of the Work

“There is so much the agency does that doesn’t translate to a formula—the one thing I like about this project ... rather than following a prescription—it is trying to get a collaborative effort ... good things aren’t so easily documented or measured—people are looking for results, changes or steps that need to be put in place or

arrived at before some of those results are more evident...we are reimbursed for 4 things, but there are 10 things that are in play ---and 6 other things are very crucial.”
—Member of African American community

The Navigators’ work is nontraditional, multifaceted, and hard to measure. They use a number of strategies to build sustainable support systems around participants, but the challenge is measuring and documenting the results of their work in a way that makes a causal connection to improved MFIP outcomes.

While the primary goal of the work is to see immediate improvement in the performance of African American MFIP participants, the community-building work done by the CWC has a much more long-term focus. Creating connections between members of the community and helping people to gain confidence and cultural identity can, in theory, lead to great benefits in time. But how can they measure these important outcomes?

“How do you translate good work in a very visible fashion? What comes to mind is a paradigm shift in thinking. Chasing funding streams, trying to subscribe...this effort is crucial to getting a funder to appreciate that these other activities are important ingredients...that we need these things funded.”

-Ramsey Community Consultant

“We do have a ‘scale of engagement’ form, which talks about their needs, goals, etc. At the bottom, it has ‘I give back to the community’ When people start, they’re not doing that, but sometimes that changes. The form is supposed to be filled out occasionally throughout the year...but it is not standardized, it is very subjective in how the participant views the situation.”

- CWC Employee

The difficulties surrounding how to communicate the less quantifiable outcomes continue at the Cultural Wellness Center. While it may not become a critical issue in this partnership if the more immediate outcomes are good, it’s still an issue well worth working on. There may be a time, down the road, when Ramsey County begins seeing exceptional social and economic health in the African American community, or the community’s issues with MFIP may worsen. Being able to point at programs and actions that led to those outcomes would be a great benefit to Ramsey County, as well as governments and communities around the state and country.

Sustaining Political Will

Every challenge discussed prior to this, and each and every one that wasn’t mentioned, are moot points if the political will for this project is not sustained. Issues with outcome measurement, balancing organizational cultures, every intricacy of implementing this

program weighs on the decisions of the members of the County Board, and, in turn, those decisions ultimately decide how long this project continues.

Through the votes of the Commissioners on each of the first two contracts for this partnership the County Board has so far demonstrated political will to sustain the project. While the partnership cannot control outside factors such as budget issues within the County, signs point to a willingness to continue the project. However, in order to maintain the Board’s support, the partnership members must be able to demonstrate that the money being put into this project is producing the necessary improvements in the traditional measures of success rates of African American MFIP participants. All signs point to sufficient positive outcomes as the most important factor in determining the long-term viability of the partnership. However, a lack of definitive positive outcomes, combined with a potential incomplete understanding of the work being done, could cause problems.

“I am extremely hopeful that the foundations we have built in the first contract, and now what I perceive to be the data coming back in the second period, will point us in the direction of the success we have achieved. I am hopeful we will continue this working into the third period. ...Am I encouraged? Yes. But am I confident? No. We have so many needs in Ramsey County that we are already competing for resources, and these resources that could be used in so many ways... I just can’t be confident yet...”

-Ramsey County Commissioner

Strengths of the Partnership

The Kujichagulia partnership tackles tensions great and small, from systemic racism to differing definitions of the problem to management conflicts. Although these tensions have at times threatened to break apart the Partnership, the ability of the partners to name, confront, and work through difficult issues is a fundamental building block of the strong partnership that exists today. Both the CWC and Ramsey County teach each other and learn from each other, creating a relationship of lasting mutual benefit.

Confronting Systemic Disparities

Because this partnership was born out of an effort to address racial disparities, the highly-charged issues of racism and oppression underlie all of their work. The fact that the County identified racial disparities in MFIP outcomes as a problem that needed fixing showed that it acknowledged racial disparities as a problem in traditional County services, and held itself accountable for fixing its broken system. A County document from 2002 states, “...the methodology and technology we currently use is having an adverse impact on some of the MFIP population. It’s not intentional, but it is systemic and institutional. As a county, we want to look at this.” Before the partnership itself had been conceived as a possible solution, Ramsey County explicitly identified systemic racism as a problem it wanted to address head-on. The conversation has not been easy, because, as one County staff said, “We are coming with a government service, a lot of bureaucracy, working with a community that has been oppressed for years and years ... even the historical context of it is not easy.” At the same time, documents and interviews show that the partnership has made progress in confronting systemic racism within Ramsey County. One CWC document describes a meeting in which “...a major concern was voiced about the history of racism as a force behind the disparities for the African Americans on welfare. Workforce Solutions administrators, managers, planners and elders did not avoid this topic, but faced it head on.” When asked if there are noticeable changes in the way the County operates due to the partnership, a community partner responded, “Yes...communication is wide open. ... They are becoming more accepting of the communication of the harsh realities. It has not been that way all along.” A CWC staff member spoke of feeling gratified in watching this progress and observed, “When racism comes up [now], people don’t run away because they feel wounded. When these raw issues come up, every person around the table thinks about how to resolve it.”

Taking Risks

All of the major stakeholders in this partnership knowingly and willingly entered into a risky proposition. The community consultants (sometimes referred to as the “elders”) risked harming their reputations and effectiveness in the community if their MFIP redesign planning process turned out to be a “superficial or window-dressing effort” for Ramsey County. By partnering with a largely distrusted government system, the CWC also risked its community credibility if it came to be seen as an arm of the County. The County risked

investing a significant amount of taxpayer dollars in an as-yet untested model of partnership that only served the needs of a small and very specific portion of the county population.

Ramsey County went outside the box in the planning process, the organization they contracted with, and the level of time, money, and effort backing up the commitment to improving its work with the African American community. County staff brought a proposal to the Commissioners and said, “A community has gone through its own process – we are asking you not to put out a RFP,” and gave the community’s recommendation; the County contract with the CWC. The community consultants presented letters signed by African American leaders endorsing the recommendation. “A strong number of voices said that they stood behind this decision.” The Board of Commissioners approved the first contract with the CWC based on the community’s planning and recommendations. This was a very different approach for the County. “Normally, you would look at data and say, ‘What should we do *to* the community?’ instead of *going to* the community.” Although the County is under significant pressure to achieve federally-mandated outcomes, in this case, the County chose to also give credence to what the community said was important.

Several interviewees noted that contracting with a Hennepin County-based organization was unusual, but as one County staff explained, “We really were going to buy a specific model that happened to come out of Minneapolis.” Notes from a 2002 County-led meeting said, “Too often we throw money where we are comfortable. It’s easier to look for big [organizational] names, but the community doesn’t go to them [for MFIP services]. ... Don’t rely on the easy, familiar, good old boys network.” This demonstrates the County’s early desire to truly innovate in the redesign process.

All parties have risked a high level of time and effort in their work with the partnership, but the County bore an additional level of risk by investing a significant amount of taxpayer dollars – totaling over two million dollars between two contracts – in the work of this partnership. One Commissioner acknowledged, “It was really difficult to say, ‘We’re going to take another risk here on another million dollars.’” Ultimately, though, the Commissioner supported a second contract because “[We] need to continue to be bold and courageous to do a better job in these communities.” Several interviewees noted the County’s willingness to take a chance and go outside its walls to work with a community on improving its services as a particular strength of this partnership. As one said, “That takes a lot of courage to admit that something you’re doing is not working and to extend a hand to the community [for help].” But as was said early in the planning process, “Things can’t change overnight. It’s absolutely necessary to take risks. Stop talking. Let’s begin the process. [Let’s] start acting and begin the process by which we learn. We cannot wait for all the answers. Take a step.”

Community Ownership of the Policy Design Process

*“Are we being intentional about what we are doing next?”
-2005 Kujichagulia Partnership meeting*

One of the factors that has contributed to the effectiveness of the Kujichagulia Partnership has been the attention multiple stakeholders have paid to the formation and implementation of this program. Ramsey County realized that they could not determine how to best solve the issues of racial disparities in their systems without talking to the communities experiencing the disparities. After synthesizing the racial disparity data County officials acknowledged that they could not interpret the data by themselves and they must approach the community for assistance --- the start of a new way of County operation: “Ramsey County began a process, working with the community, looking at why the outcomes of African American communities were so different from others. Working with some of the clients, one of the understandings was that the cultural understanding was lacking”.

