

# **COMMUNITY ENGAGED RACIAL JUSTICE TOOLKIT**

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*In the wake of seeing our neighbors anew after the 2020 election, a hyper-local approach crystallized for us around what we are calling “local kindness.” Local kindness is deliberately distinct and counter to “Iowa nice,” which can support white supremacy and white comfort. We will focus on crafting a pedagogy, practice, and space of localized kindness for our community partnerships and work. Kindness is hard and needs scaffolding (tools, skills, values) to support it. Importantly, though, we are not crafting a toolkit to teach people how to “be kind” or how to talk to people who dehumanize you. “Local” in our context means building an anti-racist pedagogy for and within a majority white university and also holding the complexities within racial and ethnic groups, between urban, rural, and suburban spaces, and between generations. Being kind and [in relation with one another](#) must include both calling people out and [calling people in](#). We know that we have to make waves in order to be kind. We know that we have to disrupt and transform the status quo to be kind. And we know that we need to fight for racial justice to be kind.*

*As people affiliated with the University of Iowa, our “local kindness” means disrupting the practices of this university that are built upon and further propagating white supremacy. We know that the university, both as an institution and the people affiliated with the university, commit violence to communities in Iowa City and surrounding areas. Often, this violence is committed “unintentionally” or under academic pretenses of “research, development, or outreach.” Thus, our goals for this toolkit and for our lifelong work is to demonstrate what power community engagement with anti-racist politics has in Iowa City - and how necessary (and complicated) community engagement with anti-racist politics is as part of the University of Iowa.*

## About Iowa City and University of Iowa

### Land Acknowledgement:

Let us always remember and acknowledge that Iowa City and the University of Iowa is located on the unceded homelands of the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe, Iowa, Kickapoo, Menominee, Myaamiaki, Omaha, Osage, Otoe, Ottawa, Ponca, Potawatomi, Sik and Meskwaki, Sioux, Three Affiliated Tribes, and Winnebago nations. These people continue to survive, resist, and create in the face of colonial violence. Meanwhile, the University of Iowa has and continues to benefit from these stolen lands and communities. Finally, we want to emphasize that land acknowledgments alone are insufficient and performative when they, much like First Nations, are regulated to “the past.” Land acknowledgements (both by the people who make them as well as the people who read them) must be combined with decolonial praxis and actions today that shepherd resources to Native people and fight for the repatriation of Native land as well as justice for Native, Indigenous, and First Nation communities.

The University of Iowa Native American Council authored and continues to shape a land acknowledgement to recognize and respect the indigenous peoples whose territories we reside on. [Here is a video](#) that discusses key issues surrounding land acknowledgments and features the University of Iowa Native American Councils land acknowledgment read in full.

[Donations/Assistance](#)

[Native American Council](#)

[Upcoming Native American events/meetings on campus](#)

[November is Native American Heritage Month](#)

### **Contextualizing Place: About Iowa City:**

Iowa City, commonly referred to as a “college town,” is home to the University of Iowa. As the first UNESCO City of Literature in the United States, Iowa City is also applauded for its literary and arts scene. The infamous Iowa Writers’ Workshop, award winning International Writing Program, and numerous cultural and arts festivals, including Mission Creek and the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, are all based in Iowa City. The city’s arts scene and public university attract young people, largely from the midwest, to town, making Iowa City’s median age around 26 years old. Walking around this former capital, the artistic, youthful, and academic culture of the town is clear in addition to one other fact: Iowa City is a predominantly white area.

With a population size of about 75,130 people according to the 2019 census, Iowa City is the fifth-largest city in the state. The city is in Eastern Iowa and part of Johnson County, which has a population of 130,882 according to the 2010 census. The 2010 census also concluded that 79.7% of Iowa City residents were white alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 6.2% were Asian alone, and 5.8% were Black alone.

The fact that Iowa City has a predominantly white population intertwines with the patterns and nuances of racial injustice in Iowa City as well as the Midwest at large. In an article for the "Little Village Magazine," Donna Cleveland explains how reputations of "Midwestern niceness," permutations of white dominant culture, and other aspects of the Midwest create unique forms of oppression for BIPOC living in these areas. Cleveland calls this the "[demure white supremacy of the Midwest](#)." She writes, "Beneath a veneer of 'niceness,' the Midwest is among the very worst places to live in the United States if you're a person of color." Citing Colin Gordon's report for the Iowa Policy Project titled "[Race in the Heartland: Equity, Opportunity, and Public Policy in the Midwest](#)," Cleveland further explains how "racial inequality in the Midwest is greater than anywhere else in the country, even the South." The racial power dynamics within Iowa City demonstrate much of what Cleveland discusses in this article.

In Iowa City, it isn't too difficult to notice the gentrification and "unofficial" segregation in Iowa City if you pay attention. The University of Iowa Public Policy Center found that Black people mostly resided in Iowa City's southeast and far-west sides. Meanwhile, white people dominated the rest of the city, particularly downtown and the north side. High-rise and luxury apartments are replacing more affordable living options throughout the city, pushing more working class and low-income people (often BIPOC) out of the city. In fact, the housing issues in Iowa City intersect with racial injustice for numerous communities. [Latinos in Iowa City faced the worst US bias in home loans](#) according to a 2014 study and Black people make up one quarter of the unhoused population in Iowa despite only representing 2% of the state's population (Iowa Policy Project).

Additional structural violence is perpetuated in the Iowa City police and "security" forces. Strengthened by the University of Iowa's funding of campus police, officers in Iowa City often target Black and brown people - an issue that the Iowa Freedom Riders (a group that organized in the wake of George Floyd's murder in June 2020) have taken on [in their work](#).

ICE agents conduct raids throughout the city against brown and Indigenous Latine/Latinx communities. What's more, these same communities are often overworked

and exploited in Iowa's meatpacking and agricultural industries, facing dangerous working conditions made even more deadly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, in 1975, Iowa was the first state to welcome thousands of Vietnamese, Tai-dam, Lao, Khmer (Cambodian) and Hmong refugees fleeing the Vietnam War to settle in the United States. Sponsored by numerous Iowa families, churches and communities, they were settled across the state in towns large and small (Monsoon Asians and Pacific Islanders in Solidarity). However, many API folks living in Iowa City denounce the microaggressions and racism [they've faced in the college town](#). One elder Hmong woman said "Iowa City has some of the most racist people" she's ever known. Additionally, an Asian American administrator turned down a position with the University of Iowa mentioning the unique racism she experienced during her job visit.

People in Iowa City, especially BIPOC, have been both surviving and fighting these patterns of racism in addition to the "demure white supremacy" of the Midwest since white colonizers invaded this unceded Indigenous land. In the past few years, groups like the Iowa Freedom Riders, SURJ, and other anti-racist organizations in Iowa City have built upon ancestral as well as (inter)national work to create justice for BIPOC in Iowa City. After protests, marches, mutual aid projects, letter writing campaigns, and other endless work, it seemed that there was a shift in the Iowa City elite. Iowa City Council members made history by appointing an anti-racist commission in which the Iowa Freedom Riders worked with the city to create a Truth and Reckoning Commission. Unsurprisingly, however, these actions proved to be part of the performative liberal culture that defines many of the people in Iowa City. Citing numerous issues including racism, tokenism, abuse, and silencing, all of the Iowa Freedom Riders who were part of the TRC [eventually resigned](#). Then, only months after establishing the commission, the Iowa City Council officially [suspended the commission](#).

### **Contextualizing Power: About the University of Iowa**

The University of Iowa is a public research university in Iowa City. Founded in 1847, it is the oldest and the second-largest university in the state of Iowa. The University of Iowa is organized into 12 colleges offering more than 200 areas of study and seven professional degrees. It is classified under "R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity." It is also a member of the Big Ten Academic Alliance.

### **Trump's Executive Order:**

In September 2020, then President Donald Trump officiated an executive order prohibiting DEI, anti-racist, and critical race theory in federal agencies, the military, and government contractors and recipients of federal grants (including universities and

many non-profits). According to Trump, this ban applied to anything that amounts to “divisive, anti-American propaganda.” No less than two weeks later, the University of Iowa announced that it would pause all DEI efforts on campus to evaluate whether they violate Trump’s EO or not. The University of Iowa announced this decision as other universities were condemning the EO or silently strategizing, making the University of Iowa one of the first to officially comply with Trump’s EO.

