



A Tent Open On All Sides

—
A New Space for
Creating a Culture of
Shared Responsibility
in Communities

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The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization that equips people, organizations, communities, and networks with the tools to bridge divides, tackle shared challenges, create a culture of shared responsibility, and build local capacities. The Harwood Institute's work is rooted in a philosophy of Civic Faith and the practice of Turning Outward. Founded in 1988, the Institute's approach has spread to all 50 states across the US and 40 countries around the world.

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Introduction

There is a story in the Bible about Abraham's tent. This story is raised here not to make a religious point, but rather to help us reimagine the kind of space we need in our local communities.

The story goes that Abraham's tent was open on all four sides so that anyone, from any direction, would be welcomed inside, even the stranger. Abraham himself stood at the edge of the tent, always looking out for who might be coming along, and who could be welcomed into the tent.

Communities need to pitch tents that are open on all four sides—intentionally creating spaces that welcome people who are willing to work together on common problems, and in doing so, generate a culture of shared responsibility.

A Tent Open on All Sides provides a new framework to develop these spaces in communities—what they can accomplish, and what it takes to make them work. How can we pitch a tent that is truly open on all sides? How can we ensure that it is truly inclusive where everyone's presence is not only welcomed but actively sought out? How can equitable and fair decisions be made in the tent? What does it take for us to be fully engaged in the space such that it shifts, maybe transforms, how we see each other, how we relate to one another, and how we work together? How can it help us to generate a new culture of shared responsibility?

This report is being written at a time when the U.S. is experiencing four simultaneous crises: a global pandemic, economic upheaval, systemic racism and social injustice, and political turmoil. Seeking to return back to normal is not an option. This is not only because of the sheer amount of upheaval that is occurring but because these crises have laid bare the inequities and disparities that for far too long have troubled the U.S. So many people have not been part of our nation's promise. So many people have not been able to fulfill their God-given potential.

Our fundamental task is to re-imagine and recreate our lives, our communities, and thus the nation itself. We must forge together a new path forward. One promising step along this path is to pitch a tent that is open on all four sides, which helps us create a culture of shared responsibility. This report provides a new framework for taking this step.



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How can we pitch a tent that is truly open on all sides?

The Opportunity

Vital forces are now converging in our society that provides us with an opportunity to act on a greater shared responsibility in our communities and lives:

- **There's a deep yearning among people to have more control over their lives and be a part of something larger than themselves. People want to be seen and heard.** They seek to restore a sense of dignity and decency in their lives and their communities. They want to be more connected and engaged; they long to build things together.
- **Solutions to many of our current challenges require marshaling our collective resources.** Some of these challenges include inequities in public schools, widespread meth, opioid, and other substance abuse addictions, growing economic disparities, and pervasive loneliness. No one organization, no one leader, and no one group of citizens can tackle these problems on their own. They beg for a collective response.
- **These times urgently call for us to produce a more just, equitable, fair, inclusive, and hopeful society.** As noted, the current crises have laid bare long-standing inequities and disparities in our society. There is an urgent need to address these challenges, and this requires taking fundamentally different approaches from the past.

It's worth noting that in seeking to step forward and seize this new opportunity, there are deeply embedded and reflexive responses that conspire to hold back and block progress in communities. For instance, many efforts are based on a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores the context of local communities. Comprehensive plans are designed that fail to realistically take into account the readiness and capacities of communities. The same leaders and organizations are invited to head up efforts that leave out and even push out essential voices, perspectives, and decision-makers. The over-coordination of efforts squeezes out the necessary room for unexpected solutions and unpredictable combinations of actors to come together. Overly linear approaches to produce change close off possibilities for new ideas and efforts to

organically emerge. There is a failure to value and tap the capacities of all people and groups and organizations in our communities.

How We Do Our Work

At its core, creating a space in which a culture of shared responsibility flourishes is a radically simple idea. It is about how to marshal our collective resources, deployed in mutually reinforcing ways, rooted in a sense of common purpose, to tackle our common problems.

This is not a new idea. On the contrary, it is quite natural. We see it in response to disasters when people and communities organize themselves to work together. We have seen it throughout American history and among societies that existed well before the U.S. was founded. For instance, in Native Hawaiian culture there is a well-established idea of kuleana, which is, in part, for each individual to take deep ownership and active responsibility for their communities and shared lives.

With shared responsibility, institutions, groups, and individuals become active and invested partners in co-creating communities that work for everyone—unleashing the expertise, assets, wisdom, and lived experiences that each brings to the table. There is a mission of building together. But, as already noted, there are so many things that hold such efforts and block progress.

This new framework is based on three interlocking dimensions. Each dimension is necessary, but not sufficient on its own. All three are required to make this approach work.

- **A new space** – we must be intentional in our actions to create a space that truly gives rise to marshaling collective resources, deployed in mutually reinforcing ways, to tackle common problems.
- **How we show up** – we must act with intentionality to genuinely embrace a mindset of being turned outward toward our communities, and then engage with new practices and skills in how we relate to one another, make decisions together, and work together.

- **Civically learn together** – we must be intentional in the ways we actively learn from each other, the community, our actions, and use this learning to re-calibrate our assumptions, relationships, and actions in moving forward together.

In each of these three dimensions, one finds the word “intentional.” That is intentional, too. Without a much greater level of intentionality, we cannot effectively pitch a tent that is open on all sides. We cannot adequately show up to do the work together. We cannot produce results that help us to address the fundamental challenges we face in our society.

Intentionality requires vigilance to make discernments about where we find ourselves. What is happening around us. What each of us must do. It demands that we make choices and judgments about how to move forward. It calls upon us to be awake, attuned, present. To be intentional, we must make ourselves visible and account for what we choose to do. We must step forward and declare here I am—and join with others to say, here we are.

Where We Find the Space to Act

Finally, one might wonder, “Where exactly is this space that is being proposed?” Of course, there are the traditional types of physical spaces where people have always come together. You’ll read about such spaces in this report.

And yet, one can think about this space in other ways, too. Everyday spaces are being created in new online environments as the global pandemic has required of us; once this pandemic is overcome, such spaces will likely continue to be part of our lives.

At times, this space may include the participation of many people. In some communities, a small group of people may choose to pitch an open tent. The very same community may decide at some point to bring people together from across those small groups to forge a larger open tent. Indeed, the dimensions outlined in this new framework can also exist when as few as two people come

together. And these dimensions are intended to live within each of us as individuals, where they can serve to guide how we engage with others and our communities.

Let’s be clear about what this new framework is not intended to be. It is not proposed as a wholesale replacement for existing community work—there are so many good and exciting efforts already taking place. Nor is this to be considered some new fad or magic solution.

Rather the framework provides an approach to how we work in communities and how we can tap into our innate capacities for action and strengthen a community’s civic culture. It is about how we can ensure we are creating a more inclusive and equitable society, and where we are mindful of the choices and decisions we make and who is part of making those choices and judgments. There are principles here that can be incorporated into many existing approaches.

Stepping Forward from Here

Much of what happens in communities—indeed, in each of our own personal lives—is driven by techniques and processes that tell us step-by-step what to do, as if in society we are building something akin to a model airplane. In this way, the task is to dutifully follow the enclosed detailed instructions.

But societal conditions today call upon us to do something wholly different. Merely following a prescribed set of instructions will not allow us to co-create the space we need to build the kind of society we yearn to see. Simply following some set of detailed step-by-step instructions will short-circuit our ability to find and make our own ways forward.

A Tent Open on All Sides is a framework to reimagine and take action on the space communities need to create in order to work together to address common problems. It calls upon us to pitch a tent that is open on all four sides where anyone and everyone is welcome. Its intent is to give rise to a culture of shared responsibility.

We can unleash people’s potential in communities to marshal their collective resources, deployed in mutually reinforcing ways, rooted in a sense of common purpose, to tackle our common problems.

About the Report

This report is divided into the following sections, with each one building on the others. The sections are:

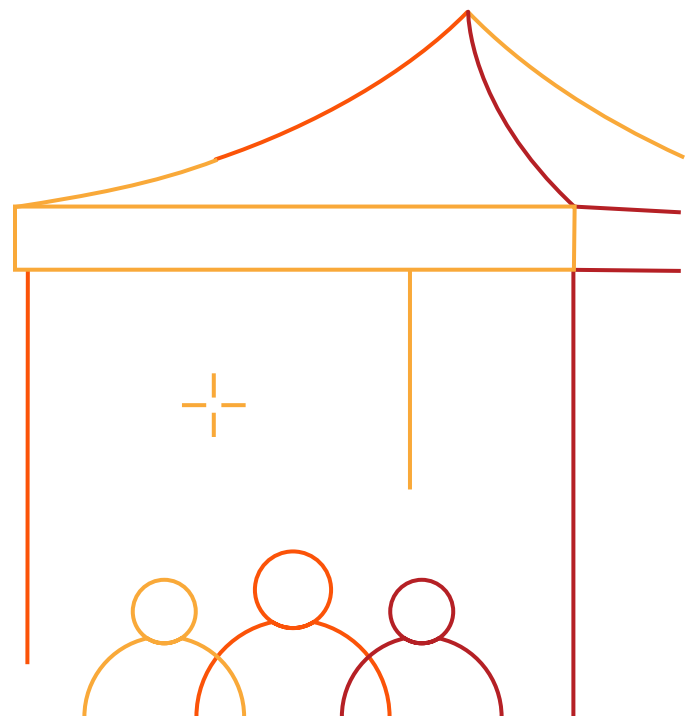
- **Community Stories.** This section offers stories from three different communities that illuminate their own efforts in pitching a tent that seeks to create a culture of shared responsibility. Each community is at a different stage on their journey.
- **Open Tent Guideposts.** This section lays out key elements for pitching a tent that creates the space that gives rise to a culture of shared responsibility.
- **How We Show Up.** This section is about how people need to show up and engage in order to make the most of the space and be productive together.
- **Essential Power of Questions.** This section highlights that the fuel for this space is not having answers at the start, but to start with the right questions.