Informal conversations “with people of color who understand the welfare systems or work in agencies that serve low income families” asking questions such as: “What do you think these numbers mean and what do you think Ramsey County should do?...In these conversations we heard several voices that said Ramsey can’t figure this out themselves, they should work with these communities to figure this out”. These formal conversations brought the County into contracting with two cultural consultants, who framed the question:

“I remember the expectation was that the community would come up with a plan and bring it to the County from the community’s perspective. We framed it a way that was simple and could be understood: ‘people are being sanctioned and what are the effects on children? How many people are getting into the workforce? What does that mean? Are they livable jobs? Are they affordable jobs? Are they getting salaried?’”

“We went around to different leaders in the community one by one and talked to them, to tell them what we were doing ...getting support. We talked to some people who were on welfare---after talking to some leaders and people from the community in small groups. We held a large community meeting...and Debbie and Laura helped us put together a flier and we held this meeting in traditional African style. Before the meeting we identified facilitators--and took the time to train the facilitators....”

After the partnership was in place, meetings were held between members of the partnership, and discussions brought to the table often began with such process-focused questions as: “Are we being intentional about what we are doing next? How do we give the community enough information so we can know where to advocate?”

The leadership and organizing by the cultural consultants, as community elders and parties outside of both Ramsey County and the Cultural Wellness Center at the time of the partnership’s inception and their focus on, and dedication to, the community work set the stage for a relationship between all parties that valued relationships and trust. One Ramsey County staff member observed that “you have to give partnerships like this time to develop trust and relationships [or it’s] not going to be a smooth journey.”

Part of the CWC’s philosophy of community is that “thinking is honored –the process is the product”. The partnership has adopted this general mode of operating, especially in the past year. Leadership of the partnership has been deliberate about creating a space where numerous voices can be heard, and attention can be given to a variety of opinions. This has been most prevalent since leaders in the partnership called a retreat in order to create more trust and open communication within the partnership. Out of this retreat came the idea to meet regularly as a partnership. Now, navigators, county program managers, evaluators, elders and many other stakeholders attend monthly meetings.

It is important that the partners have the ability to stop, step back from the work of the partnership, and acknowledge that the process they have attended to has produced something unique. This is in many ways is a new way of doing work, and perhaps the process should be recorded and documented by an outside group so that hopefully future groups will be able to learn from the deliberate, thoughtful process. When the Humphrey Institute student consulting group approached the multiple stakeholders and partners of Kujichagulia and interviewed approximately thirty stakeholders, almost every single one agreed that the partnership was special, and was happy the process was being documented.

Attention to process has also appeared to change the approaches of both Ramsey County and CWC staff. One Ramsey County employee stated that one of the things she took away from her work with the partnership was stepping back and looking at her approach to the project: “It was one of those moments –how we sit, where we sit, what we see, how we approach these questions...” Accounts from leading partners state that they have a “meeting of the minds” within the Employment Assistance workers and the African American elders and workers at CWC. “I think it’s really been gratifying to watch that, where we can sit around a table and really address hard things. Like when racism comes up, people don’t run away because they feel wounded. When these raw issues come up, every person around the table thinks about how to resolve it.”

Unique purpose - Complementing Strengths and Unduplicated Services

This partnership addresses a fundamental tension in the business of human services provision: How does local government meet the needs of families *and* meet the performance measurement indicators set by higher levels of government? Notes from a 2005 meeting record the partners asking themselves the question, “If we are so bound by rules, are we serving rules or serving people?” Early in the partnership, the County and the CWC represented two opposite ends of this tension. The willingness of the partners to work through their tensions, especially through the October 2007 retreat, allowed for a breakthrough: the creation of a shared vision statement that reconciles the opposing problem definitions into a coherent vision of collaborative work for common goals (see Table 2).

This vision statement articulates the collaborative work done by the partnership. It accounts for each partner’s unique purpose in the partnership, as well as the partnership’s unique purpose in the larger community – a purpose that could not be accomplished by either organization alone. For example, County employees have access to government resources that the CWC may not, just as Navigators can act within the community, and in the lives of their participants, in ways Ramsey workers cannot. Multiple partners talked about the unique role the CWC is able to play in the system.

“I really believe in what the CWC is doing. Is the CWC the only thing that can resolve it? No, but they are an important part. I feel strongly that they should be around, but also that other folks are playing an important part. We need them together...as long as they are producing results, what they are doing is changing people’s attitude and mentality. A lot of African Americans don’t feel good about themselves. What is happening is there needs to be something that teaches people how to read and write, and then there needs to be someone that helps with culture. The CWC, they can address these issues, because other agencies can’t cross this line.”

Another community leader stated:

“To me, the collective skill level, the knowledge of the partners, in a very focused kind of manner...being essentially documented or formatted in such a way that a funder might come to appreciate a different kind of approach to a real need. Too often the funder has dictated in many respects and the provider has tried to address.

Table 2. Different Definitions of the Problem and a Collaborative Vision for Working Together.

<p>Ramsey County’s Definition of Problem. African American and American Indian families experience significantly poorer MFIP outcomes than other racial and ethnic groups.</p>	<p>Cultural Wellness Center’s Definition of Problem. Individualism and loss of community and culture make us sick.</p>
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Collaborative Vision for Partnership. The vision of the Kujichagulia Partnership is to collaboratively function so as to assure the following outcomes for our clients and our community:

- Long-term sustainable prosperity with and for our clients
- Unique ways for clients to accomplish work/life goals
- Clients who are self-determined, active, engaged, and give back to the community
- Effectiveness in getting African Americans into work, out of poverty, and off government dependency
- Success at helping our community see its own possibilities
- The use of strategies that have been tested by the community
- We are the model for community engagement and participation with government and community
- A partnership model that is proven, tested, and looked to by other counties

The unique piece here is that a provider has tried to shape [and] a County appreciates that this is what we are doing and slowly trying to educate.”

Both contracts signed between the CWC and Ramsey County specifically address what each partner is expected to bring to the partnership.

On another level, Employment Counselors and Navigators are working to one another’s strengths and avoiding providing duplicate services, to work most effectively and efficiently. Patricia Brady, Director of Workforce Solutions, plans for Navigators and Employment Counselors to work together on congruent, but not identical issues:

“I think that this point what I’m saying is that I don’t want to duplicate services. We’re in middle of services. I don’t want them to do what we can do. I want them to do what we can’t do. What I hope is that what we do can free them up to do better job at what they can do. They’re here because we believe they’re cultural experts. I want to help grow that.”

Her plans seem to be working well, as one Employment Counselor stated:

“The navigators, their expectations are that they would be there for what the client needs that we can’t do. My example is one of my navigators was there to hold a client’s hand while she gave birth. They’re really resourceful with outreach, and they’re available to these clients 24/7. They give phone numbers, they’re out on weekends, they’re just always there. I’ve never had a problem getting them to help with issues. If I can’t find a client, I’ll call them, and then they’re there.”

Another Ramsey County staff member observed an example of the unique role Navigators play:

“We see that navigators are able to communicate things to individuals that they can’t trust us with. [Navigators] can be a reasonable voice saying these are the rules, it isn’t about so-and-so, and help find things to work around. We know they’re doing all the other services - building networks, supports, etc. At meetings we talked about a person who is supporting 13 other people. Participant ended up working in our transitional work program and navigator would call and say stuff like ‘You gotta go to work today.’ She turned out to be a very good worker. It wasn’t easy for the client because of the situation she was in. The navigator helped ground that. The counselor could have said the same thing, and had same earnestness, but they can’t be trusted because [she] has power to pull money away.”

Recent attention to the effort to complement strengths and not duplicate work or services has produced a Kujichagulia Work Plan, which outlines the work the partnership plans to team up on to prepare for the next year of work. A Ramsey County official affirmed the impact of the Partnership on the government’s approach to its work: “I still am intrigued

that we can try something different –step out of the ‘this is what you do to get a job’ and think about it in a different way—it is extremely difficult to do that inside a public bureaucracy –it is important to challenge the way we think about the world and do things different”.

Sharing Power, Responsibility and Accountability

“There were a lot of community conversations. Based on those, [it] came out really clearly that if we’re going to modify or change the service delivery model we ought to be involving the people affected by that service delivery.”

–Ramsey County Employee

The impacts of sharing power and responsibility are being felt at all levels of the Kujichagulia Partnership. A “parallel process” is occurring as power and responsibility are being shared between leaders and directors of the CWC, Ramsey County, and the African American community; between program managers and evaluators at Ramsey County and the CWC, and navigators and employment counselors and participants of the Kujichagulia Partnership.

A new attendant at partnership meetings observed quickly: “I think there’s something really important about this effort in this collaboration. It’s not just between a private sector nonprofit and County; it’s between a culturally specific, culturally aware provider and the County. I think that’s a whole different dimension, not just a different service delivery model. It’s a learning experience for both partners in sense that objectives of the relationship overlap but are in separate spheres.”