While the university released a statement “condemning” Trump’s EO, the University of Iowa [“free speech” website](#), has policies and regulations for “political activity” on campus. The section specifically for UI faculty and instructors forbade the teaching of “controversial” topics such as race, racism, climate destruction, gender, sexuality, and more unless the instructor included “multiple sides” on the given topic. In other words, the University of Iowa demands that if someone teaches about climate change, they would also have to teach the positions and narratives that deny climate change science. Similarly, if someone wanted to teach about histories of racism, they would also have to teach the (mythical) concept of “reverse-racism.” Ultimately, the University of Iowa was adamant in its “free speech” regulations that faculty and instructors remain “neutral” parties at all times, never taking a definitive stance on “political” or “controversial” topics. Notably, the link to the information on faculty’s political activity now brings up a “Page Not Found” notice. Nonetheless, this definition (or manipulation) of what “free speech” means written as university legislation prohibits what we, and others devoted to racial justice, are doing in our communities. To truly combat racism and build racially just spaces, there can be no “two-siding” or “multiple-siding” white supremacy or racism. Rather, there needs to be a collaborative, sustained, relentless, and at times unapologetic movement against the systems and ideologies that oppress us Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.

### **Iowa’s CRT Ban:**

The inauguration of President Joe Biden in 2021 felt like a cultural shift for some, particularly when Biden removed Trump’s executive orders such as the Muslim ban and diversity training ban. However, the movement to censor and ban that which relates to diversity, racial literacy, and social justice has continued on state levels. As *Inside Higher Education* put it, [Trump’s diversity training ban died at the federal level but is finding new life -- in Iowa](#). Indeed, on June 8, 2021 Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds [passed a new law](#) that prohibits teaching critical race theory and “divisive concepts” in K-12 schools as well as higher education. Teachers and [professors in Iowa](#), and around the country, have been disputing CRT bans, but the “anti-CRT movement” has certainly taken off. Around the country, teachers have been fired for having students read Black civil rights activists’ works, hanging Black Lives Matter signs, and teaching social justice lessons.

## Our Relations to this Time, Place, and Land:

As a group dedicated to dismantling oppression in all its forms, we resist, strategize, and dream in response to the above examples of institutional, ideological, and interpersonal oppression; we also resist, strategize, and dream beyond the parameters of these institutions and policies. Such systemic forms of censorship and prejudice are why we move inward to local community for survival, resistance, and transformation.

To do this, however, we need to be transparent and interrogative of our own positionalities. Those of us writing this toolkit are associated with the University of Iowa in various ways. One of us is an Assistant Director of DEI at the university. One of us is a PhD Candidate and graduate instructor. One of us is an Associate Professor. These positions within the university grant us a level of privilege and power that we must not only navigate, but also work to subvert again and again. At the same time, we also have many identities that put us in more precarious positions *within* the university. *[More to come here]*. Thus, as many scholars of color have put it, we walk with one foot in the academy and one foot in marginalized communities. As Caroline likes to add, she may use her head and present energies in the academy, but she moves with her heart, body, and future in the community.

Figuring out how to survive and resist the university, while also thriving in community is a constant struggle and re-negotiation. Each of us have found community within the university and perhaps even in spite of the university. Most of all, some of the most meaningful “academic” communities we’ve found know how important it is to organize against the university. Thus, we write this toolkit with multiple, layered realities and purposes. We write this toolkit acknowledging our privileged positions within the university setting. We write this with gratitude for the communities (both past and present) that keep us accountable. We write this toolkit with embodied knowledge of the harm institutions like universities can cause. And we write this toolkit with collective, sustained hope for community-based work that does not center the university and instead centers BIPOC joy, resistance, autonomy, thinking, and creation.



## ***What is this toolkit?***

This is a toolkit for individuals and organizations to help them work with their communities in meaningful and sustained ways. In other words, this is a toolkit on how to approach responsible community engagement. Particularly when it has a racial justice component\*. This is not a “one size fits all” document of answers. It is not a predetermined checklist that will guarantee an impactful community partnership just as long as you follow a certain set of steps as closely as possible. What this toolkit *does* provide are questions and guidelines that you and your organization should be asking of ourselves.

### ***Who is this toolkit for?***

We believe in a hyper local approach to this work. With that in mind, we have created this toolkit specifically for University of Iowa and Iowa City citizens who want to work with our local communities. Whether you are an institution that has a long history of this work, or a department that wants to branch out, this toolkit is for you. To be direct: if you are interfacing with community partners, making decisions that affect any facet of our larger community, or interacting with the community in any way, we hope that you are asking yourselves the questions contained in this toolkit.

\*The case could be made that conversations on racial justice should permeate through every exploration of potential community engagement events. But we acknowledge that there are also circumstances when organizations attempt to engage in communities with more of an overt emphasis on racial justice (for example, connecting a scholar with the community around Juneteenth.) We hope this toolkit speaks to all of the above and can help to reveal how most every event indeed speaks to racial justice issues.

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## ***So you want to do community engagement? Here are some questions to ask yourself.***

In the sections that follow, this toolkit will describe some of the key components that make up a community engagement. For each section there are core questions to consider when reflecting on how your organization's future engagement events will look like. It's in these questions that we hope the proper self assessment can occur to approach equitable and justice oriented community engagements. Further in this toolkit there will also be examples and real world case studies, particularly on challenges and lessons learned, that we hope reinforces the core questions and self reflection necessary for this work.

There are a number of questions and components that can make this work complicated. Before any true engagement work occurs it is vital to have an open self assessment to ensure that you are approaching the work with respect to all parties involved.

*What exactly is community engagement?*

[The University of Iowa Office of Community Engagement](#) describes community engagement as, "...the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity."

This toolkit seeks to guide users to form their own understanding of what can constitute good, effective, and responsible engagement.

### **Self Assessment: Questions to ask yourself about you and your organization's ability to do this work**

Although not an exhaustive list, these are some key questions that can help you think about potential engagement work. Note that these questions begin as general building blocks, with specificity happening when you begin to answer what the components of your engagement are.

*Suggestions for putting these questions into practice:* These questions can work for individuals or for organizations to work through together. One possible facilitation framework could be [Liberating Structure's 1-2-4-All](#) to move through these questions as a group. Whether using this specific facilitation structure or another, it's important to be open with your team about your answers to these questions. It's amazing to see the breadth of answers on something as seemingly simple as, "What is your group's motivation for wanting to do this engagement?"

### **Motivation**

Why is your organization interested in pursuing this in the first place? Are there outside forces and circumstances that are influencing these motivations, such as a grant requirement or upper admin initiative? What's at stake for you and your organization in pursuing this engagement opportunity? What organizational values does this engagement speak to?

### **Local History & Relationships\***

Where do you and your organization fit into the larger community? How is the current relationship with communities you are trying to engage? What are the histories of this

relationship? Is there a history? If not, how come? If so, have there been changes in the relationship over time? Are there amends that need to be made or preemptive communications that need to be made before any work can take place? Are there past collaborations and partners (good and bad) that are worthy to note?

\*Specific to our local Iowa City community, a special note on how this local history should always note what indigenous land this potential engagement is taking place on and the fraught history that we are still reckoning with working on this land. See our [local context section](#) for our land acknowledgment and about Iowa City information.

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## **Situation Assessment: Questions about your local community and organizational context**

### **Time Frames**

How much time are you willing to commit to this project? How much time are you asking of your community partners? Are there ways to break up and accommodate time commitments? Is there planning and post engagement timeframes that you need to include in this commitment? What steps can you take to make this a sustainable engagement that can be prolonged for the benefit of your community partners?

### **Geography**

Where is this engagement taking place and why? Are you only engaging with the community in your own space? What happens when you pursue events by physically going to a different geographical region in your community? Is the engagement only in person or is there a digital component? What are the barriers to access?

### **Language**

What types of language/verbiage are you using while communicating with the community? What forms and channels are these communications taking place on? Is it only on social media? What does your marketing copy look like versus your in person facilitation? Is it all in one language, why or why not?

### **Partners**

Who are you collaborating with? Who are you in direct conversation with? Do you personally identify with these communities? If not, do you know of individuals that do, and can you involve them in the process? What facets of the community are you directly

speaking to within your timeframe? Are there other partners/community members that are being excluded/why and how so?

### **Value earned**

What is the community getting out of this engagement? What are your partners getting? What is your organization getting? What is the value earned for all parties involved? Is this value quantifiable and if so is it spread fairly among the participants? Is one party getting more out of it than the others? (Is your organization getting all of the monetary benefits while your community partners are merely getting the “opportunity to work your organization?” If so, how can you shift this opportunistic model?

### **Debriefing and Future Collaboration**

What happens immediately after the engagement? Is there a responsible debriefing and “landing” period for all parties? Is there new, ongoing labor that this engagement created that is accounted for and responsibly distributed? Are there opportunities for further collaboration and who has the power to initiate those new collaborations? Are you “shutting the door” on partners for an indefinite amount of time, only to try to reach out to them years down the line? How can you keep in contact when there isn’t an immediate engagement opportunity?

### **A note on self assessment and follow through**

As stated previously, there is no one right answer for any of these components. Part of what makes community engagement fulfilling is that it should be dynamic and evolving with the community. There could be a number of reasons for why one engagement *has* to be approached differently than another (Did you get less funding this year? Has leadership changed for a key partner? Has there been a recent national event that increased media attention?) It is our responsibility to continue to ask ourselves these questions and honestly reflect on why we land on our ultimate answers to each component.