A Tent Open on All Sides is a framework to reimagine and take action on the space communities need to create in order to work together to address common problems.

Community Stories

Over the past couple of years or so, we've followed three stories from very different places across the U.S. that speak to how people are working to create a new space for a culture of shared responsibility. In each instance, the stories are still ongoing, and the community's work together continues to unfold—and for that reason, we have decided not to use the names of the communities at this time.



“The Community Task Force”

A Community Comes Together to Pitch a New Tent

The COVID-19 pandemic pushes a small rural community to double down its efforts to address immediate health crises and pre-existing systemic issues in the community—and create a broader and deeper culture of shared responsibility.



In a small rural community that was once on the brink of being left behind, residents decided to step forward and create new ways to fight an opioid crisis, embrace young people who felt abandoned, and bridge local divides of race, geography, and religion. Since working with The Harwood Institute starting in 2017, in just a few short years the people of this community have made enormous progress and have actively claimed greater control over their lives through their shared actions. Organizations and groups have formed partnerships to work collaboratively, faith organizations have crossed dividing lines to work with youth, more youth have become engaged and forged connections with adults, and blacks and whites are coming together to take courageous action on issues of race and inclusion and the area’s history of slavery.

But then, in early 2020, COVID-19 hit the U.S. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic. Two days later, the U.S. government declared a national emergency. The pandemic had the potential to derail all the hard-won progress the community had made, setting it back in time once again.

A New Community Task Force

In response to a state mandate, the county health department set out to form a wraparound services task force to monitor, respond, and relieve COVID-19’s impact on different segments of the county. But the health department already had its hands full in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. It worried about having the bandwidth to organize and run a new task force.

To fill the gap, a local foundation offered to step forward and facilitate the group, seeing it as an opportunity not only to respond to the current crisis, but to accelerate ongoing efforts to shift the community’s civic culture and address pre-existing systemic challenges in the community dealing with health care, homelessness and affordable housing, and education, among other issues. They explicitly sought to use an equity lens to do this.

When the task force launched on March 12, 2020, 60 representatives from various institutions, organizations, and groups showed up for the virtual convening. No one in the community would have ever imagined this type of response three years earlier before the community had begun its journey to bridge various community divides and where unexpected combinations of people, in unimaginable ways, created unpredictable change together. The norms of the community had been shifting in dramatic ways. Where people once saw seemingly intractable challenges, including drug addiction, family breakdown, and a declining downtown, people were now taking action on all these fronts and producing real, tangible gains. Where people once described fragmented leadership and organizations, marked by efforts that

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... where unexpected combinations of people, in unimaginable ways, created unpredictable change together.

started and stopped without explanation, there was now a growing network of leaders and groups working together with a renewed common purpose.

But even with all this progress, many of the organizations that were becoming part of the task force were still operating largely in fragmented, isolated ways—each doing good work on their own, but still without a strong shared norm of working together.

The most urgent need of the task force was to respond to the immediate crisis at hand. The task force began meeting twice a week, virtually. The meetings were largely used to report on data about COVID-19 cases and deaths and local and state economic impacts, identify service needs and gaps, provide updates on organization- and group-specific efforts occurring in the community, and list out available resources. In the first few months of the pandemic, the task force remained focused on meeting pressing basic human needs and issues facing the community, such as providing support to people who needed substance abuse recovery, mental health services, and food.

Deeper Challenges Emerge

During the task force meetings, deeper challenges were starting to emerge and be discussed. A big one was when the local public schools announced that they would close during the week of spring break due to the pandemic. Ordinarily, the schools would keep providing meals to qualified local children during this time. Now, hundreds of schoolchildren would be without such meals. Through its discussions, task force members decided they had to take action, but how? Various members, including the mayor, came together with faith leaders, community residents, and others, to organize meal deliveries at five fixed locations. Day after day they would gather food, assemble meals, and deliver them to the children and families in the county.

With the onset of the economic upheaval that resulted because of the pandemic, more and more residents increasingly were unable to pay their mortgage or rent, and faced eviction from their homes and apartments. The community had been working on the issue of the homeless before the pandemic, but now it was being

confronted by a much more acute and difficult situation. Before COVID-19, organizations such as the local homeless shelter and a homeless coalition group had handled individual pieces of this issue that they could address on their own. Now, it was abundantly clear that no single organization on its own could effectively meet the scale and scope of the challenge at hand. Thus, the Housing and Homeless Work Group was created.

This new work group was made up of organizations and community members, including the county's community services department, the county homeless coalition, the local homeless shelter, a regional organization that processed state and federal assistance funds, the county health department, the regional medical center, emergency management, the local water and waste utility company, a substance abuse recovery group, and the youth and family resource coordinator from the public school system. The initial call to action was to form local quarantine and isolation care plans for both sheltered and outdoor unsheltered homeless populations.

But over time, the workgroup began to take a host of additional actions. It formed a continuum of care for housing security that did not exist before. The group undertook advocacy for homelessness and housing security with the local government, which these partners had never organized in this way to do before. After stopping a particular homeless ordinance from going into effect, local government representatives joined the work group to learn more about homelessness in the community. In addition, the workgroup has engaged with the local landlord association representative to develop effective messaging for landlords concerning evictions and assistance programs for renters. Finally, as the winter months approached, they turned more attention to additional emergency shelter plans.

As the Housing and Homeless Work Group continued to push forward, the larger task force discussed the stress that children and families were experiencing from COVID-19 and related challenges. This led certain task force members, knowledgeable with trauma-informed approaches to offer training to families to deal with children in stressful situations and experiencing interpersonal relationship strains; to business owners and operators to recognize signs of trauma in workers and

the general public, and link people to resources; and to educators on how best to respond to children that are hurting.

Another concern for the task force was how youth and families would be supported during the summer when school was out. The response: the Summer Involvement Program. This brought together a host of unexpected partners, including county parks and recreation, the county extension office, youth ministers from various churches, and numerous citizen groups and local residents. Instead of the typical summer camp run by parks and recreation, this dedicated cadre of groups and individuals decided to run a weekly program to put eyes on children and families and give take-home activities and treats to them via drive-thru events. Since the summer, the group has been morphing into a task force of its own, one that focuses on community engagement. With more and more residents joining the group, it came back together to host a summer-like event for Halloween, reaching over 2,000 families in the county.

Meanwhile, the 60 representatives who first attended the task force meetings kept coming to the twice-weekly meetings, saying that they found the sessions comforting to know that others cared and that the meetings provided a place for them to feel not so alone and on their own. As the meetings continued, increased efforts were made to introduce conversations about what the task force members were learning about their working together in the community. These initial conversations were difficult to get off the ground. Not only were stress levels high, with people working overtime and with limited resources, but there was not yet a practice for this type of collective reflection.

Growing Fatigue and Challenges

With the protests sparked by the death of George Floyd, people were feeling increasingly overwhelmed, fearful, shaken, and fatigued. As captured in the June 1st task force meeting minutes:

It is a difficult time right now and people are experiencing many emotions and reactions. As we process the current events and the surrounding grief, check on your friends and

colleagues, especially people of color. Listen. Create space for African Americans and people of color to express their feelings—even if those feelings make us uncomfortable. Anger and even rage are reasonable feelings. As leaders in the community, we can start changing our community by leaning into this conversation and learn to be comfortable talking about race and racism. It may feel uncomfortable, or even challenging at first, but with practice and intentionality in our discussions, we can have hope for real change.

The difficulties in addressing the growing unrest around systemic racism and social injustices were only compounded when the state implemented a phased reopening of the economy, which led to heated interactions between local residents. Some individuals refused to wear protective masks in retail shops. There was the removal of physical barriers put in place to protect people, and an “I’m over it” attitude was growing toward social distancing. The community’s conversation had swiftly shifted from love and compassion to heated discussions about the civil unrest and political divisions about how to deal with the pandemic. These tensions led to a conversation on the task force about the need for de-escalation and safety. To help the task force better understand de-escalation skills, several of the task force’s mental health providers shared their suggestions for working through difficult situations.

“What Are We Learning?”

The changing landscape led the task force to focus more on what it means to create a resilient community. So, before going on a two-week break, the task force tried once again to reflect on the progress that it had made since March. This time the conversation began to produce results. Key themes expressed by members first focused on the nature of the deep-rooted issues the community was wrestling with during the pandemic, including intergenerational poverty, trauma, substance misuse, and the lack of strong social support structures. Task members also identified ways in which they and the community were working together:

- Ability to adapt to meet others where they are and work through uncertain times
- The community's quick response and generous support for people have helped to limit feelings of fear
- New relationships and ways of working are forming
- Community members are learning and generating new knowledge about the community (e.g., task members discussed learning about getting more knowledgeable on the school system and mental health providers)
- Illuminating community stories and leveraging new partnerships (e.g., new community stories and new partnerships are being highlighted. People expressed continued hope in addressing and resolving broken systems that have been exposed by the pandemic. They are continuing to ask, "Who is missing?" from their efforts.)

Still, this was an especially difficult time in the community. Notwithstanding all the good work taking place, the community was being increasingly challenged by the pandemic and associated issues. As one task force member said, "Most people's root networks are contracting, closing in on themselves, circling more and more tightly around spouses, partners, parents, and kids. These are our most important relationships, but every arborist knows that a tree with a small root ball is more likely to fall over when the wind blows."