Atum Azzahir of the Cultural Wellness Center describes this shared responsibility by saying:

“What we’re coming to understand is that neither of us can do it alone. Our approach calls for a sharing of responsibility, a culturally based knowledge production, so that everyone gets to tease out the lessons, everybody grows. That’s what distinguishes us from the conventional approach that the county does it by themselves and the authority was theirs. That system didn’t give participants any credit, didn’t give them the benefit of the doubt, and then the participants learned to take advantage of the system, and everyone was a victim and a perpetrator. Now we all have to examine ourselves and relate to one another. The situation we’re in comes from the society, and no one of us will be able to resolve it alone. The leadership of the future will have to be able to work together. Our model, the CWC model approaches this from that point of view...everyone has something to contribute.”

The Cultural Wellness Center has seen participants begin to share responsibility as well, through sharing resources and helping out with one another’s children, for example.

The contract for the Kujichagulia Partnership came up for renewal during a time that Atum Azzahir, the leader of the CWC, had to be out of town and was unable to attend an important workshop with County Commissioners. Atum was anxious that her absence would appear “irresponsible and callous”. However, elders, Workforce Solutions staff and African American leaders in Ramsey County banded together, produced a report, met with Commissioners and supported the Partnership in her absence. In fact, as mentioned earlier, when asked “what was the factor that convinced you Kujichagulia was a good project?” A Ramsey County Commissioner responded that “... the willingness of leaders in the community to come advocate for that project” was a deciding factor.

Managing Conflict

Beneath the partnership’s broad tensions of racism and problem definition were organizational conflicts that required skillful management from both the County and the CWC. County and CWC management have consistently recognized the need to address tension and conflicting by “naming and taming” the issues; however, they did not always do it as soon as they could have.

The CWC’s 2005 year-end report outlines a strategy for the following year of organizing facilitated discussions between County and CWC staffs to discuss issues and conflicts that had surfaced, but it was not until October 2007 that County leadership called the partners together to design a retreat that allowed all involved to air their concerns. County leadership called it the *Retreat to Advance* because the partners needed to “step back and get honest with each other so we could move forward.” At the retreat, people shared strong emotions about the outcomes they were looking for from the partnership’s work, why the work had been painful at times, and where there was or was not trust. Although painful things were said, as mentioned earlier, airing these sensitive issues allowed the partnership to move forward. As an interviewee put it, the retreat “was a difficult, but necessary, storming process to get the partners on the same page [because] it opened a space for healthy discourse.”

Throughout 2007, CWC reports highlight growing ability of staff from the two organizations to work through conflict. For example, CWC documents describe a discussion about sharing data among Navigators and Employment Services Counselors and observe that “this confrontation was handled very effectively by all members of the team.” Now, many interviewees talked about the need to communicate openly and honestly and to work through tensions as a significant lesson they have learned through this work, saying things like, “[When groups of people with different backgrounds and expectations come together], if they’re open to working together and listening to each other’s desires, and not afraid to speak their minds, then you really can put together a successful collaboration.”

Effectively working through tension has enabled the actors in the partnership to move away from questioning what each other is doing, to simply asking questions. The partners have gotten beyond defensiveness and are now getting to the work of serving African American

families in Ramsey County. Staff no longer fear conflict to the extent they used to. One interviewee anticipated future challenges within the partnership, and said, “They will probably want us to see things in a way we are not able to see it, and vice versa. Because we have a really solid basis of trust now, it will be an ok discussion.”

Mutual Teaching and Learning

One element of the CWC’s Philosophy of Community is, “Everyone is a student and a teacher, which results in new knowledge, responsibility, and valuing self.” The Kujichagulia partnership has brought that element to life creating new knowledge in a nonprofit organization and in government about how the two can work together to impact each other’s processes, to collect data that richly demonstrates client and system outcomes, and to contract as partners, rather than mere service providers.

Understanding and Impacting Each Other’s Processes. The CWC has taught the County about cultural barriers and nontraditional approaches to achieving desired outcomes. CWC staff have helped the County address cultural barriers through training and coaching. For example, one County leader saw workers feeling guilty and bad about themselves after traditional antiracism training, so a CWC staff person was invited in to approach the topic from the CWC’s frame of people of all cultures knowing more about the culture they come from, and also understanding that European American culture is not normative. In this way, the CWC was providing the County with a philosophy, not just a service. In another instance, the County asked the CWC Director to attend the overview meetings DHS requires new MFIP enrollees to attend. Based on the Director’s feedback and participation about potential cultural barriers in the way the meeting was structured, County staff changed the way the meetings are done. That is one small, but concrete, systems change to come out of the partnership. A County staff member said workers are increasingly aware of “that filter we use of our own culture, and that necessity of having other people to help us filter differently.”

The CWC has also taught the County that, as one interviewee put it, “there is a different solution to the outcomes.” That person described traditional County services as taking “steps 1 – 10 with an outcome of x,” and said, “what they [the CWC] are showing you is that they didn’t take 1 – 10, but they came out with x.” A County staff person spoke about the impact of this nontraditional model on clients’ experience with MFIP by saying that clients see the Navigators and staff working together as a team covering the families, and they know there is a real commitment – a shared commitment – to seeing African American families succeed.”

The CWC has also learned a lot through this partnership. The CWC has learned about County processes and language; it has gone from approaching this relationship as a fighter to a partner; and, perhaps most significantly, it has to begun to collect data to test its cultural wellness model. A 2005 report by the CWC describes “ a huge, positive gain” made after Ramsey County invited the project director to attend meetings and to participate in

discussions on planning and policy review because this allowed the CWC to “better understand the workings and language of the County and to build trust in the relationships with County staff.” The CWC has also learned to take a more collaborative approach to working in this partnership. Many interviewees talked about the early struggles between the County and the CWC, especially around the fact that the County invested money in the first contract, but felt that the CWC could not or would not tell them what outcomes had been achieved through that investment. A 2005 CWC document articulates the CWC’s position that the employment counselors should be learning from the partners working in the community, but there is no acknowledgement that those working in the community might also be able to learn from the employment counselors. That sentiment has changed over time, and the CWC now acknowledges that all partners have something to contribute. Atum Azzahir, the CWC’s leader in the partnership, spoke about how the experience of working in this partnership has challenged her:

“I have been a fighter for a long time, so to become a healer/teacher/elder in the work of building relationships across culture, that’s one of the biggest challenges I face in my life. I don’t intend to back down, but it has to be a bigger vision. Ramsey County has really challenged me to operate in this bigger vision. In doing so, sometimes I have to challenge myself and my colleagues, those who I lead and guide. I have to ask the African American community to tone down our fight so that it can be a healing fight and I don’t inflict more sounds. That’s what cultural wellness is about, and if I can’t live it, I can’t be talking about it.”

Collecting Data. Perhaps the greatest learning undertaken by the CWC is the systematic collection of data that enables the CWC to test whether or not its model works to achieve the mandated performance measurement indicators of MFIP success. This change came about in 2007, when the first contract was up for renewal and it became clear that the partnership would not be continued unless the CWC made drastic changes in its data tracking and reporting. The County was the teacher in this case, helping the CWC to learn how to be accountable for public money through establishing a performance baseline and tracking specified performance indicators over time. In a mid-2007 report, the CWC acknowledges that its “practice of oral reporting left the pilot severely vulnerable to challenge and/or criticism and did not adequately capture the benefits [of the work].” To address this, they hired a data specialist to work on-site at the CWC and hand-in-hand with the County’s evaluators to track information that can connect to the state’s database. They also trained frontline workers in documentation, and began tying reporting requirements to paychecks as an incentive for the Navigators to meet the data collection requirements. As one interviewee said, “Learning to do the data stuff has been a huge hurdle [for the CWC], and their willingness to do that was huge. They knew they had to in order to keep this contract.” Now that the CWC and the County have a process for transferring, tracking, and analyzing data towards the mandated MFIP performance indicators, the CWC data specialist is ready to begin working with Navigators to identify their criteria for successful outcomes and to develop systematic methods of measurement that will supplement individual success stories in order to capture the full benefits of the work.

While the County has done some teaching in this partnership, it has also done a great deal of learning, especially about nontraditional evaluation methods that look at an expanded sense of outcomes, and about how to partner without dominating or co-opting an organization. One County staff person said that, although the County went into the contractual relationship with the CWC looking for better employment outcomes for African American clients, the partnership has expanded the definition of what they are looking for. “We went in in a fairly simplistic way ... [now] we’re looking for people to be healthier in all the ways the Wellness Center talks about healthier. Clearly they want more people to be employed, too, but it’s not the only thing.” A County employee spoke of feeling pulled in two directions between understanding what evaluating nontraditional work requires, but also knowing that there is a government accountability piece that they need to provide. The evaluator said it has been a learning experience trying to find ways to balance those two perspectives. “I would not want to do one in the absence of the other, but both need to be done.”