Also be open to the real possibility that your conclusion could be that you *shouldn't* pursue a proposed engagement because of the answers you discover (or that the engagement would need to be drastically altered to be in honest conversation with the community.) It's just as important that this toolkit prevents the occurrence of harmful engagements.

*Self assessment*  
*questions to ask yourself about your capacity to do this work*

- A. Why do you want to do this work? What are your intentions, hopes, worries?
- B. If this is your first time doing this work or doing this work with a focus on anti-racism and racial justice, why are you considering that a priority now?
- C. What will you do to prepare for potential harm, as well as repair potential harm evoked from ABAR conversations within your community?
- D. How will you ensure individual and communal accountability for the work to get done?
- E. What values will guide your choices? How will you ensure you stay true to those values?
- F. Are you the best person to facilitate this process/participate in this work?
- G. What is your capacity for this work? Be honest. These are long-term processes; they require hours of sustained work
- H. Have you ever been called out or in for harmful behavior? Be honest. If so, how did you respond in these moments? If not, why do you think people might not have felt safe doing so with you?
- I. What power/privilege do you have but didn't earn?
- J. Are you prepared to not just use privilege, but sacrifice it to do this work? What risks are you taking to change the status quo, especially when you're in a position of power?
- K. Are you aware of your roles/lanes? Do you know how to show up while staying in your lane?

*Situation Assessment*  
*questions to ask yourself about your context*

- A. How did we get here? What are the undeniable facts we can all agree on?
- B. Who is already doing this work? Are you taking resources away from them or invading their space? How will you support their work instead of competing with it? How will you shepherd resources into the community?
- C. How will you prevent violence from entering the community?
- D. Who is leading our work? How are objectives being determined? How will we distribute power/responsibilities in our group?
- E. How can we create accountability within our own community—within our own group, with our partner organizations, and with groups in coalition?
- F. What ongoing support will be available for BIPOC as you do this work?
- G. How will you embed anti-racism/racial justice into the culture of your organization?
- H. How will you communicate your anti-racism/racial justice intentions to the whole community, and how will that communication be met with ongoing visibility and progress?
- I. What long-term anti-racist professional development will we implement for all participants in this work?
- J. If this is your organization/group's first time considering anti-racism/racial justice, why is it considered a priority now?
- K. Who is expected to take risks when doing this work in your group? Are they already vulnerable? Are people in positions of power in your group taking risks? How?

## Case Study: It's A Messy, Human Business

*Micah Ariel James, Nick Benson, and I have been doing community work for a long time. With that work has come personal victories and institutional challenges. The conversation that this case study grew out of took place in June of 2021, in between strains and waves of COVID. In reflecting on the complicated nature of community work I can't help but set our words against the push and pull of institutions that consider themselves on the other side of a pandemic. As we reflect on what it means to "get back to normal," I share the concerns and hopes of my community engagement professional peers; that as the world opens back up we remember the lessons we've learned about our communities. It's a tall, complicated, task but knowing that there are thoughtful, forward thinking individuals like Nick and Micah in our community gives me hope. -Chuy Renteria*

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It had been going on for more than a decade. A university sponsored tour to select communities across the state. Packed into a bus, excitement and joviality grew as faculty and staff zoomed past Iowa's rolling hills during the three-day long trek. For many in attendance it was a chance to bond, socialize, and experience parts of the state they had never seen before. People snapped photos and met communities outside of the campus bubble they spent most of their working days in, including community partners working with vulnerable populations like the housing and food insecure as well as immigrants.

The official aim of the tour was that those partaking would check in with partners and community groups across the state working directly with the state's populations. It makes sense on paper, the way that many of the best laid out plans make sense. Connect communities with organizational groups, those groups with larger groups, with the University as a through line devoting resources and communication avenues. The challenge with any plan is follow-through, and while many UI faculty, staff and community partners who participated in the bus tour remember it fondly, others asked "what's next in the community engagement process?". This mismatch in expectations — some thinking of it as a one-off moment of outreach, others looking for a sustained engagement— was a challenging part of the tour.

When community partners called after the engagement, excited about the chance to build partnerships beyond a one-off meeting, it became apparent that the project needed more infrastructure and support to foster community partnerships beyond those three days. Efforts to connect campus and community could not start and end with the tour's outreach, especially as more people on campus were putting their energies

towards building community-engaged courses, events, and other collaborations. In many ways, the bus tour didn't fit into these new understandings of how to build sustainable and reciprocal partnerships.

The bus tour was called the "Faculty Engagement Tour," a naming convention that acknowledges an evolving understanding of outreach and engagement. Several years later, the dissolution of the Engagement Tour is an example of the importance in evolving and reflecting on approaches to community work. It is equally an example of how important it is to have an infrastructure in place so *all* persons involved have a clear understanding of the expectations involved.

The bus tour asked faculty to commit to three days of travel across Iowa. The communities they visited also shouldered many responsibilities and expectations related to the engagement tour. Conversations and discussions during the community visits were rich and inspiring, but community partners also sought opportunities for long-term partnerships, something the tour was not necessarily designed to do. "The challenge with the tour, as is the case with any outreach and engagement work, is ensuring that expectations are clear, especially if this includes shifting into engagement partnerships from outreach work," says Nick Benson, Executive Director of the Office of Community Engagement at the University of Iowa. Nick joined the bus tour in its final year, and thinks of it as an example of the lessons learned and evolving nuance of his work. If the proper infrastructure isn't in place, good people with the best intentions can inadvertently miss-communicate with the communities they are working with. It's a pitfall of getting lost in the intersection of outreach, engagement, and the power dynamics that could result in something else entirely.

Nick often recalls a phrase from Sandy Boyd, a former president of University of Iowa: that you have to "do good, well." Intentions are a first step, but there needs to be infrastructure, expertise, commitment, and action to make a difference. Nick's passion in acknowledging the complexities of community work is familiar to those in the field, even through the grainy Zoom connections we are all used to by now. Micah Ariel James, Hancher Auditorium's Associate Director of Education and Community Engagement knows these tensions all too well. It is the middle of June 2021, and I have asked Micah and Nick to join me and talk about capital E, Engagement over zoom. We are still in a global pandemic. For more than a year, whole communities and organizations have been rocked by a virus with no precedence in our lifetimes. It is an interesting time to be a community engagement professional. How do you go about engaging the community when social distancing states that we should all hunker down and stay away from one another?



The conversation has a sense of urgency. What would have previously been abstract concepts are rooted in current examples. We talk about best practices and personal values and the pitfalls of the work. We look at each other through computer screens and talk about connecting with people. It makes me think about the grand *why* of it all. The word “essential” has, in many ways, been recontextualized, subverted, and weaponized. But I am thinking about what *is* essential in our engagement work and it is apparent that Micah and Nick have gone through similar thought experiments. That in many ways this pandemic has not only been a collective traumatic event but something like a great reset, a once in a lifetime opportunity for many of us to think of that grand “why.”

Micah Ariel James puts a pin on a point that is quickly coming to the forefront of our conversation. The story of the bus tour calls to mind a well known conversation in engagement circles. It is the difference, intersection, and confusion surrounding engagement versus outreach. For those uninitiated, one difference is that outreach can be short term and outwardly directional (like an organization setting up a one time food drive after a natural disaster) while engagement calls for a sustained cyclical relationship with the community (an org and community working together to create a long term community garden). This bus tour seemed more like outreach than engagement, the tour’s name notwithstanding. Though it was advertised as an engagement opportunity, the sustained, mutual benefits of the term were lost in the overall implementation and structure of the work. In effect it became this event that didn’t know what it wanted to be.

“It was making me think of the way that very often a lot of outreach events get labeled as engagement from grants. If there is a specific grant that we have to fulfill these requirements,” says Micah. “A critical thing on that is to not mislabel the two, because what I find often is that people are calling outreach, engagement and that is where we get into (calls of), ‘That’s not authentic.’”

There are nods of agreement as Nick adds, “It’s not necessarily that one’s better than the other, but be clear with who you are, what your organization is trying to do at this moment.”

Nick’s point speaks to that underlying sense of urgency I’m feeling. It’s a tall order; having to be clear with ourselves as a prerequisite to effectively work with and know our communities. It makes me think about how much has fundamentally changed in the last year. About how if you’re doing this work then you need to be obsessed with the immediacy of yourself and the people around you, in the right here and now. Micah speaks on thinking broadly about our community, “Who is here and what needs exist? What interests exist? As opposed to, ‘We’re looking for this population? Got it. Check.’ If

we're saying we're really interested in having these larger conversations working over a long period of time, we need to know our community."