To Reopen Schools or Not

As the new school year approached, there was great uncertainty about whether local students would attend school in person. Initially, it seemed that they would, and the task force sought to plan accordingly. But then on August 2, just weeks before school was to begin, the local board of education voted in a 3-2 decision to go online for the first nine weeks of school. While this reduced the uncertainty of what was to happen, it increased the need to organize a response to support youth and families. This served as yet another major challenge and opportunity for the task force.

After meeting with the school superintendent and other school leaders, the task force turned its attention to three new questions.

What's keeping us up at night?

What are our aspirations given the plans for a return to school?

What will it take to address these aspirations?

This first question came from the Housing and Homeless Work Group, which found it helpful to get those in the workgroup to reflect on what was happening around them and to them. The question opened the floodgates for task force members who said that COVID-19 had required unprecedented work and lifestyle changes for many of them. There was, they said, an almost chronic nature to the anxiety and stress. Fatigue was prevalent, even as task force members sought to address it and take care of themselves. This question became a mainstay for the task force moving forward.

As the task force further deliberated, it soon became clear that the school decision was not just a public school issue, but rather a larger community issue. How would students actually learn from their homes? What if they didn't have Internet access or any supervision at home? What kinds of stress would this place on families, especially those already dealing with drug addiction, mental health issues, and economic stress?

Reframing to Shared Aspirations

Following the two meetings regarding school re-opening, the question, "What keeps us up at night?" was asked again. And again, the floodgates opened, but this time it was followed up by a series of new, more precise, and probing questions that were more "community" focused:

What are our aspirations for children and families relative to returning to school via virtual instruction?

What do we need to be thinking about relative to these aspirations?

What is going to take, generally speaking, for us (as a community) to work on these aspirations?

These questions opened up an entirely new avenue of discussion. They framed the task force’s work expressly in community terms, they were more proactive in nature, and they implicated task force members to have to work in shared ways even more in order to effectively move toward the aspirations. These questions served to further lift the task force discussions out of “reporting” to one of “co-creating.” Furthermore, they underscored just how important it was to generate the right underlying conditions in the community to get the work done. Below is a very brief summary that captures the essence of the task force responses.

Shared Aspirations

- Ground families in a sense of hope to ease anxiety and tension.
- Connections are critical—we want to help our community “stay in touch” because social connections are so important for social and emotional development and well-being.
- Take a holistic approach to educating our youth.
- Organize our work (as service providers) to put families at the center of everything we do.
- Set realistic expectations for work/life balance to ease tensions and help working parents feel empowered in their dual roles of caregivers and employees.

**Create a Stronger Community
(What Will It Take)**

- The task force can work together in an even more integrated and intentional way which, ultimately, helps the entire community.
- Task force members overwhelmingly agree that our community has the resources and assets to be intentional in finding solutions to these present challenges. This sense of hope and assurance can help us build resiliency for the entire community.
- The work of the task force is relevant and needed even beyond the current challenges. The discussions, connections, and new ways of working together are helping build resilience that will outlast the pandemic.

Beyond these responses, task force members focused on how they had come to work differently together. They developed this list of new norms that they had established through their collective efforts:

- Partners keep showing up.
- Extending grace and patience.
- New can-do attitude—do not give up!
- Using trial and error to creatively fill voids. Keep trying, even when something does not work as hoped.
- Desire to continue finding voids and gaps in our safety net to help those in need.
- Encouraging self-care.
- Mutual support for each other.
- Staying grounded, focusing on what they can control, and continuing to work for the good of all.

This discussion was a breakthrough for the task force. They were developing a greater ability to process emergent information, make difficult decisions, and pivot their efforts when needed. This not only affected their own deliberations and actions, but it also began to model a new kind of engagement and even vulnerability to others in the community.

“Documenting What We Are Learning”

The next question the task force explored was, “How could they remain focused on these shared aspirations and what it would take to act on them? Until now, the “Minutes” for the meetings served as a place to document the COVID-19 updates, available resources, and general reports from individual organizations and groups. These were important and remained so. But the opportunity was to shift the Minutes to be more of a “civic learning document”—to capture the knowledge, lessons, insights, and collective deliberations of the task force; to use this civic learning document as a way to ground the task force’s ongoing focus and work; and ultimately, to use the Minutes to build common purpose and shared

actions that were mutually reinforcing. The articulation of shared aspirations became a way to ensure the alignment of actions.

During this time, a local radio station also dedicated a weekly segment to the task force meetings. The segment extended both the task force conversation and insights into the larger community itself.

Moving forward, the Minutes now would always start with the task force’s shared aspirations, along with key issues that were emerging from the task force’s deliberations. With each meeting, the group aligned actions according to their aspirations, keeping them front and center in doing their work. The key issues became a way to focus future conversations, see trends over time, build a common agenda for action, and guide the task force’s efforts. A practice the task force began to develop was to discuss these issues through the prism of the shared aspirations, thus ensuring that the task force remained focused on what it sought to achieve and to keep its actions aligned with those things.

More questions were introduced to further this conversation. The task force asked itself, “If we were able to create these aspirations for our community, what does that look like?” and “What can we do to get at these five main themes?” One of many ideas that emerged from this discussion was the idea of learning pods for students doing virtual learning. Here’s how the meeting’s Minutes reported how the individual who introduced the idea explained it: “He imagines a learning pod to be a ‘safe, supervised learning environment’ where teens can come for support to learn, do virtual homework, have connections with adult mentors, and access the technology they need to be successful at virtual learning. He believes this will help reduce anxiety teens may have about virtual learning and provide hope.” The Minutes continued, “The learning pod idea was fully embraced by the task force members, they saw how this idea can be easily replicated in other safe spaces in the community and will give consistency to help reduce anxiety in the community.”

One thing to notice about the learning pod idea—which has since been successfully launched—is how it simultaneously addressed multiple aspirations at once.

Nearly all of the aspirations, if not all of them, were fulfilled through the design of the pods. It also furthered the “norms” the task force had named were vital in order for them and others in the community to work differently together.

While the task force continued its work, another important piece of learning was beginning to take form. Two different task force work groups began to use The Harwood Institute’s Making the Invisible Visible tool. Through the use of this tool, the work groups, and the task force as a whole, could begin to more clearly and cogently see the progress they were creating.

The people of this small rural community created a new space in which they stepped forward and showed up in new ways to engage with one another and take shared action. Through their collective learning, they are creating a culture of shared responsibility.

“The Community of Educators”

Educators Shape a New Shared Responsibility Approach

Seeking to spread learning and innovation, and enhance leadership capacity across the state, a group of school superintendents embrace the idea of shared responsibility by tackling a long-standing, top-down, compliance-heavy culture, and developing a deep orientation towards communities.



In 2017, four public school superintendents came together with The Harwood Institute to design a new community of practice (a “space” in which the superintendents could learn together over time) to spur educators in the state to take a fundamentally different approach to education. While efforts to improve student learning were taking place across the state, these efforts were often fragmented, occurred in isolation, and were having positive effects only in those pockets where they were happening. When it came to the engagement between schools and communities, it was episodic, narrowly focused, and tended only to incorporate adults who had a child in a school, with the larger community being left out.

Importantly, these efforts stemmed from a state education system that had become over many years compliance-driven, top-down, mechanistic, and focused heavily on tactical outputs. The system made little room for innovation on the part of the superintendents and their schools and local communities. Meanwhile, residents of the state had been largely described by philanthropists, educators, civic leaders, and others as being disengaged, passive, even “apathetic,” about education and civic life. A central goal of the community of practice was for the superintendents to shift from being “chief compliance officers” to “chief innovation officers” who were rooted in their local communities.

Through the community of practice, the superintendents sought to change old habits and ways of working in order to meet the numerous, rising education and societal demands being placed on educators and to become more aligned with their communities. To do this, they needed to

develop deeper leadership capacities and approaches to engage with their local communities— and they sought to develop what they and The Harwood Institute call “shared responsibility”—namely, an approach that marshals collective resources and distributed capacities, deployed in mutually reinforcing ways across a community, to tackle common challenges.

The First Steps

The core team of superintendents set up the community of practice to expand over time to include the other school superintendents in the state as well as community partners, philanthropists, and other educators from the various school districts. It was designed to center on innovation and possibilities and to provide space for the superintendents to learn together about changing how they work with communities to help grow and develop children. Eventually, as the number of superintendents participating expanded, the group collectively developed the following purposes:

1. Learn and innovate together to transform how school superintendents and their teams lead and work with communities, thereby developing community-centered learning and education.
2. Establish superintendents as key leaders in innovation and community-centered education.
3. Learn together to become leaders of system-level change in education and community by creating new models that meet the needs of our schools and communities.

4. Spread knowledge about innovation and community-centered education within the public education system, which includes both the state office and local communities.
5. Continue to be a collective voice to include systems change.
6. Develop mentoring skills to better foster leaders in the state department of education.

The superintendents took great care in creating particular norms for the space. They sought a safe and purposeful space for their shared exploration, to support collective inquiry, and to learn and collaborate as adaptive leaders. They sought to embed consistent, deep practices, which would ultimately lead to creating impact on their own leadership, the state system, local schools, and communities. New norms emerged through their regular meetings, through the course of discussions about various issues and challenges they confronted. Ultimately, the community of practice became a space dedicated to peer-to-peer learning, where attendees could openly share experiences, name common aspirations, work collaboratively through challenges, introduce new or alternative practices, challenge ideas, and discover new opportunities. These norms were fiercely guarded.

Defining “Shared Responsibility”

In February 2018, the superintendents began to dive more deeply into their discussions of what it would mean for them to work with communities and the implications that would have for their leadership and work. By this time, most of the remaining school superintendents from across the state had seen the value and richness of these conversations and decided to join the regular conversations. Each time new superintendents would join, the group would review and adjust its shared norms—this was an explicit agreement about how the group sought to work together and form a shared purpose.