Contracting a Partner, rather than a Vendor. Because the CWC is a strong organization with an explicit set of values and clearly-defined theories of change, it has taught the County how acting as a partner is different than acting as a purchaser of services. One County staff person talked about the difference between the usual role of monitoring vendors for compliance, and the role in the Kujichagulia partnership of helping and supporting a partner relationship. “It’s a stretch for us here at the County. We’re learning how to work differently.” Another County staff person said the greatest challenge in this partnership has been for the County to resist taking over and imposing what it wants, “or what we’re under pressure to want,” and that the real challenge ahead will be to continue listening to and doing what the community thinks makes sense.

One of the most unique aspects of government-nonprofit relationship established in the Kujichagulia partnership is that this mutual teaching and learning is actually written into the contract. County staff involved in setting the outcomes for the first contract said they intentionally crafted it to talk about both parties taking responsibility for “a mutual relationship that talked about change on both sides of the fence.” A CWC 2007 report interprets the initial contract in the following way: “The partnership of sharing the responsibility and implementing multiple efforts for achieving this vision was a three-year *learning and teaching relationship* implemented through the contracted services of the Cultural Wellness Center” [emphasis added]. The second contract also specified mutual responsibilities for both parties to teach and learn in the County’s responsibility to “receive and give trainings as identified, receive feedback and recommendation for changes ... [to MFIP] ... and, when possible, implement changes to the MFIP-ES service system in response to identified barriers,” as well as in the requirement for evaluating “what groups have learned from each other about providing employment services.”

Although the Kujichagulia partnership is designed so that both the County and the community teach and learn from each other, it faces the reality that institutional learning is a

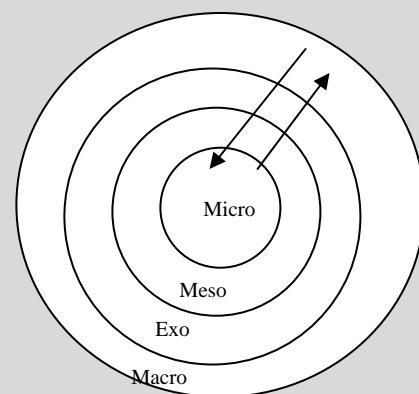
slow process, which is challenging when contracts require results in two- or three-year time spans. Minutes from a 2006 meeting between County and CWC leadership note, “People are getting impatient with the new learning on both sides. We are trying to do something that has not been done before. ... We need to get back in front of [the Board] and give them something to chew on.” In interviews, several County staff spoke about the partnership as a learning process and a new way of thinking about things for them. One talked about the time it will take for staff learning to translate into institutional change: “Learning is going both ways, but it’s not something that can just be told to an institution. Participants need to learn, but also the institution needs to learn, and that has to percolate up to a higher level. That can take a lot of time.”

Impacting the Systemic Construction of Trust

Through the Kujichagulia Partnership, trusting relationships have been built in many levels that affect MFIP clients. Taking a systems perspective on looking at how environments impact people helps explain why trust is so crucial to the functioning of this partnership. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described an ecological approach to human development, saying that people are not only impacted by events, but also by relations and interconnections in the settings around them. This is a theory of interconnectedness that highlights the ongoing, reciprocal interactions between person and environment. Bronfenbrenner said the levels of an ecological environment are nested structures (see Figure 1). At the center is the microsystem, which holds the connections between a person and others individuals or settings directly connected to him or her. The mesosystem holds the linkages and relationships between settings in which an individual participates. The exosystem holds the linkages and relationships between settings a person might never enter, but still impact the person. Finally, the macrosystem is the overarching ideology and institutional structures in a culture.

This theory can be used to examine how the relationships within the partnership impact an individual client. The microsystem contains the MFIP participant, an Employment Services Counselor, a Navigator, and other settings and individuals to which the participant is directly connected, including family, home, church, etc. The mesosystem contains the relationships between those settings, such as the relationship between the Navigator and the Employment Services Counselor. The exosystem holds the relationships and linkages between frontline workers and their supervisors, as well as between CWC and County upper-level staff, partnership members, County Commissioners. The macrosystem contains the U.S. governmental structures, including the design of welfare

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Nested Ecological Structures



policy, as well as this country’s cultural views of race and poverty. Changes within or between relationships and linkages in any of these systems reverberate through the other systems. In this way, the level of trust contained in the many relationships of the Kujichagulia partnership impacts the individual MFIP participant.

County Commissioners provided an environment supportive of trusting community-government relationships when they accepted the community’s planning process, took the recommendation of African American community leaders, and signed the initial contract. When the contract came up for renewal in 2007, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to building trust with the community by listening to community leaders’ continued support of the CWC and voting to support a second contract rather than walk away from the fragile trust that had been established during the first contract period. Without this exosystem level trust, the partnership would not exist. One Commissioner said, “I think we raised the level of trust within the leaders of the community that will eventually migrate down,” expressing hope that high level trust really is interconnected with grassroots changes.

The strong working relationship that has developed between the Navigators and the Employment Services Counselors over time was named by many interviewees as the most crucial element of the partnership – “it is where the partnership hits the road.” Many highlighted the dedicated work of supervisors from both the County and CWC to building a trusting relationship with each other, and to work with their staff to do the same. As one of the supervisors said, “Partnership is a verb. It isn’t a noun. It’s really about partnering, exchange, working through it.” After a rocky first two years, the model was redesigned in 2006 so that Navigators were partnered with a specific unit of the County’s Employment Services Counselors. In a gesture demonstrative of the trust that had developed between the two supervisors, the CWC drafted the text of a letter that was sent under County letterhead, with the County supervisor’s signature, to notify eligible clients that the CWC would be contacting them. This new model resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of clients being served by the CWC, likely because of the better working relationship with Work Force Solutions. Working as partners, rather than adversaries, enabled them to address more cases. Because of this improved relationship, frontline staff on both sides can do their jobs better, and, as one interviewee said, “participants can relax and develop trust as well.” CWC leadership spoke of the Employment Service Counselors’ openness to Navigator input, saying their relationship is “truly the core essential element of the partnership.”

Another sign that trust is working throughout the levels of the partnership now is that the County is collecting data on CWC participants. Several interviewees named data reporting as a major milestone in the partnership’s journey, noting that it was not just technical barriers, but also trust issues, that made it such a struggle early on. The CWC did not trust the County enough to give them data on their clients, and therefore the County could not get information to see the impact. Now, the CWC’s data specialist works hand-in-hand with County evaluators to track data and prepare reports, which provides a much clearer picture of impact than has ever been able to be seen before in this partnership.

Many interviewees talked about the time it takes to build trust, but that now the partnership is at a place where people are able to work through conflict because they share common goals. “I don’t think we could put enough stress on the fact that these kinds of partnerships will only work if you have relationships and trust on either side. Takes time to build relationships and trust.” Another County staff said, “You can say the words, but until there’s been time, experience, interaction ... really institutional level trust takes time.” The interviewee went on to say that once that level of trust has been established, conflict become less threatening. “We’re down the road, we’ve got all this history behind us, we know our motives, values and goals are consistent. We need to hang onto those and work out the details.”

The Path Ahead: Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Lessons Learned

According to W. Edwards Deming (as cited in Dirkswager, 2008), systems get the results they are designed to produce. If the results from a system are unacceptable, analysts should look to the design of the system, rather than the failures of the individuals working within the system. The Kujichagulia Partnership between Ramsey County, the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center, and the African American community, offers valuable lessons about how to redesign public services not only to improve participant outcomes, but also to change systems that are producing disparities.

However, systemic changes take time and constant attention to materialize, and successfully implementing a new policy design is a management challenge. It is very difficult to create the buy-in and engagement needed from all stakeholders in innovative, but previously untested, models. “Despite the cooperative spirit and aura of accommodation in collaborative efforts, networks are not without conflicts and power issues” (Agranoff, 2006, p 61). The County, the CWC, and the African American community are making efforts in the right direction, but it will take some time, and this collaboration needs to be nurtured. Huxham (2003) writes that successful collaboration takes an immense amount of communication, effort, and nurturance, and that the leaders have to manage the tensions by facilitating, nurturing and managing the outcomes.