So how do we get to know our community? Micah reflects on a post engagement listening experience she held with Hancher. To ask things like, "What was your experience of that?" Micah says, "We had held an event at the library and then we held an event at the former Center for Worker Justice that was catered toward that same community. We were hoping they would come to both events. People came to the Center for Work Justice, but did not really come to the library. We learned in those listening sessions that there are people who feel like the public library is not for them. That is not a community space. That is not an accessible space. That is information that I would not have known without those conversations."

As a self described book geek who feels at home in libraries this anecdote hits me like a gut punch. Which speaks to the importance of the interaction. In order to place ourselves outside of our own lived experience we have to start with communication. Sustained communication and relationships that spans years.

Nick responds to Micah's point and there is a shift. Like when you are talking to a friend and come to the crux of an issue. The timbre of your voice changes and you lean in for some real talk. "Community engagement can be a messy business. I try to think about the central values of what we're doing. If we're deviating a little bit from best practices, but we're able to stick to the values, then I try not to let the whole thing get derailed. But there are also times when a project is pushing against things so much that you feel like they really are beginning to break the values of engagement. And then you have to figure out how to ultimately work within the organization to change the organization so that they begin to see the value of aligning with the engagement values that you believe in? But it's a messy process and I never have an exact answer of how I'm going to act within certain situations. You kind of just have to feel it out."

Micah and Nick's responses to my questions are bringing into focus that feeling I've had throughout our time together. Like when your optometrist clacks to another prescription and everything is sharp and readable. It's us trying to find ourselves, our work, and our communities post-COVID. Not post-COVID in the sense that COVID is over, but in the sense that this situation has brought to the forefront so many examples of inequality within our communities. In order to acknowledge and work with our communities we have to acknowledge and work through the unequal distribution of trauma in the last year. I think out loud, "It's a whole conversation unto itself right? How to be sustainable. Or acknowledging the trauma that we went through. One of the things that has been really illuminating in this conversation for me is, Nick, how you said, "Engagement can

be messy." Because humans are messy. It's very much a human centered, relationship centered, practice. And to not be cognizant or responsible in how we have gone through this whole ordeal or are still going through this ordeal. It could be another potential pitfall."

Nick replies, "One of the things I've been trying to stress about this is that if it's really engagement, then it means that it's not just your decision about how engagement is going to look like after COVID. Whatever after COVID, means. And so it means, what is that partnership going to look like with the community? And that means talking to your partners about what they're comfortable with, what are their interests, what worked well for them over the past year? Maybe they really enjoyed being able to zoom more often. Or maybe they've really enjoyed the creativity that comes with more online programming."

Micah adds, "I'm generally a positive person, so I have a lot of hope. But I do think one of the things that I have been hearing and in some ways experiencing is that when it comes to some of the ways that organizations/institutions are processing the events of the last year and a half, (here I'm talking about money.) Some of the first things that get cut, it's about the engagement sorts of things. "Oh, it doesn't hurt if we cut these random events." And so what ends up happening is these critical relationships get cut off- or the number of events-And so while I remain hopeful overall, because there are so many phenomenal community engagement professionals, I do have some real concerns about the relationships that will be lost because of money in the next six months to a year."

It's an answer that encapsulates a lot of our conversation. Hope and concern. Grand self reflection as we deal with a changed world. Like many good conversations it has stirred up more questions than answers. Follow up questions stir in my head as I realize we could speak for hours but our scheduled zoom meeting time is at its end. We do that still not perfected zoom dance where we try to not look awkward as we find the 'end session' button. How do you go about engaging the community when the past year has potentially redefined what community means? Asking that question of yourself and those around you and being open to the ongoing conversations that follow seems like a start.

## Case Study: Community Engaged Teaching

*In July 2021, a small group of us gathered to talk with Dr. Rachel Williams about building and teaching community engaged courses in Iowa and elsewhere. Rachel helped build a Prison Practicum Program, which brought together University of Iowa students with individuals incarcerated nearby. We asked Rachel about her lessons learned from her years of experience in mediating the complex terrain of ethics, responsibility, institutional and legal boundaries, mentoring, hope, and power that her courses and partnerships ask of her and her students. What was it like to hold fast to an empathetic and humanistic approach in an environment that tries to strip humanity and empathy away? How could relationships be reciprocal and respectful when the freedom of movement and decision-making of some involved were so restricted? We hope readers learn from her careful approach that privileges safety over speed and deep listening over easy answers.*

*This conversation was a joyous reunion of sorts, since Rachel had been part of our Humanities for the Public Good working group where the initial idea for this toolkit emerged over the course of our meetings. We convened virtually, some of us in Iowa, others in New York and St. Louis, and Rachel speaking from a trip back home to visit family in the Southern U.S. We collaboratively brainstormed questions and then, after we spoke, reflected on the transcript of our conversation through highlights, marginalia, and exclamation points. Then I drafted the narrative below, which went through several revisions as we shared the toolkit drafts with widening circles of readers both inside and outside academia.*

—Laura Perry

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Think about the person sitting next to you on the bus in downtown Iowa City, or working a drive thru, or walking down your block. Who are they, outside of this brief encounter? What assumptions do you make about them? Could they be a new parent, formerly incarcerated, currently unhoused? While you often hear community engagement compared to building bridges, that can be misleading. Building bridges suggests that communities are separate from one another—and in a small community like Iowa City, especially, that distance can be more mental than physical. This enmeshment between communities, how we live alongside and work alongside one another, is something that Rachel Williams emphasizes to students in her Prison Practicum Program. Many might bring an assumption that they lead lives radically separate from those incarcerated or formerly incarcerated in prison. But that simply isn't the case, Williams points out: "When you go to Target or you eat at Olive Garden or you go to Quiznos in Coralville or

Culver's, there's a really good chance that you're handing your credit card to someone who's been incarcerated." Rather than the metaphor of building bridges, Williams thinks about "making those walls permeable" because "If you think about six degrees of separation, this is our community."

Rachel Williams is an associate professor in Art & Art History and Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies at the University of Iowa who has been teaching community-engaged courses in schools and prisons for much of her academic career. When she describes her classes and the intentions behind them, the care and thought that goes into planning her community engaged courses are evident. Before the launch of the Prison Practicum Program, Williams had spent over a decade working with incarcerated individuals at Mitchellville, the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women. Even with that time spent building relationships and gathering knowledge, her approach to designing her community engaged course began by asking questions.

"I had real reservations because the folks that are incarcerated were quite vulnerable and I thought, I don't want this to be a dog and pony show," remembers Williams. The harm done by well-intentioned but ill-conceived community engaged projects that ask communities to put on a spectacle for students, scholars, and researchers is not unique to work in prisons— but all the more crucial to remember in a context where power dynamics and differences are so stark. To understand what curriculum could be most responsive and meaningful for those incarcerated at Mitchellville, Williams and a group of UI students hosted a year-long series of listening sessions asking: "What are the main things that create stressors in your lives within the prison and when you leave?" After a year of listening, learning, and facilitating these listening sessions, four main pillars emerged for this group in conversations: healthcare, parenting, substance abuse, and intimate relationships.

The next step in the process was to collaboratively design a curriculum. One principle during the design process helped inform the subject of the course, the self-awareness of "knowing your scope of practice and what you can do and what you can't." This honest assessment of their own capacities and what they had to offer led the group to design a curriculum focusing on intimate relationships, drawing on the connections between the Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies program and the [Domestic Violence Intervention Program](#) and UI's [Rape Victim Advocacy Program](#) as well as a close attention to gender dynamics and gendered power relations. All told, the planning process behind the program took about three years.

After this extended design process and five years' experience leading the course, Williams has learned a few key lessons about how to support students and partners

involved by creating boundaries and accountability. Before students begin the prison practicum program, Williams writes “a pretty stern email” to them which emphasizes the importance of their facilitator role and the unpredictability of working in a prison environment.

The first several weeks of the course are spent educating students before they step foot into the prison. This preparation addresses both the broader context of the prison system and carceral injustice, but also the local context of the community that extends inside and outside the prison. For some students, this might be the first time they’re working with students who don’t look like them. As Williams puts it, “people really need to grapple with how whiteness works in the Midwest. The Midwest is quite diverse in many, many ways, but that diversity is whitewashed, marginalized, and concentrated in ways that hides it sometimes for folks who are white. Students need to realize that Iowa is actually quite diverse and that if they’re going to be in human services of any kind, whether that’s teaching, social work, social services, they have to come to grips with that. I think most students are eager to do that and want to develop those skills.”

