

CROSS-CLASS CAPACITY TOOL

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/cross-class-capacity-tool.html>

This living document was created by the SURJ(Stand Up for Racial Justice) poor and working-class group as an act of love and commitment to our common desire, across the class spectrum, to bring white folks into action, dismantle white supremacy and engage with the complex struggle and beauty of collective liberation.

Some framing: White people working together to dismantle racism is critical work. Attempting to do this work without acknowledgment and thoughtfulness to how class affects folks experience of race limits a true understanding of what is racism and what is classism. Working to dismantle white supremacy and to end structural and interpersonal racism doesn't mean we can avoid talking about issues of class privilege. On the contrary, if we don't become bold about what cross-class solidarity work means as white folks yearning for racial justice, our work will be less effective and our wins short-lived.

With this in mind here are some examples of common sticky spots that class privileged whites come upon when working across class:

- **Conflating Race and Class.** Assuming that all white people have access to wealth erases white poor and working class people. Referring to communities of color with an assumption of poverty erases the Black middle class and other class privileged people of color. These two systems of oppression use similar tactics and have always been intimately linked, however they are not interchangeable.
- **Scapegoating.** Through subtle or direct means, operating with a bias that assumes working class whites are somehow more racist than white folks with money reinforces classism. This scapegoating takes responsibility away from middle and upper class families who have often accrued wealth through exploitation and takes emphasis away from the damaging policies and practices put in place by wealthy whites that structurally reinforce both racism and classism.
- **Discomfort around conflict.** Recognition of conflict and figuring out disagreement is very different across cultures and classes. White, class privileged cultures often carry a value that avoiding conflict or being 'nice' and 'polite' are the better/only ways to talk about difficult things. This value is not universal and can sometimes stifle needed dialogues.
- **Outcome over Process.** Sometimes the desire to create action can override the process of thoughtful and intentional planning. When intentionality breaks down, group norms will almost always default to those with the most privilege/power calling the shots.
- **One right (controlling) way.** As is true with whiteness in general, within class privileged circles there can be an attachment to things happening in a particular way. The sense of what is the right way is informed by folks class background and status. Attempts to control or micromanage the details can push out poor and working class involvement/leadership.

- **Attempting to homogenize.** Just as whiteness can attempt to subsume everything into a false perception of sameness, class privileged cultures often do the same. Creating cultural norms around language, dress, actions etc that cater to middle and upper class comfort. Bringing working class folks to the table without changing the class culture of the table in question will often be short lived.
- **Palatability.** Choosing only working class folks who are college educated or otherwise assimilated into middle/upper class norms to be a spokesperson/reference point around class.
- **Convenience.** Recognizing class dynamics when it's convenient but treating it as off topic when brought up in a way that challenges power or requires long term investment in our lives and communities.
- **Masking/False Scarcity.** Presenting as though stressed about money from a false sense of scarcity, not a lived experience of not having access to enough. This can be done in an attempt to relate to working class people or to assuage guilt, confusion, a lack of exposure to cross class learning spaces, or a combination of them all.

Examples of things that can be alienating to welfare/working poor, low income and working class whites:

- Speaking for and about working poor, low income and working class whites without the necessary leadership or adequate representation from these communities.
- Introductions that pivot on education/employment status and lineage or political resume and credentials. This holds true within emails, on conference calls and in person.
- Giving advice or asking questions about people's struggle; our impairments/health, lack of money, employment or anything that might be intrusive, patronizing or blaming.
- Presuming shared experience about activities that are dependent on middle class lifestyle and values of some sort, examples: college, out of state / country travel for pleasure, rejuvenation or political actions
- Using acronyms without explanation
- Not using class identifiers (see below)
- Defensive reactions to questions and feedback about barriers and assumptions that hinder our involvement.
- Inaccessible language and jargon (academic and non-profit speak)
- Making fun of, dismissing, or shaming working, welfare class, and rural cultures and equating our communities with ignorance and bigotry.
- Cultures of perfection, 'professionalism', and respectability politics (meaning messaging, language, formatting, and campaign demands have to be always appear 'respectable' to middle and upper class people in order to be legitimate)
- Commodifying our lived experiences to add credibility without an implemented commitment to alter the material conditions of instability and poverty we often are living through within our practice of white anti-racism.

Examples of some things that create room to be, breathe, and engage as welfare, working-poor and working-class whites:

- Provide food and childcare at meeting spaces/events. Ensure that meeting spaces are child friendly and have reasonable start and finish times
- Use class identifiers – be transparent and honest about your class background when getting to know each other and when starting to work together. Often class is not mentioned, and therefore, class experiences and differences are erased, even though they strongly inform everything we do!
- Practice creative ways to redistribute wealth. Examples include: prioritizing (whenever possible) resourcing of poor, welfare and working class leaders, as well as local leaders in under-resourced areas, over well resourced, urban career consultants. Work on building a presence within our communities that provides support for ordinary needs. Resource and staff regular food banks, provide basic advocacy for folks navigating government benefits. Help with access to childcare, healthcare and housing. Commit to stay - reduce the impact economic fragility and exploitation has upon our vulnerability to the race bribe. Build up local leadership within these spaces.
- Move at an accessible pace! Keep in mind that poverty and instability can be debilitating and at times completely preoccupying. Modeling a schedule, leadership or decision making structure based on class privileged and able bodied capacity can be a deterrent to poor and working class involvement.
- Engage in campaigns that are relevant to welfare and working class whites, ideally that are developed by and for low-income white folks. Includes relevancy in approach, demands, and language.
- Reflect on what type of culture is being created and in what ways it's centered around middle/upper class norms and comfort. What would it look like to center it around working class participation instead? Practice moving back from the front of the room and decision-making positions - embrace the value of being middle class / upper working class supporters and allies of working poor and low income leadership and direction.
- Support meeting spaces (in person, phone, online, etc.) for welfare and working class whites to strategize, share and develop resources, develop peer mentorship relationships, and support each other!
- Prioritize resourcing of leadership development and training for poor, welfare, and working class organizers
- Provide fundraising support for poor and working-class led projects (fundraising training as well as sharing resources)
- Provide travel support – metro cards / rides . Know where the local food stamp / HUD/ social security/ food banks office and shelters are.
- Find other class privileged people to sort thru things with. Challenge one another to dive deeper with your understandings and self reflection. Understand that less privileged folks get to move away from situations, without explanation, that they simply don't

want to have to deal with... again. Remember it is not the responsibility of welfare and working class folks to be supportive of a middle/upper class learning moment when those with less power are being hurt, alienated, offended, oppressed, triggered, and insulted.