

'Accountability Statement' by SPARC (Sparking Powerful Anti-Racist Collaboration)  
SPARC was a white anti-racist training organization for organizers in Boston in the late 90's. Sadly, it no longer exists.

\*Sparking Powerful Anti-Racist Collaboration (SPARC)\*

Foundation Beliefs & Accountability Statement

OUR MISSION:

SPARC, a Boston-based non-profit organization, was founded in August of 1996 with the primary mission of mobilizing white people to take action against racism in their own communities in ways that are rooted in accountability to communities of color. Our primary organizing vehicle, which we call the SPARC Group, is meant to build a movement of white people committed to challenging white supremacy through the development of community based anti-racism projects that are organized around a particular issue or theme.

FOUNDATION BELIEFS:

In early 1996 we wrote a set of foundation beliefs that not only clearly stated our political commitment to working with other white people to end white supremacy, but also doubled as a vehicle for conducting a community needs assessment. Our primary focus was to be in dialogue with folks about the foundation beliefs and what was actually needed and/or missing in our local communities around white on white anti-racism work.

After many revisions and a great deal of input from white allies and allies of color we developed the following foundation beliefs:

- \* Racism-white supremacy- is a white problem. White people created and continue to control the institutions which preserve racism.
- \* Because we live in a society which cultivates and accepts racism as a foundation through its legal, cultural, educational, and political structures, racial prejudices live within us all. Additionally, white people receive preferential treatment we may not see. As people who hold powerful positions within the institutions, it is important that we take steps to end racism.
- \* It is important for us to have a broad base of understanding and of accountability to the experiences, opinions, and knowledge of people of color whose involvement is key in every stage of this project.
- \* A powerful way white people can work to end racism is by organizing within our own communities. Boston area groups are forming to bring together diverse people to develop this project focused on organizing in white communities.
- \* We see all forms of oppression as equally destructive and connected. In our commitment to end oppression, all areas of difference among us will be addressed.

\* The relationship between class and race is of particular importance to us. Class differences are often ignored, silenced, and misnamed. We pledge to work together to achieve cross-class diversity in all stages of our work.

#### OUR APPROACH:

Initially gathering as a white group is important for several reasons:

\* We are modeling our foundation belief that ending racism - white supremacy - is white people's responsibility.

\* White communities are diverse in gender, sexual orientations, ethnicity, religion, abilities and economic groups, among other ways. This diversity means that we must take time to invest in building relationships across our differences. Developing an understanding of how these differences shape our relationships to one another and our commitment to end racism is an important key to success.

\* White people have historically and deliberately resisted exploring the ways we are different from one another. This has resulted in a general belief that white people do not have culture and has contributed to the difficulties white people have in organizing against racism together. Meeting as a white group will allow us to work to change these self-defeating patterns.

\* Taking the time to look at our relationships with one another will help us to identify some of the barriers that have prevented us from working well together. By exploring and sharing our personal experiences in doing anti-racism work, we will discover how to build relationships among our communities and neighbors.

\* Developing a vision about how to work against racism ourselves, instead of relying on the ideas and creativity of people of color, challenges a common racist pattern among social change organizations. The ideas and projects generated in the SPARC Groups will give us the needed tools to fight racism effectively in collaboration with people of color.

We also recognize that gathering as a white group must be done with careful consideration:

\* Well-intentioned white people have repeatedly ignored the voices and leadership of people of color by remaining in control of economic resources and decision making power.

\* The legacy of hate generally associated with all-white gatherings and the failure of past efforts to organize white people against racism are

additional obstacles.

\* Organizing a white group to fight against racism is not an end in itself. Working with white people never precludes working with people of color, we can always do both. The SPARC Group is the initial step in creating a much larger project.

#### FORMALIZED ACCOUNTABILITY:

Central to our work is maintaining formalized and systematic accountability to people of color and communities of color in all aspects of our work.

If our mission is to foster and support multi-faceted anti-racism work in white arenas and we believe this work is white people's responsibility, actively seeking anti-racist white people to join these efforts, the result is likely that we will be a predominately, but not explicitly, white group of people. As a predominately white group, we believe it is important to formally structure ways of maintaining accountability to our political allies of color. It is important as well, to create systems of support for any people of people of color who decide to be a part of SPARC.

Why is accountability so important?

Input from folks who carry the experience of racism is essential: White people are unable to have a comprehensive perspective on racism. Well-intentioned white people have repeatedly ignored the voices and leadership of people of color by remaining in control of economic resources and decision making power. Furthermore, the legacy of hate generally associated with all-white gatherings and the failure of past efforts to organize white people against racism makes the need for connection to communities of color more evident.

By building systems of accountability into your/our organizational structure, the knowledge and experience of fighting racism and other forms of oppression which lie with people of color is brought to the center of our work. We hear directly what our political allies of color think of our work in white communities and can incorporate multiple perspectives into the foundations of SPARC.

It is critical to model the process of building alliances and coalitions across lines of race and other differences. Through our evolving personal and political relationships, we establish the basis for information flow, communication, and solidarity between social justice organizations.

SPARC's vision is to gather a diverse group of individuals from white communities and communities of color to participate in one of two groups: an Accountability Council or a Program Council.

### THE ACCOUNTABILITY COUNCIL

The Accountability Council is comprised entirely or predominantly of people of color. This group may initially be as small as six or eight individuals from a diverse set of class, sexual identity, local geographic location, ethnicity and religious backgrounds.

The purpose of the Accountability Council is to provide feedback on the overall direction of our work and identify problem areas we may not see. The Accountability Council will help determine whether SPARC is staying rooted in our foundation beliefs and our commitment to ensure that the perspectives and experiences of people of color remain central to our work.

Responsibilities include:

- \* Providing feedback and concerns about SPARC's work.
- \* Identifying new work locations and needed anti-racist interventions.
- \* Networking and making connections between SPARC projects and the work of other community organizations.
- \* Facilitating the building of a broad base of solidarity across lines of difference and movements for social change.

### THE PROGRAM COUNCIL

The Program Council will consist of a small group of anti-racist white folks who are members of the communities in which we are working, as well as any people of color who express an interest. Unlike the Accountability Council, the Program Council will become involved in the day-to-day issues that arise in SPARC's work.

Responsibilities include:

- \* Assisting with building and directing SPARC programs
- \* Building a program strategy
- \* Identifying, challenging, and hurdling the barriers to collaboration that arise between the participants.

For more information on SPARC please contact:

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