Two guiding principles that come up again and again as Williams speaks about her teaching are reciprocity and humility, which she credits to her experiences teaching community engaged courses and working with incarcerated individuals who “have ideas about what they need and what they want and they don’t really have time for bullshit and they’ll gladly call you on it.” This was a lesson she learned during one of her first experiences teaching in prisons, and it’s stuck with her to this day:

*When I first went into Jefferson Correctional Institution, I was a graduate student getting my MFA. I was probably 22 years old, basically a product of art school where it had been about how to draw good things and very formal sort of esoteric, aesthetic questions. I had all my books that were white men, dead artist books. I thought, "Well, I'm just going to teach this like I teach Drawing 1." Not what they wanted. Under no uncertain terms, they were totally not having it. The women at the prison were so excited because there was no art program and I was a terrible disappointment to them. I could read it, I was like, "Wow, I am definitely not what they want."*

*It was just a moment where I was like, "I could sit here and push through this and cry about it later or I can say, 'Wow, I screwed the pooch here. What do you want to do?' That's what I did: "I really don't have anything to teach y'all. I don't know what you want to learn. What do you want to learn?" That was a really humbling*

*conversation. I think every woman in that room was older than I was. They were incredibly kind to me, took me under their wing, and said, "Well, let's talk about what teaching should look like" and that was a great experience. I had a moment of humility. You need to say you don't know and you need to listen to people that do know what's important.*

*That's where I really learned to teach and it was because the women at Jefferson were so generous, they were kind to me, and let me come back and let me work it out with them. I really appreciated that. That's also where I learned to love art for real."*

Community engagement doesn't happen on a semester timeline. For Williams, this has been almost a lifelong pursuit. This encounter between a fresh-faced graduate student and her new students continues to shape her understanding of teaching, learning, power dynamics, and the power of art. The "horror of prison system" is never far from her mind, nor is the recognition that students and faculty have the power to leave at the end of a semester, while many of these incarcerated individuals are serving lengthy or even lifetime sentences. What keeps her coming back to these courses is not only these relationships, but also the hope for a better world: "I want my students to go on and be teachers, policy makers, lawyers, social workers, or parents who recognize that that system is incredibly harmful and to vote against it, to speak out against it, to try not to evoke carcerality as a possibility for retribution."

#### **Questions:**

- A. What school policies can we eliminate that are harmful or oppressive to our students of color? How can we replace them with healing centered policies?
- B. How is anti-racist community engagement different from community service or charity?
- C. How will you move from theory to action?
- D. What do you feel when doing this work? Are you outraged? Where do you direct your outrage?

Choose one of the forms of white supremacy culture described here and think about *how* you can *refuse* it (personally abolish it) from your pedagogy/classroom:

[White Supremacy Culture](#)

## Case Study: Community Engaged Art and Artists

### A Mask To Tell Their Story

*An artist/photographer/professional multi-hyphenate, Miriam Alarcón Avila has a long and storied list of projects to her name, from creating multi-media works to [carving extravagant pumpkins](#) for Halloween. In talking of the inspiration guiding her most recent Luchadores project, it is clear that there is a grounding to Miriam's identity. That she is more than a culmination of her projects. That through line is her Latino identity. Miriam wanted to use her art to explore that identity and document the story of immigrants in Iowa. Creatively overcoming the challenge of protecting her collaborators led her to a forward-thinking engagement wholly immersed in racial justice. -Chuy R.*

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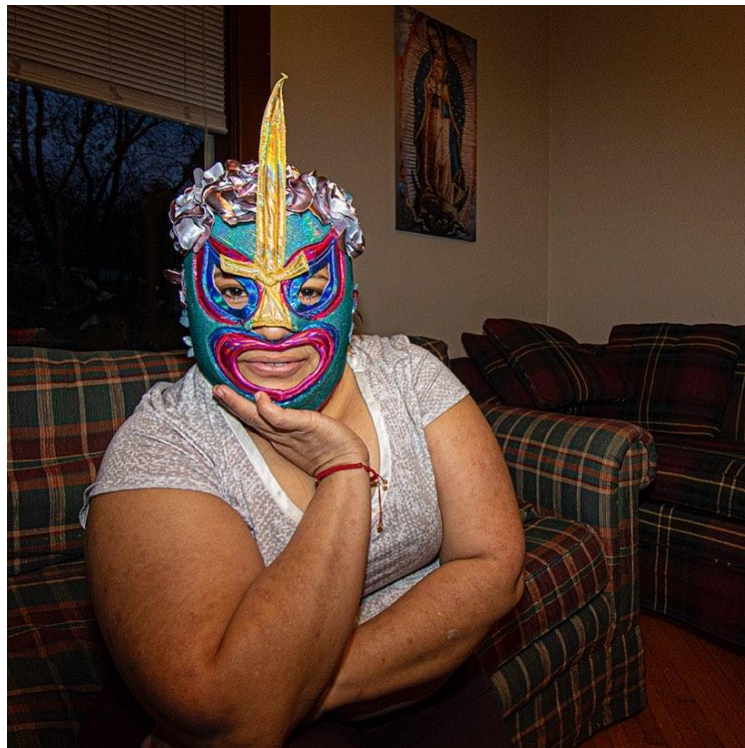


“The feeling of belonging to the Latino community here in Iowa is when I stopped to call myself a Mexican. And I find my Latino family, my identity as a Latino here,” says Miriam Alarcon Avila. Miriam is a photographer, artist, and Mexican immigrant who moved to Iowa in 2002. The fact that her identity as a Latino came into focus in the overwhelmingly white state of Iowa might not make immediate sense. But it was exactly this juxtaposition that led Miriam down this path of discovery. She found that connecting to other Latinos in the sea of the majority was the catalyst that brought to fruition her Luchadores project. A project whose process provides a key lesson for community engagement professionals on how to navigate working with community partners. Having had a chance to speak with Miriam about her approach, this case study explores



“Luchadores: Immigrants in Iowa” and this key lesson Miriam provided that brought the project’s together, which Miriam relays, “...was a need for me to create a space that allows the connection between the Latino community with the Iowa community.”

Luchadores is a photo documentary project where Miriam interviewed Latino immigrants to Iowa. The interview process involved one-on-one questions, a photo shoot, and a written component based on the interviewees’ answers. Another key component is immediately recognizable to anyone who takes a passing glimpse at the photos that accompany the Luchadores project.



“I was driving home one day and I was thinking of my super hero when I was a child: Santo, el Enmascarado de Plata. Which is our Lucha Libre wrestler in the Mexican Lucha Libre...and I was thinking about the double meaning of the lucha word. Which means on one hand the name of the match...and then on the other hand is the struggle and overcoming of a challenge by a person,” says Miriam. It was this on the road epiphany that provided the solution to a problem that Miriam faced in documenting her interview subjects. This problem and subsequent solution proved to be the very spirit of Miriam’s project, and a problem solving journey that gets at the very heart of community engagement work.

The problem was this: asking her interview subjects to sit down and allow themselves to be photographed and documented was at the very least a power dynamic; taken to its

most extreme, there was a tangible danger of putting her subjects--some of which were undocumented--in harm's way. "Any person...in front of a camera, it creates a little shock. Like, 'Oh my gosh...What I'm going to say is going to get recorded and people are going to see.' When I get the camera in front of them they tell me, 'The people are going to see, people are going to recognize me. I don't want that.'

Miriam tried a myriad of ways to capture the experiences of her subjects while protecting their anonymity. From only photographing their hands to attempting to document them in silhouette. This last example seemed especially troublesome, "I did not want to darken their faces or hide them like the media usually does. A lot of people are used to seeing that. And I did not want to do that because all the stories are very underground already. They are very undercover. And I do want them to feel that this was going to be another (similar) thing."

This recollection sparks a reaction in me. As a Mexican-American myself I am well aware of this phenomenon that Miriam is describing. When the nightly news haphazardly masks a person's face and modulates their voice, there's something unsettling about it. An Othering. The fact that this is the same process used to obscure criminals on the lam is significant. Sure, these news programs are protecting the identity of their interview subjects, but at the cost of much of what makes them human.

The solution Miriam found was in the lucha libre masks, those colorful handmade garments already steeped in Mexican culture. The bombastic Lucha Libre wrestlers like Santo el Enmascarado de Plata already figured out a way to protect their identities while projecting their spirit. "I can use the luchador mask to cover the identity of these immigrants living here in Iowa. It also gave me the ability to transform them into local superheroes. Where instead of hiding their faces, I'm putting a lot of light and color and sequences on their faces. And with that element, each Luchador created a persona that allowed them to feel comfortable, to share anything, and also to protect them."

It is important to stress the lengths in which Miriam went to protect those involved in the project. With each Luchador persona came a name and visual motif. Much care went into always keeping the birth name of a participant on separate channels from the Lucha name. From email chains to text threads, Miriam worked meticulously to prevent any possible tracing. If you think Miriam's concern was unfounded, know that [incendiary ICE Raids were happening in Iowa towns](#) throughout her process or that the Governor signed into law a [Sanctuary city ban](#) that targeted cities like Iowa City. There was a real tangible risk that Miriam was running up against. Both for her interview subjects but for herself as well.