The Kujichagulia Partnership began with an acknowledgement by Ramsey County that its MFIP system did not work equally well for all cultural communities. Many of the lessons learned from this partnership are related to the elements of the policy’s design that work to rectify that situation. The first of those is community ownership of the policy design process, which gave the African American community collective voice and power over the nature of MFIP services and the organization that would provide those services. The second important element in this policy design is flexibility in contract language and in reshaping traditional practices. In this case, a flexible design allowed for an initial contract that consisted primarily of exploration and pilot activities, followed up by a second contract that required both the CWC (through data collection) and the County (through specified systems change outcomes) to change their organizational practices. The challenge is to balance flexibility with clear, negotiated expectations of roles and responsibilities in order to mitigate potential confusion and conflict due to differing interpretations of a flexible design. The third element of the policy design that evolved later in the partnership’s journey was a redefined mission. The partners melded the traditional County performance measurement indicators and the CWC’s broad community goals into a shared vision statement that speaks to the role of both organizational partners. The fourth element of the policy design was the partnership itself. This element is highly atypical of government-nonprofit relationships. The policy established a partnership committee with members from the government, the contracted nonprofit organization, and the community (represented by the community

consultants) to share responsibility for the operation and evaluation of the Kujichagulia project. The collaborative nature of this work, as mandated by the policy design, has begun to shift the culture of interaction between the government and the community from a consumer services mindset to a producer and co-creator mindset (see Table 3), which is a significant paradigm shift.

In addition to lessons about designing policy for the public good, the Kujichagulia partnership offers many lessons regarding the management challenge of implementing policy in order to bring two significantly different organizations – with different definitions of the problem, approaches to the work, and definitions of success – together in partnership. The first lesson is that undertaking innovative, collaborative work requires the willingness to take a risk, followed by a balance of action and reflection. While a good amount of “learning by doing” must take place when creating a new service delivery model, this must be accompanied by ongoing efforts to step back and build trust, articulate shared values, and develop a common vision between those doing the work. A second lesson, related to the first, is that implementing a policy of partnership requires regular, strong communication and feedback loops that inform midcourse adjustments to the design, as well as support the development of trust among collaborators. It also requires that leadership actively facilitate naming, confronting, and negotiating through tensions between partnership members to prevent these issues from negatively impacting clients. Finally, making room for reflection and emphasizing communication facilitates development of cultural understanding, appreciation of each other’s perspectives, patience, and trust and buy-in at many levels, which are all necessary ingredients for sustaining a partnership such as this in which it might take awhile to fully realize the potential for systems change.

In the search for a solution to the problem of racial disparities, Ramsey County had a choice between pursuing what Crosby and Bryson (2004) term a big win strategy or a small win strategy. A big win strategy attempts provide thorough and comprehensive solutions to a policy problem in hopes of a demonstrable, complete and large-scale victory. A small win strategy, on the other hand, pursues incremental successes toward a larger victory. Crosby and Bryson write that big win strategies are time consuming, run into high risk of defeat and face intense opposition. Small win strategies are lower risk, require lower initial investment, and allow learning by doing. The Kujichagulia Partnership can be seen as a small win toward the big victory of eliminating racial disparities.

Beyond improved MFIP outcomes for African American families, the added value of this policy’s design of a partnership between government and a cultural community is that it exemplifies a political shift happening in small, but noticeable, ways around the world away from public services and toward public work. Public work is a “sustained, visible effort by a mix of people of diverse interests that creates or produces things – material or cultural – of lasting civic benefit, whose value is determined by a continuing process of discussion and deliberation (Boyte). Public work develops what Boyte (2008) terms “civic agency,” which is the capacities and skills of individuals to work together across lines of difference in order to solve the complicated challenges of today’s increasingly diverse and rapidly-changing world.

Different than a traditional customer service model of government, the Kujichagulia Partnership brings groups with different interests together around a common goal and generates cooperative work that solves public problems, such as racial disparities; creates public goods, such as a genuine partnership between local government and cultural communities; and contributes to the recovery of Abraham Lincoln’s vision for American democracy: government *of* the people and *by* the people, not simply for the people.

Table 3. Shift from public services to public work.¹

Question	Public Services: Ramsey County	Public Work: Kujichagulia Partnership
What is the philosophy?	Public and private scarcity – cut contracts, minimize services	Democratic abundance – how can we partner to create more than would be possible if we worked in isolation
What is the basic question?	What can government do to improve MFIP outcomes?	How can the County and the community work together towards self-determination of MFIP participants?
Who is in control?	County Board of Commissioners and County Management.	County, Community, and Nonprofit organizations. Citizens, including those in government.
What is the culture of interaction?	Consumer attitude: complaint, protest, competition, “government as vending machine.” ²	Producer attitude: partnerships, negotiations, ownership, co-learning
What is the outcome?	Customer service Government <i>for</i> the people	Solving public problems (racial disparities) and creation of public goods (partnership between government and cultural community to address problem of disparities) Government <i>of</i> the people and <i>by</i> the people, as well as for the people
What is democracy?	Democratic state, with regular elections	Democratic society created by the ongoing work of all

¹Adapted from Boyte, 2008.
²Benest, 2006.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the lessons learned from the journey of the Kujichagulia partnership, as well as the analysis of its strengths and challenges.

1. **Continue to measure success.** Documenting outcomes of public investment are essential elements of accountability for taxpayer money and sustained political will for innovation and systems change. The Kujichagulia Partnership must continue to grapple with how to represent the public value of this effort, which is much broader than improved MFIP outcomes for one client population. The formation of an evaluation subgroup within the partnership committee is a promising step in this direction.
2. **Continue investing in partnership for client and systems-change outcomes.** Investment is more than contract funds. It is also public staff time. Dollars alone will not be enough to accomplish the ambitious goals of this partnership. Continued investment of time and effort in regular communication and building the collaboration will be needed to support the work of designing a system that provides better outcomes for African American MFIP families.
3. **Continue focusing on the important work of public systems change.** The partnership members face an ongoing challenge to balance healthy conflict with affirmation of the collaborative work so that, in the words of the CWC’s Director, working as a partnership between the African American community and the government is a “healing fight” that builds relationships across cultures, rather than a fight that inflicts more wounds. Continued training, orientation, and collaborative work across organizations is needed to dismantle any remaining skepticism and cynicism of the partnership’s utility at the operational level.
4. **Explore how to bring this model to new communities, to scale.** The potential exists to expand this partnership model within Ramsey County, as well as to use it as a model for other counties in how to partner with cultural communities. However, caution must be taken to not apply this model in a cookie cutter fashion. One of the most central elements of its design and functioning is the community ownership of the design process, followed by ongoing engagement from the community partners. Thus, the replicated model would likely look different in each community.

A core element that could and should be replicated is the purpose of redesigning the system so that citizens experience positive interactions with government. Soss (in Schneider and Ingram, 2005) states that characteristics of citizens needed for a flourishing democracy – citizens who are efficacious, engaged, aware of public issues, and conscious of collective interests – emerge out of many experiences gathered over a lifetime.

“But like civic compliance, [these characteristics] can be supported or undermined by public policy. They depend, to a significant degree, on the ways policy designs position individuals in relation to the state and one another, and equally on the ways policy experiences shape individuals’ beliefs about themselves, their groups, and their government.”

If it is followed by a series of small wins that are informed by a strategic direction, the small win on a policy and implementation level of the Kujichagulia Partnership could become the foundation for a big win over time (Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Setting the strategic direction and identifying the next small wins will require continued exploration of how to create a sustainable and replicable model for positive interaction between government and cultural communities.

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*Kujichagulia
Partnership*

Organizational Chart

Community Elder/ Consultants
Kwame McDonald
Mary K. Boyd

Community Members
Billy Collins, YWCA
Stephanie Battle, YWCA
Lester Collins, Council on Black Minnesotans
Roger Banks, Council on Black Minnesotans

**Ramsey County
Board of Commissioners**

**African
American
Community**

**Cultural
Wellness
Center**

**Ramsey
County**

Workforce Solutions

County Human Services (CHS)

Evaluation

**Executive
Director**
Atum Azzahir

**Director of
Knowledge
Production**
Janice Barbee

Director
Patricia Brady

MFIP Program Manager
Janet Guthrie, left 3/08
Ginnee Engberg, left late '04

**MFIP Planning Specialist
Workforce Solutions**
Patricia Yates

**Financial
Assistance
Services
Director**
Mary
Nelson

Planner
Naly Yang
Formerly Deborah
Schlick
(left 10/05)

Manager
formerly Laurie Hestness,
current interim Cameron Counters

**Health
Systems
Navigator**
Akhmiri
Sekhr-Ra

**Information
Systems**
Biff Dunsworth

Program Specialist
Erika Nicholson

Unit Supervisor
Bruce Casselton

**Operations
Manager**
Tim Smith

County Evaluators
Rahel Tekle
Mark Herzfeld

**Community
Systems
Navigators**
Sheronda
Orridge, Pam
James, Jessica
Black

Employment
Services
Counselors

Employment
Services
Counselors

Employment
Services
Counselor

APPENDIX B.