Then, in November 2018, Rich Harwood led an in-person workshop that focused explicitly on what it takes to lead and work with a “shared responsibility” lens. The workshop began with a discussion on the meaning of shared responsibility. Several of the superintendents



They sought to embed consistent, deep practices, which would ultimately lead to creating impact on their own leadership, the state system, local schools, and communities.

commented that this idea seemed to include elements of togetherness, a level of passionate commitment and engagement, and a way of working that strives towards a common purpose with a set of goals and a means of sharing and leveraging leadership.

Still, even amid this discussion, it was noted that there were already lots of bright spots of progress that existed in communities throughout the state. New ideas and solutions to various challenges had already been developed. Investments had already been made. Educators and community members were hard at work. None of this was lost on the superintendents; in fact, many of them had helped to create these bright spots.

So, what then did creating a culture of shared responsibility bring to the table? What would one actually see happening in a community that was different from current efforts already taking place? When the superintendents wrestled with these questions, they began to list out what they would actually see occurring in a community where shared responsibility was at work. They generated the following actions:

- **There would be an ongoing community conversation about youth, education, and the community with the focus being, “What do we want for our community and kids?”** This conversation would engage people from across the community, from various sectors, including students, adults, those with children in school, and those without. It would enable people to articulate what they are for—and discover what they share in common that the community can work on together.

- **Learning would be taking place within schools; it would also be happening all across the community.**

For instance, a local non-profit that focuses on environmental concerns might co-create a curriculum with teachers that use the outdoors to explore math and science, while also connecting kids to their culture's values and heritage. Other courses would take place in local businesses, at golf courses, at a naval base, etc. The community would now be an active, integrated place for learning.

- **A network of nonprofit organizations, faith institutions, service clubs, and other community-based groups would serve as "hubs" for afterschool learning and support.** Many would serve young people and their families.

- **Each student would now have a significant adult present in an ongoing way in their life.** This may be a parent or someone from their school, but it would just as likely be a neighbor or another individual from the community. These individuals would provide guidance and wisdom—and yes, love. Each student would know they have someone who is looking out for them and to whom they can always turn to for support.

- **In the community, adults would play an active role in supporting other adults by way of support groups for mothers, fathers, those dealing with issues like suicide and students with learning challenges, among others.** People would no longer feel alone and isolated in dealing with their challenges—they would know that others face similar setbacks and that they have others to rely on.

- **Schools, libraries and other local institutions would have extended hours, making their buildings open and welcoming places for people to meet, convene, and learn together.** These spaces would become community-oriented centers of activity.

- **There would be easy and open access to a variety of community supports, namely, emotional, psychological, and mental health care.** These services would now be focused on giving people care rather than people having to figure out how to navigate the system.

Once the superintendents generated this list, they came to name this aspirational community "Schoomunity."

This produced a palpable excitement in the room. But this excitement soon gave way to a silent pause among the superintendents. Again, the reality set in that different versions of the actions in "Schoomunity" were already taking place in many of their communities. Again, what was different here? Why pursue "shared responsibility" at all? Were they really talking about a different approach, or just working harder at doing more of the same?

After much-animated discussion, the superintendents agreed that while many of the individual actions they named in "Schoomunity" looked the same as what they were already doing, they were, indeed, fundamentally different. In "Schoomunity," the actions had a different individual and collective quality. They were more purposeful, integrated, mutually reinforcing, and part of a larger, holistic structure. The superintendents said that this approach would refocus their roles and relationships with others in their communities. Their current endeavors, the superintendents said, were largely "add-ons," available only to certain students (not universal), and happening in isolation from one another. They often had the feeling of being scattered, maybe even without a clear purpose.

As one superintendent explained: "When I look at that list, I think it helps address so many social ills. You can start to direct the tide of things when you operate in this fashion." The superintendent went on to say, "You can see this helps everybody. Because the 'why' is all the same. The 'why' is the kids." He then concluded by wondering aloud about how to do this work: "I don't know if it's just bringing the right people to the table to share those conversations about what we envision for our community?"

How We Do the Work

This superintendent put their finger on an important question: How do we make this approach actually work? Many of the superintendents present were itching for a way to gain greater clarity on the individual and collective shifts they would need to make in order to adopt a shared responsibility approach—to make real the actions not only in the aspirational "Schoomunity," but back home in

their own communities. To help do that, they created two lists that illuminated moving FROM a view of the community they currently operate in and TO an alternative one rooted in a culture of shared responsibility. Working together, they generated the chart below.

SHIFTS IN LEADING & WORKING DIFFERENTLY FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY		
Move From		Move To
Being defensive	→	Listen with an open mind and heart
Defending your organization	→	Focus on people
Looking inward	→	Be outward-looking
Blaming others for problems	→	Building trust
Having all the answers OR thinking you need to have all the answers	→	Believe the community has the capacity for action
Scarcity mindset and approach (protecting one's turf)	→	Have the desire to create change with others
Being fearful	→	Belief in possibilities
Survival—going at it alone	→	Relationship-driven
Mistrust of others	→	Assume positive intentions
Grandstanding	→	Community-focused and being inclusive
"My way or the highway"	→	Working through things
"Me"	→	"We"

Once they named these adjustments, the superintendents expressed their excitement at the possibility of making these changes in their communities. They said that the moves they were describing would require that they make shifts in both the mindset of turning outward and new practices in how they operate. One superintendent put it this way:

In the end, it is our belief that the community must become the school. Looking outward means that we need to fundamentally rethink how "we do school." Our continuing school transformation efforts are grounded in a belief that our learning institutions must begin to look outward to our communities to create a "different kind of school" and a different learning experience for our students.

This belief was reflected in many of the actions—both in individual and collective terms—that the superintendents had generated as part of “Schoomunity.”

At the same time, however, some of the superintendents started to vocalize underlying fears and tensions about what these shifts would mean for them personally and for their colleagues. One superintendent summed things up this way: “I actually feel a little bit hopeful and excited and inspired. But it also makes me feel anxious because I think about just the sheer amount of time and investment that might be required. I’m thinking about this even with my own little team.”

Another superintendent chimed in, “Carving out time to do the shift is like, ‘We know we need to do that,’ but it’s so hard because of the operational technical stuff on a daily basis. When I don’t have enough time to do those things, it seems like everything else just falls [apart].” This superintendent continued, “If you don’t carve out that specific time...then the other pieces get further behind and other work doesn’t move forward.”

The discussions about making shifts in mindset and working differently raised a whole host of potential, nagging, even profound fears, including: “How do I actually learn to do this?” and “How do I deal with my anxieties about opening myself up in these ways?” and “Will I lose the community along the way?” and “How do I not try to become all things to all people?” and “How do I manage all the uncertainties and ambiguities?”

The mix of excitement and fears produced a probing conversation that asked each superintendent to consider the following questions about their personal role and personal power:

What’s your role in all of this?

What’s your power in this and how do you not forfeit that power to others?

How do you claim and exercise it to make this shift happen?

Where are the spheres of influence that you have where you can begin to get things going?

These questions produced another pivotal part of the conversation. The superintendents need to create space to deal with and manage and work through the fears, uncertainties, ambiguities, and tensions that were surfacing for them.

The conversation also led to: how does one even gets started in their own community. For instance, looking at “Schoomunity,” some superintendents worried that they were being asked to implement such a vision all at once—in one fell swoop! And yet, they all knew that each of their local communities was different. They had different needs, different capacities, different appetites for change, different norms and expectations. A one-size-fits-all approach would never work—could never work. And so, this presented the following questions:

Given where the group is in relation to the community, what are good starting points/places for you to start moving?

How can you build onto things that are already happening in your community?

Through this conversation what became clear is that each local community would need to start its efforts differently, moving at their own pace, unfolding in their own ways. All of this would emerge and unfold only over time.

Moving Forward

In and of itself, the workshop helped the superintendents to identify and think through strategic inflection points and their role in shifting towards a shared responsibility approach. As one superintendent put it, “This [workshop] was inspirational. It gave me an entry point. We can do this! It just will take time.”

Over the past couple of years, and looking ahead to 2021, the community of practice continues. Since that conversation on shared responsibility, the superintendents have only accelerated their learning and progress in a variety of areas. They continued their on-site learning sessions, which took them as a group directly to their different local communities, where they examined what can be created with a longer-term commitment of local schools and partners working and learning together. They developed a new state education performance evaluation system for superintendents, which serves as an example of how the community of practice is helping to shape systems change that can reinforce how superintendents lead differently. The principles and approaches of the community of practice are now a model for a different form of leadership development and peer-to-peer learning in education in the state. Learning with and from local community partners through the community of practice sessions has been both inspirational for the superintendents and is leading to a cross-pollination of learning.

In 2021, three adjacent school districts within the state will bring together their respective superintendents, senior teams, principals, and community partners for a day-long convening on shared responsibility. The goal is to spur an integrated, long-term effort to address equity issues across the larger region using a shared responsibility approach. The Harwood Institute has co-designed and will co-lead the convening.

Finally, one central lesson was clear from the community of practice experience. Without forming this new space, it is not likely that any of this change would have been ignited. Frequently this is an overlooked component of building change, but it is absolutely an essential condition for proper leadership and systems change. It requires patience from the larger system while these “invisible” seeds take root. As one superintendent said, “If you want to change the visible, first change the invisible.”

Only with energy, commitment, and attention can a community-led effort occur. Here’s how one of the superintendents summed up what they had done together, “The community of practice story is one of how you work in the community to build community.”

“The Community of Ad Hoc Teams”

The Beginnings of a New Tent for Shared Responsibility [A Short Story]

A fragmented community sets out to rebuild a culture of shared responsibility and takes important steps toward forging a new civic covenant and can-do spirit.