“It was a lot of stress for me to guarantee their safety but also guarantee my own safety. And trusting everyone involved in the project will have the maturity and the understanding of the size of the project and the consequences that can generate,” says Miriam.

Note how this framing is different from the aforementioned news method of disguising someone’s identity. Miriam said, “...each Luchador created a persona that allowed them to feel comfortable, to share anything, and also to protect them.” The order in which she emphasizes the intent is important. It’s not just about protecting identity, it’s also acknowledging and giving a platform to someone’s humanity. “It is really powerful to see the empowerment of the person feeling that by wearing the mask, they really have the power, the authority to feel free to share anything they want. Some of them, they really get into the character of the persona that they were creating.”

Speaking of creation, Miriam tapped into the plethora of her talents and created each Luchadors mask herself based on the interview and persona the subject wanted to portray. Each mask is unique and perfectly fitted, both literally and figuratively, to the wearer.



The fruition of the luchador masks is only one example of the care and expertise that permeated throughout Miriam's entire process with this project. From the top down Miriam shows that she was, and is still aware of the risks that her collaborators must take for the project. If we look past the bare minimum of protecting one's identity the motivation of the project goes deeper. Yes, there are risks but the purpose of the project speaks to why Miriam was willing to traverse those risks. That purpose being the ability to work with individuals to help them amplify their stories. To enable and embolden them. To make them a mask and acknowledge that they have the strength to tell their story despite the treacherous landscape.

"The story was about them. So, that was my priority. And I think that is one of the more, I will say, characteristic of this work is that it's a collaboration. I am the artist because, yes, I came up with the idea. I'm the one getting the entire work together, but in reality, it's a work between myself, my camera and the whole luchadores. The luchadores are as important as myself. That is one of the reasons every single time, when someone invites me to do a presentation, I always want to bring the luchadores with me because the stories that we're sharing are theirs, and for me, it's important they feel they are part of this."

## Questions:

Imagine you are part of an organization interested in pursuing a project like this but that lacks a clear point of connection or familiarity.

**EDUCATE:** What is this group's history? What has been going on the last few months? What issues is this group dealing with right now? How do you know?

**REACH OUT:** Who would you need to connect with, recruit, invite into the conversation, center in decision-making? What questions do you need to ask as you initiate contact? What care do you need to take?

**REFLECT:** (what will you do to embed racial justice and an anti-racist lens to each of these practical questions):

- A. How much time is needed for this work?
- B. How will you document practice?
- C. How will you solicit feedback during the process, and how will you learn from that feedback?
- D. How will you share power within your organization?
- E. How will you ensure accountability for the work to get done?
- F. How will you sustain this work?
- G. Who are you compensating for this work and how?

## Freedom Dreams

### Background:

Historian Robin D.G. Kelley is adamant about the power of dreaming in his book, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. He writes, “We must tap the well of our own collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done: dream,” describing the importance of radical dream-work in social movements (Kelley 2002). There is no creation without first imagination. Moreover, there is no liberation without first dreaming of freedom. And there is no materializing those dreams without controlling the violence that kills and “spirit-murders” (Dr. Betina Love) Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.

Community-centered, hyper-local, racial justice work is inevitably limited and fraught under institutions and systems that were designed to oppress BIPOC. This is bodily knowledge for marginalized people surviving and resisting these institutions daily. This is also important knowledge we cannot avoid while making this toolkit: this work is messy, limited, and often co-opted. We have done our best to outline questions, values, and practices that, in our experiences and for our contexts, have helped make our work sustainable and ethical. However, the fact is what we do is tied to a university and used to further legitimize that institution. We feel it is important to not only acknowledge the limits of what we do within the university, but also imagine the possibilities of what we could do without the university. Thus, to conclude this toolkit, but to continue this lifelong journey of anti-racist and racial justice work, we invite everyone to follow the work of Dr. Kelley and “freedom-dream.”

### **A note from Caroline on freedom-dreams:**

Every semester, I ask my students to follow the work of Dr. Kelley and “freedom-dream” a new education. Students’ responses vary from “why am I doing this” to depictions of an education system where their humanities are cared for through times of rest and joy. When I have students of color, LGBTQ+ students, first generation students, and other students from marginalized positions, their dreams are often inseparable from the systemic struggles they face in their bodies and identities. Their dreams constitute a duality of lack and abundance: a lack of white supremacy, police, borders, and trauma; and an abundance of love, care, autonomy, and community. Their dreams are filled with hope, conviction, as well as frustration. Who is willing to help us in manifesting these dreams of a new education? Who is willing to take the risks necessary to materialize an equitable reality for marginalized people? Who is willing to weaken the institutions that harm us all, but especially those of the Global Majority (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled, first generation, undocumented, etc.)? Is it you?

**Our freedom dreams:**

*Chuy: In my freest of dreams, education would be open and freely available to all those who want to pursue it. That it will not be paywalled and blocked off by geography or historical institutions. That it is not subverted by political machinations but rather regarded as the enlightenment that it is.*

*In my freest of dreams, communities would be mobilized and revered for how integral they are to the landscape and our humanity. That they will not be abstracted and commodified but rather looked at as the basic building blocks of our society.*

*In my freest of dreams, the world would be an extension of our local communities. That we could all have a collective epiphany that the world has been deeply interconnected for our whole lifetimes and the responsibility to maintain the world lies on us.*

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*Caroline: In my freest of dreams, education would happen without place and position, without rank and reputation. Education would be of and between and for people. We would come together to learn and unlearn not always as teachers and students, but as community members, friends, and co-conspirators. Our relationships would be the education: how we build community, mutual aid projects, skillsharing, political zines distributed in public spaces, conversations between elders and youth, walking tours, gatherings over food and laughter...*

*In my freest of dreams, communities would live in radical abundance and care in which resources are shared. Liberation would be in the atmosphere. Community joy would be palpable, because each community's particular needs, self-determination, and plans for transformation would be recognized and empowered.*

*In my freest of dreams, the world would have no prisons, police, borders, landlords, or nation-states. The possibilities for our world without these violent structures would be endless. The world would thrive from the roots of BIPOC solidarity, collectivity, and community care.*

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*Laura: In my freest of dreams, education would become truly a public good — offered in abundance, not held in false scarcity, a lake so big we can't see the shores of it.*

*In my freest of dreams, communities would build neighborhoods that invited, included, sustained those who lived there and actively work to repair legacies of policing, pollution, theft, and violence that shaped the lands and shoulders we stand on.*

*In my freest of dreams, the world would prove all my favorite post-apocalyptic fiction wrong.*

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*Roxanna: In my freest of dreams, education would go on forever and ever. . . people wouldn't just study for a degree, finish it, then move on, but continue learning throughout their lives. . .*

*In my freest of dreams, communities would be comfortable, open spaces in which members would constantly work together and think about the collective well-being, places of tolerance and acceptance of wide varieties of differences. . . And people would flow in and out of different communities seamlessly, linking them and transforming them.*

*In my freest of dreams, the world would be connected and united, yet distant and diverse. . . ordered and well-functioning, yet beautifully chaotic. . .*

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*Ashley: In my freest of dreams, education would be both justice and redemption, equally available to anyone on any path.*

*In my freest of dreams, communities would center love as the primary metric of progress and success.*

*In my freest of dreams, the world would understand it's big enough to hold difference and strong enough to be healed by it.*

**Freedom-dream questions** (this work is inevitably limited because of the institutions we continue to survive and live under, so what are our dreams for this work when we are free of these institutions and systemic violence):

- A. In your freest of dreams, what would “community engagement” work be like? How would it look, sound, feel, and work?
- B. What would no longer have to exist for this dream to be reality?
- C. What are community partners and community members’ freedom-dreams? What are BIPOC’s freedom dreams for communities and the world? How do you know?
- D. What is in your power now to get us closer to these dreams? What can you do/change with your roles, positions, and privilege right now?