DRAFT Interview Protocol

Capstone Project on the Self-determination Kujichagulia Partnership

Last modified: 3/23/2008

PROTOCOL:

At least two capstone group members will attend each interview. One will act as the primary interviewer and one will type minutes of the interview for later analysis. In order to maintain racial balance during interviews, at least one of our two colleagues from India will be part of every interview.

Each interviewee will be sent a *description of interview topics* in advance.

One set of questions will be asked of *all* interviewees. Another set of questions will be tailored to the interviewee's particular role and/or insight into the partnership. The questions do not need to be asked word-for-word or in any particular order – the important part is to capture the main ideas while also keeping it conversational.

Interviewers will follow the protocol set by the capstone group.

Interviewees will receive a copy of the final written report (or at least the executive summary).

INTERVIEW OUTLINE:

Introduction: *As you know, the Self-Determination Kujichagulia Project is a unique partnership in Ramsey County to provide culturally specific services to African American persons currently participating in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). This partnership represents a fundamentally different way for government to partner with the community. We are part of a consulting group at the Humphrey Institute that is working to provide an in-depth study of the Partnership in order to increase the overall learning for both non-profit, government and community participants by capturing the process and the continuing relationship of the partners and delineate program theory. Our questions will follow a funnel design, starting with some general questions as a warm-up, then getting into some specific questions about your role in the partnership before stepping back for some big picture questions at the end. The interview should take no more than an hour. We very much appreciate your taking time to share your thoughts with us.*

Questions for all interviewees:

1. (*warm-up*) What is your role in the Kujichagulia partnership? How did you get involved with the partnership?
2. How did the Kujichagulia Self-Determination partnership come into being?
- *Optional probe:* Why do you think MFIP wasn't working for the African American community?

[INSERT QUESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC INTERVIEWEES HERE?]

3. What has worked really well in the partnership? What are its strengths?
 - *Ask for examples*
 - What do you think have been the most significant milestones achieved so far in the Partnership?
4. How do you think the relationship among the organizational members of the partnership impacts the target community?
 - *Ask for examples*
5. Do you believe this program is more effective than traditional MFIP services? How so or how not?
 - *Ask for examples*
6. Have you seen/experienced any changes in the way the County approaches its work due to this partnership?
 - *Ask for examples*
7. What has been the greatest challenge of the partnership thus far? (*If necessary, give a menu of examples, "some of those challenges have been tension, building trust, different ways of approaching work..."*)
 - *Option:* If you woke up tomorrow and this partnership fit your perfect ideal, what would it look like? How would it be similar to it is now? How would it be different?

8. What opportunities exist in this partnership?
9. What do you most enjoy about your role on this project? What are the greatest challenges you face in your role?
10. What is the single most valuable lesson that could be taken from this partnership? Do you think the partnership should be replicated in other places or arenas?

Conclusion: *Thank you again for your time today.* We really appreciate your willingness to help us with this process, and we look forward to updating you with our final report in May.

Questions for ELDERS:

- How were you identified as a community elder for this project?
- Tell us more about the process that led to the formation of the Partnership.

Possible follow-up questions, but follow interviewee's lead on how they describe the process – don't put words into their mouth based on what we have heard from other sources.

- How was “the community” identified?
- Called together? Who came together?
- Were meetings held? Interviews done?
- What questions were posed to the community? What were the answers?
- How was this documented? (If there were meeting minutes taken or summary reports written, could we get copies of those?)
- Were other ideas suggested that were different than forming this partnership? Why was this idea pursued over those others?
- How was PPCWC identified? Were other organizations suggested? Why was the CWC chosen over other organizations?
- Are there other instances when you have been asked to represent your community on larger social change efforts ? If so, how have those compared to this effort?

Questions for OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS:

- Tell us more about your organization's role in the partnership.
 - How were you identified as a potential member of the partnership?
 - When did your organization become involved? When did you personally become involved? *(if applicable, Who was involved from your organization before you were?)*
- How is this partnership similar to or different than other partnerships your organization is involved with?

Questions for COMMISSIONERS:

- Did you support or oppose the renewal of the initial contract? Why?
 - Were there other options on the table for addressing MFIP disparities besides the renewal of this contract?
 - Do you consider yourself optimistic or skeptical about the future of the project? Why?
- What is the general mood among the Commissioners about this project?
- What kind of results would you like to be seeing out of this project? Do you think that's consistent with what the rest of the Board is looking for?
 - Do you consider evidence of these outcomes as a necessity for the County's continued involvement in this project?

Questions for EVALUATORS:

- Could you please describe the 500 Families research process in detail?
 - What is the current status of the 500 Families research process?
 - How were these families identified/sorted?
 - What indicators are being used to track the progress of these families? How were these indicators chosen?

- Who is responsible for tracking and collecting the data?
- Can we have access to the information you're gathering from this process?

Questions for people MANAGEMENT ROLES (CWC):

- What type of work, if any, has the CWC done with Ramsey County in the past?
- What is the CWC's past relationship with Hennepin County?
 - How did that relationship work? How did it end?
- What type of results do you think Ramsey County is looking for from this project?
- What outcomes are being tracked in Kinship Networks?
 - How can this be communicated to the County?
- The CWC defines the problem in terms of "sickness." Continuing the medical analogy, what is the expected "treatment dosage" required to treat the "sickness." Roughly how long and how intensively would participants need to receive the CWC's "treatment" in order to get well?
- How do you know when your work is done?
- How sustainable is the work you're doing? What factors facilitate sustainability? What factors inhibit or threaten sustainability?

Questions for people in MANAGEMENT ROLES (RAMSEY CO):

- What type of work, if any, has Ramsey County done with the CWC prior to this project?
- How does the County's MFIP work with other groups, such as Native American and Hmong communities, look? How does it compare to this project?
 - What is the impact of having or not having a similar partnership in these communities?
- What is the mood about this project among the Commissioners? What results do they want to see?

Questions for people in DIRECT PRACTITIONER/NAVIGATORS (CWC):

- What activities do you do with participants?
 - How does this compare to what County workers are doing?
 - How many families do you work with, and how does this work load compare with that of county employees?
 - How often and for how long do you work with these families? How does that compare with the county?
- What is the relationship like between Navigators and county service providers?
 - When and how often do you meet?
 - How structured is your communication?
 - What has been the best part of your experience working in this partnership?
 - What has been the most challenging part of your experience working in this partnership?
- The CWC's main office is in Hennepin County. Has it been challenging for Navigators to work with participants in Ramsey County?
 - How have Navigators learned Ramsey County resources?

Questions for people in DIRECT PRACTITIONER/NAVIGATORS (RAMSEY):

- What activities do you do with participants?
 - How does this compare to what CWC navigators are doing?
 - How many families do you work with, and how does this work load compare with that of CWC navigators?
 - How often and for how long do you work with these families? How does that compare with the CWC?

- What is the relationship like between Ramsey service providers and CWC navigators?
 - When and how often do you meet?
 - How structured is your communication?
 - What has been the best part of your experience working in this partnership?
 - What has been the most challenging part of your experience working in this partnership?
- The CWC's main office is in Hennepin County. Have there been any challenges in working across County lines, or has geography not been a barrier in your work with the Navigators?

Questions for ACADEMICS:

- [Explain the partnership.] Are there other projects/partnerships you know of that are similar to the Ramsey-CWC partnership?
 - How are these projects similar and different from this one?
 - Is this partnership unique? If so, what makes it unique?
 - What information from this project do you think would be most helpful to other groups considering tackling the problem of racial disparities in MFIP success rates?
- What are some of the main causes of the MFIP success disparity between African Americans and the rest of the population?
 - How does this project, as far as you understand it, address these issues?
 - If you could design a project to address these issues, what would it look like? How would it be similar to the CWC-Ramsey project, and how would they differ?
 - What advice would you give a partnership like this one to help them better address the problems they're working on?

APPENDIX C.

Work Plan
African American MFIP Project

Vision: African American families moving from dependence to independence.

Goal: To assist the African American community in the development of a plan that includes strategies to;

- Increase the number and proportion of African American families whose income comes more from earnings than from assistance,
- Decrease the number of African American families sanctioned,
- Increase the number of relationships with families, agencies and other support systems that are helpful.

Methodology: We will;

- Engage in conversations with members of the African American community,
- Share the data from Ramsey County,
- Listen to the stories of success and failures with the community,
- Identify groups, organizations and/or agencies in present or past delivery systems,
- Record suggestions,
- Utilize information gathered from the conversation to outline a basic strategy,
- Convene a forum to review data and supply detail to plan, such as,
 - number of families to be served
 - how they would be served
 - community definition of success
 - identify the means to implement the plan

Budget Consultants fees will cover all costs, including administration of the planning process, the recruitment of participants, the facilitation of focus groups, the recording of all conversations, the provision of meeting space and equipment, honoraria, child care, transportation as appropriate.