This city has a rich history—a history that many people take great pride in, but also lament. While many of the contours of the city’s story are unique, it is not unlike many other American communities. There is a complicated, deeply layered, and ever-unfolding story of seemingly intractable challenges of race and class. These challenges are intertwined with a host of social, political, and economic concerns.

When describing the city, one community leader said, “Fractured is the word that comes to mind.” Negativity and mistrust have persisted. The lack of concrete change and sustainable efforts often has led to great frustration, even deep anger among some. Indeed, many community leaders have spoken about projects that get started and suddenly stop or stall out. Others have talked about the lack of coordination between groups and organizations, burnout among civic leaders, and political logjams that take the steam out of good ideas. Meanwhile, it can seem that many people are waiting for a single individual or moment to somehow transform the community.

The community has been seeking to restore a can-do spirit and narrative. And yet, so much of its past and even recent narrative has been rooted in what “can’t” happen.

But signs of renewal have sprung up in recent times. During the response to George Floyd’s murder, the people of this community came together to march, talk, and take action to address systemic racism and social injustice. In response to COVID-19, the community rallied to provide health care and other critical support to community members. Meanwhile, the public schools had already begun a long-term transformation effort, along with other

key initiatives in the community. Still, progress has been slow, and most of the community remains stuck in time, longing for a renewed sense of possibility and hope.

In 2020, The Harwood Institute held a virtual Public Innovators Lab in this community. Out of the lab, five ad hoc, multi-racial teams formed. These teams were made up of different organizational leaders, neighborhood activists, and community residents. The teams are developing community-led efforts to address concerns such as neighborhood redevelopment, economic equity, educational opportunity and equity, and the use of arts and culture to rejuvenate the community. Already the ideas and practices that were taught in the Lab have led additional people from the community to step forward and join these teams, and already these ideas and practices have spread to entirely new teams in the community.

In the second part of the Lab, many of the participants began to name what they were learning. While they had been exposed to The Harwood Institute’s Turning Outward mindset and practice, it was during one particular session that the Lab attendees said, “Oh, so what we are doing is growing a new culture for our community.”

All the teams have been hungry to learn from the community and each other. They have actively engaged local residents to understand people’s shared aspirations and concerns and will be using this knowledge to help shape strategies and efforts to ignite progress in the community that people can believe in.

In addition, the teams have shown a hunger to learn from one another—about what they are learning from the community, their experiences through their early efforts, and how they can support one another. Already, some

individuals from teams are joining other team meetings to learn and cross-fertilize efforts. And some team members are beginning to share their newly developed knowledge with other community members and community leaders.

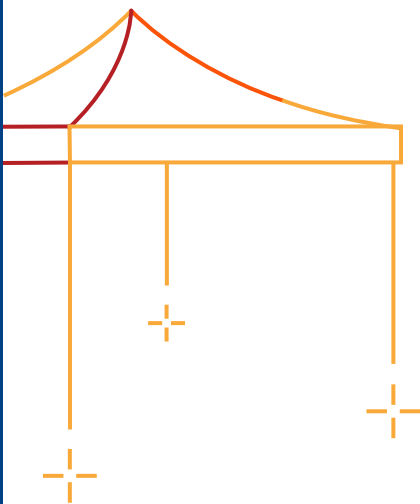
There is a spirit and culture of shared responsibility taking hold, and emergent actions to back it up. To further this evolution, some teams will form their own tents for shared responsibility to continually engage more people, groups, and community capacities and assets. And key members from each of the teams, along with other community residents and leaders, will begin to form a new larger tent in the community that helps to further cross-pollinate what is emerging and to further a new can-do spirit and narrative throughout the community.

Open Tent Guideposts

Each of the three community stories helps to illuminate how people in different communities have begun to create a new space to work, create, and learn together. In this section, we lay out guideposts to pitch a tent (or tents) open on all sides that intentionally create a culture of shared responsibility: What qualities does an open tent have, and why are these important? How do we ensure that the space we are creating will help to produce a culture of shared responsibility?

The guideposts are reflected to varying degrees in each of the three community stories. They are informed also by The Harwood Institute's experience in working in communities over the past 30 years.

Think of these guideposts as holding up the tent, and by doing so, opening up space in which people can show up for one another, work together on shared challenges, and civically learn about their communities. There is no "order" in which these guideposts are to be deployed, activated, or set in place, however, their presence must be active and constant.



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What qualities does an open tent have, and why are these important? How do we ensure that the space we are creating will help to produce a culture of shared responsibility?

What Matters to People

An open tent that creates a culture of shared responsibility is rooted in holding a deep understanding of the community. This means knowing what matters to people and the community's context. This requires turning outward to the community and having the community as a reference point for making choices and taking shared action.

From the get-go, this raises a question many people ask: What is "community" and whose community are we referring to? To be sure, communities are not monolithic. They are made up of diverse and different people and their lived experiences.

And yet, it is clear from our work that when people think about "community," they often gravitate to those they know, to people who are like themselves, to people they feel comfortable with, and to people who look like them, unintentionally excluding other voices. Having a tent open on all four sides requires that people from all walks of life, all areas of a community, and different perspectives and backgrounds are actively engaged. This is not something that is the norm today. It must be. It is the only way an open tent can work.

Thus, knowing what matters to people includes understanding people's shared aspirations for their community, their concerns about the particular challenges before them, who they trust to take action, how they themselves can be involved, and the community's underlying conditions of readiness for action. In reference to the definition of community noted above, this means being radically inclusive. This may sound like a lot to know, but with the right approaches, it is doable. This understanding of people and the community is not a replacement for data and other expert knowledge, but it is not possible to be deeply rooted in the community without it.

This particular understanding of what matters to people differs significantly from what communities often focus on when they do engage people. In many cases, communities get mired in what or who people are against, what they oppose, and what they are seeking to stop. In an open

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tent, there is a focus on what people are for—what they are seeking to co-create in their shared lives and community. This provides a path forward.

Moreover, in some communities, engagement can have people list a litany of problems, but this only causes people to argue over why more progress has not been made, and who is to blame for the lack of progress. Or, there are those instances when engagement is based on utopian visions for the future, but these plans are largely unattainable and lack relevance to people's daily lives. The imperative of an open tent is an ongoing focus on people's shared aspirations. In an open tent, the task is to create tangible change and progress.

Let's be clear. In an open tent, we must not sidestep or push aside a clear articulation and understanding of past and present disparities, inequities, and imbalances in power. These concerns are part and parcel of the focus in each of the three communities highlighted in this report. They must be. As in each of those communities, in an open tent, the imperative is to connect such realities with the need to create a new path forward that is rooted in a deep commitment to a more just, equitable, fair, inclusive, and hopeful society.

In *Unleashed: A Proven Way Communities Can Spread Change and Make Hope Real for All* (a new book by Richard C. Harwood published by Kettering Foundation Press), a key characteristic identified for how and why communities are able to generate long-term change is the role that knowing what matters to people plays, which includes:

- Reframing public discussion to focus on the community's shared aspirations, the challenges in meeting those aspirations, and the need for the community to take ownership of its future.
- Providing an opening to enlist organizational allies, groups, and individuals to work together to take action. Different groups and people can now see a role for themselves.
- Ensuring that strategies and initiatives squarely address people's hopes and concerns. The focus is on what will make a real difference in people's lives.
- Keeping community actions aligned over time by continually staying focused on this common point of reference.

There is one more important note to make here: Knowing what matters to people and understanding a community's context enables people in the open tent to figure out where and how to begin their efforts in the community. Thus, creating a culture of shared responsibility is explicitly not based on a one-size-fits-all approach; it plainly rejects such an approach. Rather, people in their own community will need to figure out what makes the most sense in terms of how to practically catalyze change and cultivate a culture of shared responsibility.

A focus on what matters to people creates a vital touchstone that exists outside of each individual and organization within an open tent and that is shared and owned by everyone. This reference point pulls us outside of ourselves, beyond ourselves. It calls upon us to stay focused on the community itself, and we are there to serve those larger interests.

Distributed Capacities

In an open tent, shared responsibility is based on the premise that we need to actively value and tap into the distributed capacities that exist within our communities. Only then is it possible to marshal a community's collective resources to act on common problems.

By distributed capacities, we mean the potential capacities that each member of a community has to take action, including various institutions, groups, and residents. This

approach is about people and groups in communities making a real contribution and being part of something larger than themselves.

But there are obstacles that often hold us back from taking such action. One noteworthy challenge is the narrow view we can hold about who has the capacities and knowledge to take action on any given challenge. So often we think of a select group of experts and professionals who are specifically credentialed. Absent such credentials, we devalue people's own knowledge and capacities.

We need experts. But a reflex that only relies on experts inadvertently closes off the vast number of institutions, professionals, groups, and community residents who have their own capacities to contribute. It diminishes the possibility to generate new capacities and resources.

The unfortunate truth is that in too many community efforts, we leave too many community capacities on the table, untapped and unused. This undermines our chances for success. We forfeit the opportunity to unleash the potential of people and communities. We send an unmistakable message: you are not valued and of value. We short-circuit people taking ownership of their own communities.

Another challenge in taking effective action in communities is an over-reliance on large institutions. Certainly, we need these institutions. But we need much more. Let's face it: so many community challenges—from educating youth to combating crises like loneliness and opioid overdose and addiction—also require smaller, even human-scale actions. Such actions involve engaging organizations, networks, and community residents who

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The unfortunate truth is that in too many community efforts, we leave too many community capacities on the table, untapped and unused. This undermines our chances for success.

are on the ground, closer to people's lives, and trusted by people. Sadly, these smaller-scale actions are not deemed to be adequately strategic, sophisticated, complex, new, or shiny. In other words, they are not valued.