## Appendix: Readings, Resources, Questions

### Readings:

[Read the Principles — Design Justice Network](#)

[Allied Media Network Principles](#)

[safer space policy / community agreements](#)

[Audre Lorde “Uses of Anger”](#)

[calling people in](#)

[“Americans are good at acute compassion but not chronic empathy” --](#)

[Non Profit Industrial Complex:](#)

[Social Change Ecosystem Map - Building Movement](#)

[A Position at the University by Lydia Davis](#)

[Iowa City Truth and Reconciliation Commission restarts this week](#)

[Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning](#)

[Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit example](#)

■ [communities engaged in resisting violence guide.pdf](#)

■ [ATN Guide to Racial and Restorative Justice in\(1\).pdf](#)

■ [ABAR Work Guide LAC \(1\).pdf](#)

■ [a community safety toolkit with multiple pandemics.pdf](#)

[Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation](#)

[The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities](#)

Mutual Aid -- [Verso](#)

[Generous Thinking - Humanities Commons](#)

[No Left Turn Handbook:](#)

### Local Organizations:

[Iowa Freedom Riders](#)

Fred Newell-Dream/Kingdom Center

[Prairielands Freedom Fund](#)

(formerly Eastern Iowa Community Bond Project)

[Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice](#)

Center For Worker Justice

[Multicultural Development Center of IA](#)

Labor Center (Robin Clark-Bennett)

American Friends Service Committee of IA (Alejandro Ortiz)

Citizens Against Racism (Narada Poole)

Little Village-

Iowa Chapter of ACLU

## Memos of Understanding Templates

### A NOTE ON HOW and WHY TO USE THESE TEMPLATES:..... [to come]

#### **Memorandum of Understanding for a Faculty Member (Instructional or Tenure-Track)**

*[This MOU will no doubt differ based on whether the faculty member is instructional track, meaning he/she/they has a higher percentage of his/her/their contract devoted to teaching; or tenure-track, meaning a higher percentage towards research]*

This memorandum confirms the agreement decided upon with regard to overall effort by the faculty member towards participation in a community-engaged racial justice lab. *[It's important to initiate the writing of the MOU, to make sure that everyone is on the same page and that there is a written document outlining the agreement. The absence of an MOU could lead to problems, if the various parties involved can't agree upon what was decided].*

The department chair supports the faculty member's participation in this initiative, and acknowledges its importance for his/her/their professional development. In addition, he/she/they recognizes its significance for promoting the unit's missions in teaching, research and service, as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

*[Part of the MOU should be a statement explicitly saying that there is a show of support for the person participating in the lab, ideally from higher-ups such as department chairs and deans. There should also be a recognition of the role that the activity plays in the mission of the department or program, as expressed in a mission statement or strategic plan. All too often these statements are set aside and put in a drawer the minute they are written, and never connected to any concrete actions. The MOU could recognize the extent to which the faculty member is trying to put principles agreed upon by the department into action.]*

Participation in this lab represents a commitment to teaching and service that extends beyond the normal effort allocation for a faculty member, such that he/she/they shall receive a release of one course from the regular assignment for the unit norm. Teaching one fewer course will allow the faculty member to devote considerable time and effort to participating in the lab; this commitment represents 10% of the faculty member's overall effort allocation, or about 170 hours for the academic year.

*[It's important that the MOU explain how the extra effort of participating in the lab aligns with the faculty member's contract. If it is an activity in addition to what he/she/they is regularly doing, he/she could be paid a stipend for his/her/their efforts. But ideally it would replace part of the normal duties carried out, such that the faculty member is not overloaded. Since it can sometimes be difficult to quantify and measure service, the easiest way to ensure that participation replaces part of the contract is to grant a course release, meaning that the participant teaches one fewer courses per year.]*

The course buyout of 15% of the faculty member's annual salary will be paid by the grant/department/College.

*[This is the official rate for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa, and may vary based on the institution. However, it is important to keep in mind that it may be possible to negotiate a lower rate, such as 10%, with a department chair or dean by convincing him/her/them of the value of the endeavor.]*

At the end of the participation period, the faculty member will give a presentation to the department during the Colloquium Series in order to share with the rest of the faculty the experience and results.

*[It's important that the faculty member share his/her/their work with colleagues, such that knowledge from it can be disseminated and appreciated. The colleagues may also want to know what work the faculty member was conducting rather than teaching or doing service in the department. In addition, the presentation could provoke an interesting discussion about community engagement and racial justice. This may also encourage others to follow suit!]*

During the tenure and/or promotion process, the faculty member is invited to include materials marking the participation in the lab as part of his/her/their professional development/teaching/service/research, and describe the experience in the accompanying statements.

*[Because tenure and promotion standards for different ranks vary so widely, it would be very difficult to create an MOU that sets definite parameters on the extent to which work based on racial justice and community engagement would count. However, there needs to be some kind of statement affirming that it will count towards one of the three main areas (teaching, service or research) and that the candidate will be allowed to include materials related to it in the promotion process.]*

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### **Memorandum of Understanding for a Graduate Student Teaching Assistant**

*[This MOU may vary depending on whether the graduate student is an MA, MFA or Ph.D. student, as well as the particular stage he/she/they is at in the program.]*

This memorandum confirms the agreement decided upon with regard to overall effort by the graduate student towards participation in a community-engaged racial justice lab.

*[Once again, actually having an MOU—a written document with an agreement—is half the battle! The key is to make sure that one exists, such that the terms are clear among the different parties.]*

The Director of Graduate Studies and dissertation advisor support the graduate student's participation in this initiative, and acknowledge its importance for his/her/their professional development. In addition, they recognize its significance for promoting the unit's missions in teaching, research and service, as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

*[A written affirmation of the value of participating in the lab is important. This should also affirm exactly how it would count, for instance, as a special topic for the Ph.D. comps exam, a chapter of the dissertation, or a component that is not necessarily part of the degree but mentioned in letters of recommendation.]*

The graduate student will participate in the lab for 10 hours a week for a 20 hour/week total assignment. As a result, the TA may teach one section of a course instead of two, and participate in the lab, much like a course release for a faculty member.

*[With graduate students on a 20-hour-a-week contract the lab could count as 10 of the 20 hours. This would require a buyout of half of the TA line, which at Iowa would be \$10,000 plus a 20% overhead, so approximately \$12,000 for the full academic year. Since many TAs teach one section of a course per semester, this could be similar to a course buyout for a faculty member, such that they would teach one course per semester instead of two.]*

The student will have the opportunity to present an account of the experience of participating in the lab to their faculty mentors and fellow graduate students during a departmental Colloquium. In addition, the student is invited to include the subject matter learned in a special topic of a comprehensive exam or to incorporate this knowledge into the dissertation.

*[The student should do a presentation in front of colleagues in the department—both peers and mentors—in order to disseminate the information learned and provoke a discussion of questions of community engagement and racial justice.]*

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### **Memorandum of Understanding for a Staff Member**

*[This MOU may vary widely based on the particular kind of staff position.]*

This memorandum confirms the agreement decided upon with regard to overall effort by the staff member towards participation in a community-engaged racial justice lab.

*[For staff in particular an MOU is crucial, so that the participation doesn't become a burdensome activity performed for free in addition to a regular, full-time position.]*

The supervisor supports the staff's participation in this initiative, and acknowledges its importance for his/her/their professional development. In addition, he/she/they recognizes its significance for promoting the unit's missions in teaching, research and service, as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

*[There should be a statement from higher-ups declaring support for the participation, and also linking it to the mission and strategic plan of the unit. All too often, these are empty statements never put into practice, but participation in the lab could help bridge the theory and the practice.]*

The staff member will participate in the lab for 10 hours per week, or 25% of his/her 40-hour-per-week contract. This time will be bought out from the employer by the grant/department/College as a quarter of his/her/their salary for the term.

*[It is very important to establish precise hours for the buyout from the employer!]*

In order to assure that the duties of participating in the lab *replace* those of the normal position, rather than simply add to them, the staff member will block out 10 hours per week on his/her/their Outlook calendar meant to be devoted to the lab, in consultation with their lab team and supervisor.

*[Ideally, the staff member would block out hours in his/her/their calendar for participation in the lab, even if some of these times are for conducting work independently and not necessarily meetings.]*

When the staff member undergoes a performance review, he/she/they will be invited to include participation in the lab as part of his/her/their professional development portfolio and work in his/her/their position.

*[As in the MOUs for faculty and a graduate student, it should be established that the work in the lab is relevant to the staff person's position, and should count in a category of the performance review, such as professional development.]*

## About Us

### *About Humanities for the Public Good (HPG)*

The Humanities for the Public Good (HPG) initiative is laying the groundwork for a new interdisciplinary, collaborative, and practice-based humanities PhD. Imagining a world transformed by humanities scholar-practitioners, HPG is designing a program that will support students and humanities scholars in connecting disciplinary expertise with social justice and the public good. Funded through a four-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, HPG is hosted by the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies and supported by working groups composed of faculty, academic staff, and graduate students.

As part of the HPG initiative, five working groups investigated the structural integrity of traditional humanities doctoral training to consider what parts of the degree needed to be upheld and which parts should be reimaged. Teams of UI faculty, staff, and students researched important building-blocks of a new PhD, considering career pathways, community engagement, graduate student internships ([Leonard Cassuto wrote about this program](#) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*) and how courses, dissertations, and degrees might be structured in a Humanities for the Public Good PhD program. Careful critical inquiry and humanistic frameworks and habits of mind resounded as continued imperatives, while structural mainstays of admissions-based-on-exclusion, monograph-form dissertations, and the devaluing of collaborative and community-engaged research were uncloaked and acknowledged to be mechanisms of prestige that are inherently inequitable and often biased.