MKB and Associates, Inc.	\$10,000
Mary K. Boyd, President/CEO	
The Center for Sports, Education and Communications, Inc.	\$10,000
Kwame JC McDonald, President/CEO	

APPENDIX D.

Recommendations for Implementing the African American Self-Determination Project

This memo outlines a common understanding on the part of Ramsey County Workforce Solutions, Community Human Services and Mary K. Boyd and Kwame McDonald, about the recommendations emerging from a community-based planning effort in the spring and summer of 2003.

Vision: African American families recovering and moving from dependence to interdependence and self-accountability

Goals:

The Goals sought by Ramsey County:

- Increase the number and proportion of African American families whose income comes more from earnings than from assistance
- Decrease the number of African American families who are sanctioned.
- Increase the number of relationships with families, agencies and other support systems.

The goals set forth by the Community partners:

- Increase the network of relationships with family and extended family
- Restore the vehicle that allowed personal and community resources to be systematically helpful to families
- Improve the skills and communications between Ramsey County MFIP employees and their clients.
- To enhance the approaches and methods that Ramsey County MFIP employees use to work with African-American clients.

Moving forward: Ramsey County will contract with the Powderhorn/Phillips Cultural Wellness Center for \$375,000 a year to implement a Community-Systems Navigator Initiative to help both Ramsey County and the community meet their goals. The center will bring to this work its mission of *unleashing the power of citizens to heal themselves and build community.*

1. The Cultural Wellness Center will provide Community Systems Navigators experienced in working with African American families on MFIP who will connect with 45 African American participants in the initial six months and will:
 - Provide short-term individualized and comprehensive strategic empowerment support (case management);
 - Advocacy to navigate complexities of MFIP system;
 - Personal and family mentoring;
 - Convene group mentoring and informal community groups
 - Train local residents who are leaving the system to become community systems navigators who will sustain the Initiative long term.

APPENDIX D.

- o Will implement a curriculum which teaches heritage as a resource for self-accountability.

Over 3 years, the Initiative will provide similar services to about 500 families.

2. The Community Systems Navigators and Atum Azzahir, director of the Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center, will work with African American community institutions, agencies and individuals, to develop a network of community support (including volunteers) for families on MFIP.

Track record:

The Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center initiated the concept of community navigators with funding from the Minnesota Department of Human Services for a two and a half -year project, ending in summer 2003.

That project had projected to serve 300 participants on MFIP. In the end, the project served 434 families. Of those families 31% of 405 adults and 18% of 29 teen parents were employed. The median placement wage was \$9.34 an hour.

A significant difference between the pilot project and the proposed effort is the partnership with the County. At the outset of the pilot effort, project organizers had anticipated that 100% of referrals to community navigators would come from MFIP employment service counselors. Actual experience, however, was that 43% of the referrals came from workers in the MFIP system and the rest of the referrals came from the community organizing work directly with participants.

APPENDIX D.

APPENDIX E.

Agreement Between Ramsey County and Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center For African-American Self-Determination Project

This is an Agreement between Ramsey County, Minnesota, a political subdivision of the State of Minnesota, on behalf of Workforce Solutions, 2098 Eleventh Avenue East, North Saint Paul, MN 55109 ("County") and Powderhorn Phillips Cultural Wellness Center, 1527 East Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55407, a Minnesota non-profit corporation ("Contractor").

WHEREAS, The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved the Minnesota Family Investment Program Employment Services ("MFIP-ES") Redesign Plan in February, 2003; and

WHEREAS, The MFIP-ES Redesign Plan called for community-based planning efforts in the African-American community to develop recommendations to respond to racial disparities in MFIP outcomes; and

WHEREAS, On October 21, 2003, based on the recommendations made by the community-based planning effort, the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners approved an agreement with the Contractor for the African-American Self-Determination Project to improve MFIP outcomes of African-American families in Ramsey County, on terms to be negotiated by the County Manager; Now, Therefore,

The County and the Contractor agree as follows:

1. Scope of Services

- a. The Contractor shall provide the services described in this Agreement to 500 MFIP families who self-identify as African-American, over the term of this Agreement, through four Community Systems Navigators ("Navigators") experienced in working with African-American MFIP participants.
- b. The Contractor will make the final determination as to which of the services described herein to provide to each of the MFIP Families. Services available from the Contractor are to:
 - Provide short-term individualized and comprehensive strategic empowerment support
 - Provide advocacy to navigate complexities of MFIP system
 - Provide personal and family mentoring
 - Convene group mentoring and informal community groups
 - Train local residents who are leaving the MFIP system to become Navigators who will sustain the African-American Self-Determination Project long term with the County's support.
 - Implement a curriculum that teaches heritage as a resource for self-accountability.

- c. The Contractor will work with African-American community institutions, agencies and individuals, to develop a network of community support (including volunteers) for families on MFIP.
- d. The Contractor will work with the County to enhance the approaches and methods the County MFIP staff use to work with African-American participants through trainings, coaching and feedback.
- e. The Contractor will assist the Ramsey County MFIP in meeting the following outcomes:

Overall System Outcome for which the entire Ramsey County MFIP system is responsible: The Self-Support Index for African-Americans on MFIP in Ramsey County will be no more than 5% off the total percentage for the full caseload. This contract is undertaken to help achieve that outcome by improving the ability of the Ramsey County MFIP services staff to engage participants.

Overall Project Outcome: Ramsey County MFIP services staff will more effectively engage African-American participants women and men in services that are intended to lead to increasing self-sufficiency.

Indicator 1: African-American MFIP participants will participate in activities that teach goal-setting, self-correction, personal responsibility, and how to resolve family conflict and develop kinship networks.

Measure: Percentage of referred clients who participate in the African American Self-Determination Project.

Expected result: 63% of the individuals referred will participate in African-American Self-Determination Project activities (40 clients per quarter).

Measure: Number of participants involved in support or educational groups.

Expected result: Thirty (30) individuals each quarter will participate in a support group or educational group.

Measure: Percentage of clients who improve their level of participation on the Health Continuum.

Expected result: Of all the individuals who have participated three months or longer in African-American Self-Determination Project activities, 80% will have improved their level of participation on the Health Continuum, attached hereto and made a part of this Agreement as **Attachment A**.

Indicator 2: Information on problems experienced by participants will be provided to the Ramsey County MFIP service system.

Measure: The type and frequency of problems experienced by clients will be reported quarterly.

Expected result: Quarterly narrative report.

Measure: Staff from the Wellness Center will provide training on system barriers to employment service and financial assistance staff and administrators.

Expected result: 3 training sessions are held each quarter starting in the third quarter of Year 1 (6 sessions in the first year and 12 sessions each in Year 2 and Year 3).

2. County Roles and Responsibilities

The County shall meet with Contractor on a regular basis to review progress on the Project, review the reports, receive training as identified above, receive feedback and recommendations for changes to the County's MFIP-ES service system, and select and implement changes to the MFIP-ES service system in response to identified barriers.

Indicator: The County's MFIP service delivery system will make adaptations that will increase the ability of African-American participants to be successful in achieving self-sufficiency.

Measure: Ramsey County MFIP management will review the quarterly narrative reports about problems experienced by individuals and develop and implement a work plan to address problems.

Expected result: There will be a decline in the number of problems reported by African-American MFIP participants after work plan changes have been implemented.

3. Time

The services will be provided during the period from November 1, 2003 through December 31, 2006, unless earlier terminated in accordance with the termination clause of this Agreement.

4. Cost/Payment

a. The County will pay the Contractor the following sums for the indicated time periods, to the extent the costs incurred by the Contractor are consistent with the Project Budget, attached hereto and made a part of this Agreement as **Attachment B**:

- 1) up to a maximum of \$62,500 for the period from November 1, 2003 through December 31, 2003
- 2) up to a maximum of \$375,000 for the period from January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2004
- 3) up to a maximum of \$375,000 for the period from January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005
- 4) up to a maximum of \$375,000 for the period from January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2006

AGREEMENT
Between Ramsey County and the Powderhorn/Phillips Wellness and Cultural Health Practices Center
for the African-American Self-Determination Project

This is an Agreement between Ramsey County, Minnesota, a political subdivision of the State of Minnesota, on behalf of Workforce Solutions, 2098 Eleventh Avenue East, North Saint Paul, MN 55109 ("County") and the Powderhorn/Phillips Wellness and Cultural Health Practices Center, 1527 East Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55407, a Minnesota non-profit corporation ("Contractor").