But these individuals and groups have enormous—essential—capacities, the know-how, and the wisdom to address a community's toughest problems. They are at the heart of social, religious, and other networks that can uplift people. They can provide mentoring, peer-to-peer help, love, and support to others. They can deliver programs and services that fit their local context. They can ensure the inclusion of all people. They are the community. In shared responsibility, we place an emphasis on institutional and smaller, human-scale actions. It is not one or the other. Communities need both.

A focus on distributed capacities means that we do not need to solve problems on our own, all alone—we can tap into the innate capacities that people have to offer, which all communities have.

Mutually Reinforcing Actions

Imagine a community where distributed capacities have been effectively tapped, but where everyone is moving in their own random direction. Some might suggest this is the equivalent of allowing a thousand flowers to bloom. Or, small is beautiful. But to what effect? How can these actions add up to something more? How can they share some larger common purpose?

One alternative approach might be to “coordinate” these actions through a designated central organization or body. This is a common approach in many communities. At times, this can make sense. Take, for instance, the distribution of vaccines or providing clean water to a community.

But there are potential challenges to taking this route when it comes to creating a culture of shared responsibility. The coordination of actions can squeeze out the necessary room for innovation and learning. There is limited room left for change to organically emerge, even for serendipity to happen. So much emphasis can

be placed on the coordination plan that it short circuits unexpected or unimagined possibilities for different groups to come together in new ways.

Furthermore, the default mode can be that the usual suspects are the ones making all the decisions. Again, as noted, too often only large institutions play a significant role. Those without financial resources or certain credentials are not deemed valuable to the cause. We lose the opportunity to hear and act on different perspectives and ideas. We fail to level the playing field; to share and leverage power, which inevitably leads to more inequities and disparities.

Recall each of the three stories presented in this report. In each one, they are taking a different route, one rooted in various actors, taking mutually reinforcing actions, rooted in a larger common purpose.

By creating an open tent, communities unleash their collective potential to take action, and for these collective actions to be mutually reinforcing efforts. This is a vital feature of an open tent and of creating a culture of shared responsibility. Here's what we mean:

- Actions tap into the distributed capacities of the community—coming from different directions, taken by different actors, acting on different pieces of the larger puzzle, all moving in a common direction.
- These actions are not moving randomly in their own direction, without any common purpose. Nor is an emphasis placed on a tightly wound approach of coordination. Instead, the focus is on making room for different institutions, groups, and individuals to become part of the collective work.
- The actions are driven and aligned by a larger common purpose that emerges, in part, from what matters to people in the community. Everyone is moving with intention, in mutually reinforcing ways.

Thus, an essential feature of shared responsibility is that actions come from multiple directions and sources all moving in a common direction. Importantly, these actions can both be smaller, human-scale actions and come from larger institutions.

An open tent provides the space for the community to intentionally come together, set a common direction and purpose for action, and work in mutually reinforcing ways.

Can-Do Shared Narratives

In The Harwood Institute's work, we have discovered that a community's shared narratives are the greatest hidden factor to whether a community moves forward or not. Such shared narratives shape people's mindsets, attitudes, actions, and behaviors.

Sadly, many communities suffer from ingrained negative narratives. It is possible to hear in some communities that "Our kids are incapable of learning," or "Our best days are behind us and there's nothing to look forward to," or "We 'can't do' (...fill in the blank) in our community." These are all shared narratives the Institute has heard in different communities we have worked with.

Of course, there is usually not a single narrative in a community. For instance, there is one community in which the Institute is working where a dominant narrative is that the community is inclusive, fair, and equitable; this is based on actions from decades ago when the community proactively sought to integrate housing. And yet, there is a competing narrative in the community that it has over time failed to address long-standing, persistent, and growing disparities and inequities. These narratives co-exist.

The remedy to combat negative narratives is not for a community to create a new upbeat public relations slogan or undertake a new advertising campaign. These efforts fail to reflect people's reality. People often feel they are being sold false hope. They typically result in producing greater skepticism, even cynicism, among people.

So, what is the alternative? How can a new space of an open tent and a culture of shared responsibility play a constructive role?

A key guidepost of an open tent is to cultivate a community's "can do" narrative. This only happens through the emergence and naming of actions that are generated by people in the community itself. Such actions demonstrate what is possible by people working together. Importantly, these stories are not always about success.

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The progress made along the way illuminates how unexpected combinations of people can join together to do unimaginable things.

They should highlight when a failure occurs, when people fall down, and when things don't work out. They can also show how people get back up and make new choices to re-calibrate their work together. The Harwood Institute has written extensively about the qualities of such stories elsewhere and thinks of them as "civic parables."

When these stories are told, people can see themselves in them. Indeed, these stories implicate people as possible actors, partners, doers, and builders. People often say when they hear such stories, "I could do that!" or "I may not do that exact thing, but I could do something else that I know or care about."

By lifting up these stories and connecting them to one another, a new authentic narrative begins to emerge. This new narrative typically comes into direct competition with the existing ingrained negative narrative.

One critical point to underscore here is that many of these emergent stories remain invisible to people in the community, even to those who are directly involved in the work itself. There are many reasons for this. Sometimes the actions are not deemed impactful until they reach certain measurable outcomes; progress along the way is not valued. Other times, progress is not being named along the way because it is difficult to see when being knee-deep in something. And there are times when real progress feels out of reach, and any actions feel too small or inconsequential.

But the progress that is made along the way gives people a sense of possibility and hope; a belief that progress is even possible. This is the case in communities just as it is in our own personal lives. The progress that is made along the way provides evidence that people can come together

to get things done. The progress made along the way illuminates how unexpected combinations of people can join together to do unimaginable things.

A central guidepost of an open tent is to cultivate a new can-do shared narrative in communities. This requires making the invisible visible. It takes connecting one story to another to help shape an arc of a new narrative. It demands utmost authenticity and forthrightness in the telling of the stories.

The importance of “can-do” narratives is that they help to create a new trajectory for hope. People can gain a sense of possibility that the community is moving in a more positive, productive direction, with growing momentum, and ever-expanding civic confidence.

Civic Learning

There is a special kind of learning that occurs in an open tent that supports the creation of a culture of shared responsibility. It is “civic learning.” It is how people in the community learn from one another, and how they put this learning to use. Sometimes this occurs without people even knowing that it is happening. Too often it doesn’t happen at all. The good news is that in an open tent, we can make it an explicit and concrete way of working together.

The payoff is enormous. In the three community stories presented in this report, it is possible to see how people in each of those communities are coming to a deeper understanding of their own purpose in acting: how they see and relate to one another; and what actions are required to make a difference in the community and the form those actions need to take to be effective. They also discovered that they would need to lead differently and engage with their communities differently.

This collective learning came about by people actively engaging with one another, making discernments about what is being learned, and using these insights and lessons to inform the choices and judgments they make. None of this could have been done by any single individual alone; people needed each other. It is changing how the communities see themselves and are working.

There is a host of questions that can spur civic learning in an open tent. They are of a certain flavor—namely, they focus on what is being learned collectively and how that affects the choices and actions people make. For instance:

What are we learning together about the community?

What are we learning about our purpose in working with the community?

What are we seeking to achieve together?

What does it mean—and take—to work with each other?

What are we learning as we do our work together about how we need to re-calibrate our efforts?

What are we learning about our relationships and ourselves?

In shared responsibility, we are tied to one another—in our purpose, efforts, and relationships—all with the goal of creating together a more just, fair, equitable, inclusive, and hopeful society. This requires that we actively and openly learn together as we wrestle with where we are, where we seek to go, and how to get there. And it takes the inclusion of all voices, especially those we may disagree with.

Without an explicit commitment to learning, we can fail to see and name what is working and what isn’t working. We can fail to re-calibrate our efforts. We can fail to see and

value the capacities that others have. We may not rearrange our relationships and roles, and thus alter the very ways in which we work together. These and other insights are essential to forging a culture of shared responsibility.

Such civic learning is the connective tissue of an open tent in which we continually weave together our shared knowledge and unleash our individual and collective power.

OPEN TENT GUIDEPOSTS

What Matters to People	Turn outward to the community and focus on people's shared aspirations and concerns, the actions they believe will make a difference in their lives, who they trust to take action with, and the community's readiness for action.
Distributed Capacities	Tap into the capacities and knowledge individuals, institutions and groups have to take action. This includes large-scale institutional actions and smaller, human-scale actions.
Mutually Reinforcing Actions	Take actions that are driven and aligned to a larger common purpose that emerges, in part, from what matters to people in the community. Everyone is moving, with intention, in mutually reinforcing ways.
Can-Do Shared Narratives	Cultivate a community's "can-do" narrative through the emergence and naming of new actions that are generated by the community itself, and that demonstrate what is possible when people work together.
Civic Learning	Focus on what is being learned collectively by understanding and working with the community, and how that affects the choices and actions we make.

How We Show Up

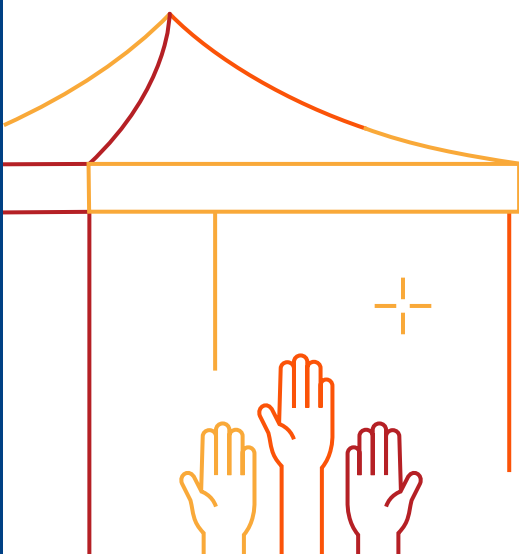
Building an open tent requires being intentional in how we show up and engage. It takes making shifts in how we see ourselves and others and relate to one another. It calls for altering not just what we say, but what we do—and why.