While the 2019-20 year was based on investigation and research, in 2021-2022 we turned to invention and design. Five working groups of the Humanities for the Public Good 2020 – 2021 Advisory Board designed humanities labs by imagining collaborative projects based on wicked problems, including racial justice, environmental change, and pandemics. Like their counterparts in the sciences, humanities labs foreground inquiry, exploration, and collaboration. Often based on the creation or development of a specific project, humanities labs are spaces (physical or intellectual) to convene transdisciplinary teams to respond to a hypothesis or problem that is immediately identifiable in the world and across communities.

In the spirit of a lab working environment, groups convened around open-ended questions and trusted the process of collaboration as they built community with one another this year. This form of research and inquiry felt countercultural to traditional metrics of success, and helped to sustain group members during a year that asked so much and left so little room for reflection and experimentation. While the topics, methods, and approaches to each lab design varied, all working groups grounded their

work through non-hierarchical collaboration amongst group members, opting to form their teams as equitable circles of thought partners and co-designers.

Throughout the academic year, the HPG Labs made tremendous progress in designing prototypes of key components of a new PhD program over the course of about 15 hour to hour-and-a-half long meetings. Our conversations were necessarily shaped by the realities and possibilities of UI as a community and a campus, but always with a sense of the worlds beyond Iowa City's borders. Several events stand out as watershed moments, bringing clarity to values and commitments across the labs and raising the stakes of our conversations: the E.O. 13950 and presidential election. In September, the Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping and the University's subsequent decision to 'pause' programming across campus made many of us angry, uncertain, and all the more dedicated to the work of the labs to carve out spaces on campus welcoming to these conversations about racial injustice and inequality. In November, the election left many of us exhausted, on edge, and yet—as before—even more committed to being in community with one another and working for change. And in January, we were shocked by the attempted coup and insurrection.

### *How we came together*

This team emerged from the small groups of the Humanities for the Public Good Advisory Board, led by postdoctoral fellows Laura Perry and Ashley Cheyemi McNeil, who facilitated discussions by asking key questions, inspiring lively debate, and taking careful notes. Three members of this initial group, Rachel Williams, David Cunning and Caroline Cheung, served on the HPG Advisory Board during its first year (2019-2020), with Chuy Renteria and Roxanna Curto joining the Board in its second year. At the HPG retreat in August 2020, focus groups were formed to examine potential labs on four topics: public good, the pandemic, environmental change, and racial justice. Rachel, David, Caroline, Chuy and Roxanna serendipitously ended up in "Racial Justice 2."

The Racial Justice 2 lab recognized the need to hold space for the harsher realities of what racial justice means — the trauma, the hurt, the ongoing oppression — and to guard against hollow allyship statements. At the first meeting, our team made a deep commitment to practice these values with each other locally as we strive to implement these ethos in the design of a lab. As such, each of our meetings depended on process-based engagement, where vulnerability and honesty are always centered and held with respect and compassion for one another. Our priority has been cultivating an ethos of racial justice, and then allowing ourselves to build from there.

Throughout the year, our conversations ranged from emotionally and politically-charged discussions about these events, and also the Black Lives Matter movement; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; the unequal impact of the pandemic; and free speech. Ultimately, we chose to focus on the notion of local kindness for the purposes of creating a lab. We then designed a potential lab structure and presented it

to various parties, exploring how to distribute the labor of DEI while assuring that participants stayed in appropriate lanes. The Community-Engaged Racial Justice group designed a structure for 2-year lab cycles of collaboration with a community partner around a hyper-local expression of racial justice.

At the end of the spring semester, when the option of continuing into the summer and fall by working on a toolkit was presented, Chuy, Caroline and Roxanna decided to continue in a small group with Chuy as the director and Caroline and Roxanna as members. Realizing that “doing” community-engaged racial justice work here at / in Iowa is a unique and complex process, we decided to create a toolkit to guide this work, which could be used both by other labs and also in an HPG methods seminar.

#### *Our director*

**Chuy Renteria** is an author, dancer, storyteller, and teacher raised in the town of West Liberty, Iowa. He currently serves as Assistant Director of Inclusive Education and Strategic Initiatives in the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the University of Iowa. He previously held the position of Public Engagement Coordinator for Hancher Auditorium. His first full-length publication, a memoir about growing up in West Liberty, Iowa’s first majority Hispanic town, [We heard it when we were young](#) appeared with University of Iowa Press in November 2021 to great acclaim. He was also published in [We the Interwoven: A Bicultural Anthology Series](#) (2019). Chuy’s performance background and equitable community advocacy work for individuals with special needs has led him to his current role in the DEI office at Iowa. He also teaches at the North Liberty studio All the Way Up and was recently featured in [Iowa PBS](#).

#### *Our members*

**Caroline Cheung** Caroline dreams and fights alongside others who know that scholarship and theory happen everywhere (and must materialize on the ground). She is currently an English PhD Candidate with a graduate certificate in Gender, Women’s, & Sexuality Studies at the University of Iowa. She works at the intersections of women of color feminisms, theories of state violence, transformative justice and prison abolitionism. Her research explores the ways that myths of white supremacy and proximities to whiteness uphold the prison-industrial complex. She believes that the creative and imaginative work of literature serve as revolutionary gestures, providing both experiences of and frameworks for transformative justice and community accountability. In addition to her local activist work, Caroline has found camaraderie with other scholar activists as a NWSA Women of Color Leadership Project member, an Imagining America 2020-2021 PAGE Fellow, and Imagining America PAGE co-director for 2021-2022. No matter what the space is, Caroline’s work is consistent: to strengthen radical community and weaken the institutions that harm us all.



**Roxanna Curto** is originally from Iowa City and grew up in a Spanish-speaking household as the daughter of Argentine parents who taught at the University of Iowa; she is trilingual between English, Spanish and French. She is currently an Associate Professor of French and Spanish and Chair of the Department of French and Italian. Prior to becoming Chair, she served for a year and a half as Director of Graduate Studies for French and Francophone World Studies. In her research, Roxanna explores representations of technology and sport in literature from the French and Spanish-speaking worlds. She is the author of [\*Inter-tech\(s\): Colonialism and the Question of Technology in Francophone Literature\*](#) (2016) and her second-book project is entitled, *Writing Sport: The Stylistics and Politics of Athletic Movement in French and Francophone Literature*.

*Our postdoctoral interlocutors*

**Ashley Cheyemi McNeil** is a scholar, community-advocate, and third generation Japanese American. She earned her bi-national Ph.D. in English from Georgia State University and in American Studies from the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University in Germany. As a researcher and manager in higher ed, she has worked with cross-disciplinary teams of students, teachers, community members, and partner organizations to imagine and implement public-facing projects to share stories and knowledge. As an ACLS Leading Edge fellow, she joins film organization Full Spectrum Features to design curricula for their Hidden Histories program.

**Laura Perry** received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Before joining HPG, she was Managing Editor of *Edge Effects* magazine where she worked with environmental writers, artists, and activists to publish essays and podcasts for a global audience. While at University of Wisconsin-Madison, she helped organize the research group Environmental Justice in Multispecies Worlds, partnered with local nonprofit Sheltering Animals of Abuse Victims, and hosted a weekly radio show on WSUM 91.7 FM. She also taught a service learning course with the local Humane Society where students consulted with staff, volunteers, and animals to produce digital projects. A throughline in this work is supporting collaborations that bring together voices inside and outside the academy to imagine a more livable world and just future. She is now the Assistant Director for Research and Public Engagement in the Center for the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis.

*Other members during Academic Year 2020-2021*

**David Cunning** is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Philosophy Department, a position he has held for seven years. His research and teaching interests include the history of the mind-body problem, methods of rationalism, free will and determinism,

agency, and the rhetoric of inquiry. He recently completed a scholarly edition of the works of the 17th-Century philosopher and scientist, Margaret Cavendish, and is continuing to work on both Cavendish and Descartes, and on related issues in Spinoza's monism and pan-psychism.

**Rachel Williams** is an Associate Professor of Art and Art History, and Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies. She is also an artist and teacher whose work focuses on women's issues, community, art, and people who are incarcerated; her current projects include a graphic novel about the Detroit Race Riots of 1943, a novella about Mary Turner, and stories about working in women's prisons. After serving as a university ombudsperson for two years, she has returned to the chair of GWSS position that she previously held.

## Questions for Reflection

### Processing questions (after reading the toolkit):

- A. How does/will your work address and/or transform the root causes of violence/racism?
- B. Are your actions part of reducing harm?
- C. Which values, politics, and people will you be accountable to as you do this work? Who is your community?
- D. How do you define success?
- E. What does it mean for groups with an anti-violence lens to partner with organizations that do not share that analysis?
- F. Key takeaways? Are you the best person to do this work? Should you be doing this work? What lanes should you stay in to do this work?
- G. What are the power dynamics at play in this work? How will you address them? What are the inevitable limitations to this work?
- H. What are some other questions that could/should guide your anti-racist and racial justice work?