WHEREAS, The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved the Minnesota Family Investment Program Employment Services ("MFIP-ES") Redesign Plan in February 2003; and

WHEREAS, The MFIP-ES Redesign Plan called for community-based planning efforts in the African-American community ("Community Consultants") to develop recommendations to respond to racial disparities in MFIP outcomes; and

WHEREAS, Based on recommendations from the Community Consultants, the African-American Self-Determination Project ("Project") was piloted under the terms of an agreement with the Contractor from November 1, 2003, through December 31, 2006; and

WHEREAS, On December 12, 2006, based on a positive evaluation of the Contractor's services and recommendations made by Workforce Solutions and Community Human Services, the County Manager signed an amendment to the Agreement with the Contractor to extend the term through March 31, 2007 and to establish the contract sum for the period from January 1, 2007, through March 31, 2007; and

WHEREAS, The County established a Project a partnership committee ("Kujichagulia"), with membership made up of representatives of the Contractor, Community Consultants, and the County (Workforce Solutions and Community Human Services Department), to discuss operations of the Project, evaluate the effectiveness of the Project, triage any concerns or issues, identify areas of improvement, and make decisions that support the Project; Now, Therefore,

The County and the Contractor agree as follows:

1. Scope of Services

- a. The culturally based services ("Project Services") that the Contractor shall make available exclusively to MFIP clients who self-identify as African-American ("Project Clients") are as follows:
 - 1) Mentoring
 - a) One-on-one sessions with Community System Navigators ("Navigators") experienced in working with African-American MFIP participants may include, connecting to community resources, building a system of support and reconnecting with culture to build a foundation for healthy living. The Navigators

- will also be working with the Project Clients and Ramsey County staff to build a better working relationship; and
- b) Mentoring services shall be provided to at least 600 Project Clients during the Term of this Agreement, through four Navigators.
- 2) Classes and/or workshops
 - a) Group activities will include African American Heritage, Birthing Teams, Family Connections, and Kinship Networking, Educational Support, Resource Development and Management, Cultural Health and Nutrition, and Life Skills Support; and
 - b) At least 180 individuals will participate each calendar year, for a total of at least 540 individuals over the Term of this Agreement.
- b. All African-American MFIP participants assigned to Workforce Solutions Assisted Services unit will be referred to the Contractor by Workforce Solutions Employment Services Staff ("ES Staff"). The Contractor, in consultation with the Project Clients, will make the final determination as to which of the Project Services to provide to each Project Client, acknowledging that services may or can overlap.
 - c. The Project Services to be provided by the Contractor under this Agreement are intended to:
 - 1) Provide support, which is short-term, individualized, comprehensive, strategic, and empowering;
 - 2) Provide advocacy to navigate the complexities of the MFIP system;
 - 3) Train local residents who are leaving the MFIP system to become Navigators who will sustain the African-American Self-Determination Project long-term with the County's support;
 - 4) Train Project Clients using a curriculum that teaches heritage as a resource for self-accountability.
 - d. The Contractor will convene informal community groups and will work with African-American community institutions, agencies and individuals, to strengthen its network of community support (including volunteers) for families on MFIP.
 - e. The Contractor will work with the County to:
 - 1) Enhance the approaches and methods the County MFIP staff use to work with African-American participants through trainings, coaching and feedback; and
 - 2) Coordinate, develop and implement a Leadership Development Training Series for all County staff working on the Project and other County and community individuals as identified.

2. **Project Outcomes**

- a. The intent of the parties is to achieve the identified Project outcomes in order to improve the achievement of MFIP performance measures and MFIP performance outcomes in 2008 and 2009.
- b. The Contractor will assist the County in meeting the following overall Project outcomes:
 - 1) **Outcomes for Project Clients:**
 - a) An increase in people working and hours participating in work-related activities: the average number of hours worked by African Americans will increase 10% and the number of African Americans who have any work or work related hours will increase by 10%.
 - b) A decrease in the disproportionate rate of sanction; the rate of sanctions for African American participants will remain at or below 15%, the average for MFIP participants.
 - c) An increase in employment rate for African Americans: the number of African Americans who have any work hours will increase by 5%.
 - 2) **Outcomes for System Change:**
 - a) The partnership between the County and the Contractor improves services for African-Americans in Ramsey County;
 - b) County employment services counselors report that they have an improved understanding of how to work with African-American individuals; and
 - c) MFIP participants utilizing the services of the Contractor report an improved sense of cultural identity as demonstrated by an increase in the utilization of their circles of support, and as reported in client feedback process conducted by the County.
- c. The Contractor will provide monthly reports to the Kujichagulia that would include Project Client-specific identification and other pertinent information needed to measure these outcomes, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - 1) The number of MFIP clients referred to the Contractor;
 - 2) How many clients were served; and
 - 3) What kinds of services were provided.
- d. The Contractor, in partnership with the County and the Community Consultants, will produce and provide written semi-annual and annual reports to the Kujichagulia and the African-American community leadership.

3. **County Roles and Responsibilities**

- a. The County shall meet with the Contractor on a regular basis to review progress on the Project; review monthly, semi-annual and annual reports and evaluation measures; receive and give trainings as identified above; receive feedback and

recommendations for changes to the County's MFIP-ES service system; and, when possible, implement changes to the MFIP-ES service system in response to identified barriers.

- b. The County will contract with an outside vendor to conduct Project Client surveys for feedback on services provided by the Contractor.
- c. The County shall, jointly with the Kujichagulia, evaluate the data collected by the Contractor, the County's outside vendor, and the Ramsey County Community Human Services' Office of Performance Measurement and Evaluation ("OPME"), and issue a report on the success of the partnership and the progress of the Project Clients.
 - 1) The OPME will, at least once per year during the Term of this Agreement, conduct a survey of the Partnership Committee members regarding the success of the Project, to include, but not be limited to, the following issues:
 - a) The quality of the Partnership
 - b) The effect of the Partnership on the service delivery system, including Workforce Solutions, the Human Services Department and the Contractor.
 - c) What members have learned and how it has affected the way that they plan and implement services.
 - d) Individual Project Client results due to the activities of the Partnership.
 - 2) The OPME will, at least once per year during the Term of this Agreement, conduct a survey of the County's MFIP-ES staff and the Navigators to assess improvement of services and of the County's relationship with Project Clients. Issues to be included in the survey will be, at minimum, the following:
 - a) What groups have learned from each other about providing employment services;
 - b) Whether the practice of the County's MFIP-ES staff have changed as a result of their interaction with the Navigators;
 - c) Whether the employment services providers used activities and resources that they had not previously used; and
 - d) Recommendations from both the County's MFIP-ES staff and the Navigators on further service changes to improve the quality and results for Project Clients.

3. Term

The Contractor shall provide Project services as described in this Agreement for the period from April 1, 2007, through December 31, 2009 ("Term"), unless earlier terminated in accordance with the termination clause of this Agreement.

4. Cost/Payment

- a. The County will pay the Contractor the following sums for the indicated time periods, to the extent the costs incurred by the Contractor are consistent with the Project Budget for the applicable year
 - 1) up to a maximum of \$281,250 for the period from April 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007;
 - 2) up to a maximum of \$365,000 for the period from January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008; and
 - 3) up to a maximum of \$365,000 for the period from January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009.
- b. The 2007 Project Budget is attached hereto and made a part of this Agreement as **Attachment A**.
- c. The Contractor shall submit an invoice to the County by the 10th day of the month, showing types of services, identification of personnel performing the services identified by classification, dates and hours of services by classification, and related expenses incurred during the month. Payment will be made within 35 days of receipt of a detailed invoice.
- d. Interest accrual and disputes regarding payment shall be governed by the provisions of Minnesota Statutes Section 471.425.
- e. If the Contractor receives an advance in funds for initial program operations, the Contractor shall submit documentation with the invoices for the expenditure of such advance funds, including time, materials and related expenses, up to the amount forwarded.

5. Independent Contractor

It is agreed that nothing contained in this Agreement is intended or should be construed as creating the relationship of agents, partners, joint venturers, or associates between the parties hereto or as constituting the Contractor as the employee of the County for any purpose or in any manner whatsoever. The Contractor is an independent contractor and neither it, its employees, agents nor representatives are employees of the County. From any amounts due the Contractor, there will be no deductions for federal income tax or FICA payments, nor for any state income tax, nor for any other purposes, which are associated with an employer-employee relationship unless required by law. Payment of federal income tax, FICA payments, and state income tax are the responsibility of the Contractor.

6. Indemnification

The Contractor shall indemnify, hold harmless and defend the County, its officials, employees and agents from any and all liability, loss, cost, damages, expenses, claims or actions, including attorney's fees, which the County, its officials, employees, and agents may hereafter sustain, incur or be required to pay, arising out of or by reason of any act or omission of the Contractor, its agents or employees, in the execution, performance, or failure to adequately perform the Contractor's obligations pursuant to this Agreement.

APPENDIX G.

Major Events in the Kujichagulia Partnership