As noted earlier, being intentional requires vigilance in making discernments about where we find ourselves. What is happening around us. What each of us must do. It demands that we make choices and judgments about how to move forward. We must actively choose to make ourselves visible and account for what we choose to do. We must step forward and declare here I am—and join with others to say, here we are.

This takes being awake, attuned, present.

In creating this new framework, there was a wide range of possible points to include in “how we show up.” What’s presented here are the most essential points—those that in particular shape and drive an open tent and culture of shared responsibility.

For each point, we have created juxtapositions to highlight the tensions that are embedded in making this space work.



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We must step forward and declare here I am—and join with others to say, here we are.

Skip the invitation, and make an entreaty.

In each of the three communities, it might seem that the organizers of an open tent must have sent out invitations to a select group of individuals and groups to attend the first meeting. This would be akin to a wedding or a party, where a list is developed, invitations are printed or sent via email, and RSVPs must be received by a certain date. But that never happened.

Instead, rather than an invitation being sent out, an entreaty was made. There is a significant difference between the two.

An invitation is when an event, party, or a collective community approach is developed by someone, or some group, and then others are “invited” to become a part of that already existing, pre-formed event or effort. The invitation is a way to aggregate people and groups. It is a method to line up others. Even more, it is a way to say: “Please come to a space we already created.” Again, think about the nature of a wedding or a pre-set community process. There are times and places when this approach makes all the sense in the world.

But when it comes to building an open tent for shared responsibility, it is an entreaty that is required. An entreaty has fundamentally different qualities and purpose than an invitation. An entreaty is a way to ask someone if they want to join you in a shared journey. In joining together, the journey is created together. The space in which that journey takes place is co-created.

In this way, people or groups are not asked to put aside their own aspirations or needs, or thoughts, but to come with them and contribute to making the whole. Over time, those in the tent will recreate what the whole is and what it means. This is happening in the Community Task Force and is emerging with the Community of Ad Hoc Teams. This is what happened time and again in the Community of Educators.

In each of the three communities, there was no formal (or even informal) invitation list to ensure that a pre-ordained group would get together to lead an initiative. Quite the reverse occurred. An open entreaty was made to people

in the community, and those who wanted to step forward and join in did so. This was critical to how each of these efforts began.

When we create a tent for shared responsibility, it starts not with an invitation, but with an entreaty.

Welcome everyone, and get started with those who are ready to roll.

Many community efforts start with the assumption that they need to gather as many institutions and leaders—and funding—as possible. They typically reach out to those who seemingly hold the most power, resources, and reach. This often leads to bringing together the “usual suspects” in a community—those who are typically asked to serve on various boards and lead special initiatives. It often means that these efforts spend considerable time coordinating this far-flung set of actors. Again, there are situations and times when such an approach makes sense.

In building an open tent for shared responsibility, a decidedly different approach is taken: Welcome everyone, and start with those who are ready to roll. This is what is happening in the Community of Ad Hoc Teams, where the five teams of community leaders, neighborhood activists, and residents have joined together to catalyze change in their community. These are individuals who raised their hands and stepped forward to get started. There are others in the community who expressed interest but chose not to join in as of yet. There are still others who may be skeptical of the efforts and have chosen to keep their distance.

But those who are working on the teams chose to answer the entreaty. What’s more, as the teams have gotten underway, many of them have already welcomed new team members, who heard about the ongoing work and stepped forward. The teams are naturally expanding. Entirely new teams also have become part of the growing work. What’s more, many of the teams have actively sought out people with essential voices, perspectives, and lived experiences that are typically left out of such efforts. The next step is to bring people from across these teams together to learn from each other, along with additional official leaders from the city government, business, philanthropy, and others.

Here's the thing. A key to building a culture of shared responsibility is to ensure that the tent is always open on all four sides from the outset of a community's efforts. It is to keep the tent remaining open at all times so that others can join in as the work takes root, grows, and spreads in the community. What's important here is that not everyone will be ready to join from the get-go; instead, start with those who are ready to roll.

While the story of the Community of Educators began differently from the Community of Ad Hoc Teams, it still has similar markings. In that example, recall that the four school superintendents initially came together to get the community of practice off the ground. Slowly, but surely—and, importantly, over time—additional superintendents stepped forward. They joined the space, one by one, on their own, at their own pace.

As this space took form, various community partners joined in, too. The expectation is that they will continue to join various discussions and learning as time goes on as will philanthropists, other educators, along with others. Coming into the space is always open; who joins, when, and why will all vary. What is also open is the freedom to find ways to contribute to the ongoing work and to help create new avenues for work.

With the Community Task Force, 60 representatives from various organizations and groups, and government agencies stepped forward to respond to COVID-19 and related concerns. In addition to the points already raised, this group further underscored the importance that having an open tent does not mandate or require attendance at each meeting. This is also the case for each of the other examples. Of course, continuity is important to any effort. But so too is keeping the space "porous," where people can come and go as they please. In none of the community examples was there a "membership," letterhead, or required attendance.

When we pitch the tent, all people are always welcomed, they can enter from any side, and come and go as they please—when they are ready.

Come ready to problem-solve, and come without the answer.

In each of the three communities presented in this report, people came together to solve a community problem or a constellation of challenges. It was about education in one example, seeking to ensure that schools and communities take co-ownership of educating youth; and that school superintendents shift their orientation and practices from compliance to innovation. In another, it was about addressing the problems related to COVID-19, with those efforts then expanding into various other underlying systemic and equity challenges in the community. In the last example, it was about how to catalyze a community's can-do spirit and demonstrate that positive and lasting change is possible. In each and all of these instances, and many other communities The Harwood Institute has worked alongside over the years, one thing is clear: people want to solve problems.

And yet, when spaces are created to solve problems in communities, those who come into the space typically bring with them their own solutions and seek to get a group they are working with to adopt those solutions. The space inevitably becomes a competition for whose ideas will prevail. Jockeying for position, protecting one's turf, and seeking credit all become the norms of the space. There is a tendency to emphasize comprehensive plans. "Knowing the answer" is seen as wielding power. Complex, mechanized approaches are sought to minimize and squeeze out tension, uncertainty, and ambiguity. There can be an urgent desire to always know what comes next. We have all been a part of such engagements.

In an open tent, people come ready to engage in order to solve problems and yet come without any pre-set answers to these problems. This may sound counter-intuitive, but it is what actually makes the space work. People do not join the tent to lobby others, cajole others, or force their will onto others.

Instead, once inside an open tent, a culture of shared responsibility emerges from those who are working together, first turning outward toward their community to understand what matters to people, and then, by

co-creating responses based on what they are learning. It is possible to see this culture emerging in each of the three communities documented in this report.

In each of these three communities, people have stepped forward together to co-create a way forward. At each step along the way, their responses have taken new shapes, shifted courses, and engaged new partners. In other words, their responses have continually emerged over time.

This requires showing up in an open tent in a certain way. There is a premium on listening deeply to one another. Dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty is imperative, as challenges can be fuzzy, unclear, or in need of definition. It calls for landing on a solution, only to realize with new learning that a different solution is called for. As in the Community Task Force, recalibrating efforts is a necessity; without it, the community could not have adequately addressed local concerns, especially as community conditions kept changing. Nor could it have created a culture of shared responsibility where different combinations of groups and residents worked on different challenges.

This may sound easy, certainly reasonable, perhaps even obvious. But what happens in the tent is fundamentally different from so many of our ingrained ways of working and reflexes.

Level the playing field, and be sure to level power.

All communities have their own power hierarchies and dynamics. In some communities, the power is held closely by business leaders and philanthropists. In others, it is driven by “old families” who have lived in the community for generations, or by a “good ol’ boy” network, typically made up of older white men. In others, there is the usual cast of well-known characters, who always dominate and drive what happens in the community. In some communities, it is a different mix of these things. The power hierarchy is clear.

Now, take a look at each of the communities that are presented in this report and you see a different set of circumstances at play. In the Community of

Educators, while the group clearly started with school superintendents, they were intentional in their efforts to level the playing field by ensuring that there was no hierarchy among the participating superintendents. This was true even though a small core group initially took the lead to launch the community of practice. This approach to leveling power from the beginning was critical to make the space work. One way that they achieved this goal was when new superintendents came into the space, there was a constant revisiting of purpose and approach to ensure that everyone in the tent had a stake in what was happening moving forward.

The superintendents went well beyond that, too. Recall how they spoke about how they must work in their communities. To create a culture of shared responsibility, they said, they would need to see themselves as partners with the community to educate youth. As one superintendent put it, “Looking outward means that we need to fundamentally rethink how ‘we do school.’” This insight is what led them to create a “From/To” chart on leading and working differently to bring about a culture of shared responsibility in their communities. This newly desired reality was demonstrated when they went on site visits to see how different superintendents and their communities were experimenting with this approach.

Leveling the playing field by leveling power is at the core of what makes the tent work.

Think about the Community Task Force. As one can imagine in a small, rural community, the power structure among those 60 individuals had long been set. In a Harwood Institute report from four years earlier, people from the community had said that the community had been run by “a good ol’ boy network.” Many of the organizations, groups, and city leaders participating in the task force had for years operated in fragmented, siloed ways.

To do their work together with the task force, this power structure had to be intentionally leveled out. Otherwise, the space would have degenerated into a typical meeting, where certain groups and individuals dominated the agenda, who would speak, and what actions would be taken. Instead, different individuals stepped forward, different groups worked together in new ways, and

different notions of power emerged. This change in how people showed up was one of the critical learnings the group identified as it did its work together.

As an open tent now forms in the Community of Ad Hoc Teams, neighborhood activists will sit with senior city officials; economic development leaders will sit with community residents; philanthropists and business leaders will sit with individuals who hold few financial resources but are rich in innate capacities. Together, they will create a culture of shared responsibility in their community.

This is possible only when we level the playing field by leveling power. This is what happens when we pitch a tent that is open on all sides.

Embrace inherent tensions, and leverage the heck out of them.

There are at least two options when it comes to groups working together: politeness and conflict. Politeness is when groups find a way to set priorities and create plans to move forward, all while bending over backward to make sure that no one's feathers are being overly ruffled or feelings are hurt. But this forward movement often belies underlying dysfunction. In such situations, community members will often say, "We're all so nice to one another" and then quickly add, "And this prevents us from ever really getting to the hard issues." The community norm is that open disagreements are not permitted or acceptable behavior.

Another option is that conflict prevails. This yields heated arguments and lead people to hunker down in their respective corners, where they dig in and become defensive. It causes people to engage in "solution wars" between and among opposing ideas, where the outcome can be gridlock, even acrimony, and ill-will. In these communities, one often hears comments like, "We just can't agree on anything" or, "We keep meeting, but it goes nowhere."

In how people show up in an open tent, they are intentional in steering clear of both of these options. There is a decided move to create and maintain a

distinctively different space. It is to identify, lift up, and engage with inherent tensions at play, and to proactively find ways to leverage the heck out of them.

When these tensions are avoided sidestepped, and shunted aside, they have a way of taking different shapes and forms, often pushing and pulling at the conversation until they are surfaced and worked through.

This is what happened repeatedly with the Community of Educators. In their conversations about "Schoomunity," they discovered that there was an inherent tension between the actions that ordinarily take place when schools seek to educate youth on their own, and when such actions are informed by a shared responsibility approach. For the school superintendents, this caused deep consternation about the meaning of leadership and how they would work with the community. There were palpable fears and trepidations about whether they had the personal capabilities and skills and dispositions to take such an approach.

It would have been easy to simply disregard these inherent tensions, sweep them under the rug, pretend they did not exist, or blame others for why they might exist.

But at each step of their conversations, the superintendents made the choice to embrace these tensions. They actively leaned into them. They opened themselves up to examine their own assumptions, how they typically work, what they would need to change in their relationships with others, and how they personally would need to show up. This propelled them forward. It led them to new insights. It produced even transformative personal and professional changes in how they saw their work and themselves.

With the Community Task Force, this examination and progress took a bit longer, but it still ultimately came about. There, those involved could have kept working diligently to address challenges they already believed beset the community without ever examining the underlying tensions at play.

But over time they began to wrestle first with the inherent tension of what keeps them awake at night. Recall, this opened up a floodgate of comments, reflections, and tensions about their own work. Next, they examined their

shared aspirations, which led to questions about what they were working on, why, and how they were working together. Then, they began to unravel the equity concerns related to what was happening with different issues and concerns in the community. These concerns had often not been on the table in the community.

Perhaps one way to look at this cascading conversation is that this was just a series of planned steps that they undertook. In reality, however, each of these questions emerged only as a result of the preceding ones. Each of these questions called on those in the group to step forward and actively engage in inherent tensions. There was absolutely no assurance that these conversations would work, or even happen. On the contrary, each conversation was risky for those involved.

The group chose to make each one happen. The group wrestled with underlying tensions about how individual members were feeling about what was happening around them. They struggled with whether their good work and good deeds actually addressed the great needs of the community. They sought to understand if their new ways of working together were actually effective ways to work together.

None of these questions were particularly easy or comfortable to engage with. Certainly, there can be an aversion to critique what is occurring. There can be a fear of hurting someone else's feelings. There can be a desire not to step on anyone else's toes. Conversations could have become divisive and acrimonious.

Instead, the task force embraced the inherent tensions at play and forthrightly examined what was actually happening versus what needed to happen, which ultimately led to making different choices about how to relate to one another, how to take action together, and how each individual needed to show up. When they embraced the inherent tensions is when major shifts in thinking occurred, even significant breakthroughs in understanding and in taking subsequent actions.

In an open tent, we embrace inherent tensions and then find ways to leverage the heck out of them to make our shared work more effective and to prompt us as individuals to show up in more present, awake, and engaged ways.

Name the invisible, and then you can make things known and actionable.

In each community, there were moments when a problem, tension, aspiration, or emerging story was at play, but until it was expressly "named" it was neither truly understood nor actionable. The "naming" of issues, new ideas, learnings, and other elements in an open tent is pivotal to propelling people's ability to know what is at work, and to engage with it productively.

There are numerous examples of this throughout the three community stories. With the Community of Educators, it is only when the school superintendents "named" the mix and nature of the actions in Schoomunity, that it became clear what a culture of shared responsibility might look like. It was only when they actually named the distinction in what it means for them to lead and operate differently in their communities that the implications of a shared responsibility approach became clear for them personally. It was only when they named their fears and uncertainty about pursuing a culture of shared responsibility that they could begin to work through those fears and uncertainties.

In the Community of Ad Hoc Teams, it was initially the naming of the "can't do" vs. the "can do" narrative that helped call people forward to join in the effort. This is what fueled the initial entreaty. This naming held particular power because the "can't do" narrative had been a felt unknown in the community: something people regularly felt, but which was not openly said. It also showed the power of shared narratives, a key factor of an open tent for shared responsibility.

Another example is the Community of Ad Hoc Teams was in the second half of the Public Innovators Lab when the team members named just how different the mindset and practices of The Harwood Institute were from how they

and others in the community ordinarily operate. It was this discovery—and its shared naming—that helped to cohere and congeal the learning of the group so that it could adopt and adapt a new way of working together.

In the Community Task Force, it was when the group named their shared aspirations, that they made a significant shift in how they considered their actions and purpose. It was also when they named what they were learning about what it means to work together, that they began to fully recognize and own and thus further propel an emerging culture of shared responsibility. Their civic learning all depended upon their ability to name what was being learned, why it was important, and what the implications were for how they moved forward together.

Moreover, it was when the Housing and Homeless Work Group and the Childcare Workgroup started using The Harwood Institute's Making Visible the Invisible Tool that they could clearly see the power of their individual efforts, share those efforts with the larger task force, and enable others in the task force to begin to discover the power of their own efforts.

A shift occurs when people give a name to something that has gone unnamed or when they have experienced a felt unknown—when they name something that has been invisible to them. This naming generates within and among people a shift in mindset, practices, and ways of doing things. Such shifts occurred in each of the three community stories, and they are pivotal to the work that is done in an open tent.

All of this starts with naming the invisible.

HOW WE SHOW UP

Skip the invitation, and make an entreaty	Ask people to join in a shared journey that they cocreate.
Welcome everyone, and get started with those who are ready to roll	Keep the tent open at all times so others can join in as the work takes root, grows, and spreads in the community. Begin with those who are ready to get started.
Level the playing field, and be sure to level power	Place a premium on people being ready to listen deeply to one another, deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, and forge shared responses.
Embrace inherent tensions, and leverage the heck out of them	Make room for all individuals and groups to step forward and work together in new ways. Actively level power hierarchies and dynamics.
Name the invisible, and then you can make things known and actionable	"Name" issues, new ideas, learnings, and other elements to propel people's ability to know what is at work, and to engage with it productively.

Essential Power of Questions

What gives rise to the necessary conversation, choices, and actions in an open tent are the questions that people ask themselves. These questions lead to discoveries that produce a different mindset and approach to how people see the community, their relationship with it, their relationship with one another, and their relationship with themselves. They lead people to make different choices about what needs to be done and by whom. Read through each of the community stories in this report and it is possible to see the essential power of such questions.

Perhaps this is counter-intuitive. There can be a tendency in our society to value the complex and complicated over things that have an elegant simplicity. As noted before, there can be a desire for a set-by-step set of detailed instructions that tell us what to do in order to get started.

The truth is that clear and concise questions actively open up room for people to express themselves more fully, and in doing so gain clarity of purpose. They enable people to make more intentional choices and devise their own ways forward. It is through questions that people co-create what happens in an open tent and help forge a culture of shared responsibility.

In The Harwood Institute's work, clear and succinct questions drive and animate an open tent. Such questions can include,

What are our aspirations for the community?

What is going to take for us (as a community) to work on these aspirations?

If we were able to create these aspirations for our community, what does that look like?

Other questions might include:

Where are the spheres of influence that you have
where you can begin to get things going?

What are we learning together about the community?

What are we learning about our purpose in working
with the community?

What are we learning about our relationships and
ourselves?

Through our continued work on an open tent and creating a culture of shared responsibility, we intend to identify the specific questions that fuel this new space. This is the next phase of work. In the meantime, here's what we know for certain. The fuel for this space is not having the answers at the start, but to start with the right questions.

Conclusion

We live in a time when people are yearning to exert greater personal and collective agency and control over their lives and communities. When finding effective responses to so many of the challenges we face requires us to bring together our shared resources. When there is an urgent yearning for a more just, equitable, fair, inclusive, and hopeful society.

These realities provide an opportunity for us to step forward and re-imagine and recreate our lives, our communities, and our nation itself.

To create this new path forward, we need new intentional spaces where we can unleash people's potential in communities to marshal their collective resources, deployed in mutually reinforcing ways, rooted in a sense of common purpose, to tackle common problems.

A Tent Open on All Sides is a framework to create such spaces, where anyone and everyone is welcomed, and that gives rise to a culture of shared responsibility.





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