

An Overview of Catalyst Project's Feedback and Community Accountability Process in the Creation of the Anne Braden Program

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This document provides an overview of the process that Catalyst Project underwent in making the decision to create and implement the Anne Braden program, as well as the steps we took along the way to get input, feedback, and support in shaping the program itself. We share this as a way to contextualize the program in the community that helped create it, and to recognize and appreciate the many people who helped this program come into existence.

In 2005, the Challenging White Supremacy (CWS) workshop, which had been running 4-month long anti-racist political education workshops for white activists and organizers since 1993, made a decision to close down. Catalyst originated as a project of CWS in 2000 to support anti-racist work in the global justice movement. Sharon Martinas, a co-founder (along with Mickey Ellinger) and coordinator of CWS, recruited Chris Crass to become a co-coordinator of CWS and build Catalyst Project. From 2000 to 2005, most of the members of Catalyst participated in CWS as workshop participants, and then as small group organizers, presenters, and trainers in the workshop. Many of us took on leadership roles in CWS and Sharon supported us as we built Catalyst into its own organization.

In 2005, Sharon Martinas, who serves as a Catalyst advisor, talked with us about continuing an intensive anti-racist training program for white social justice activists. We committed to seriously assessing our work and the possibility of taking on an intensive training program in the Bay Area. We knew it would take some time to increase our capacity for a Bay Area program as we also kept up our national work, particularly our anti-war movement building program and national political education. Our national work significantly expanded after the levees breached and flooded New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. In response, we slowed down our process for building a Bay Area training program and stepped up our participation in the national Katrina solidarity movement.

In 2006, Catalyst conducted Bay Area and national movement assessments to gauge whether this program would meet current political needs and be a valuable contribution toward building anti-racist movements for collective liberation. Overwhelmingly we heard from organizers of color and white anti-racist organizers that this kind of training program was needed. We heard repeatedly from white activists who had been through CWS and organizers of color who worked with people trained by CWS, that anti-racist training vastly increased the overall capacity of the multiracial left in the Bay Area and nationally. From this feedback we developed our initial goals and thoughts on what the program could look like, the constituency it would serve, and plans for a community input and feedback process to help us move forward.

We met with Sharon Martinas to discuss our ideas of building the Anne Braden Program. She gave us critical feedback, important questions and a lot of encouragement to move forward. We also met with our advisor Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez for feedback on our overall plan. With their support, we did more work internally to envision the program and brought in outside support to develop work plans for the building process. We then had the first of

multiple meetings with the School Of Unity and Liberation (SOUL), a primarily women of color led organization that focuses on political education and organizing skills development programs for youth and young organizers of color. They gave us feedback on the direction and focus of the program, helped us work through some difficult questions we were struggling with, and shared many of their organization's resources with us.

We developed a program proposal to share with our advisors and allies. We brought our advisors together over dinner, presented the proposal and received feedback, questions and encouragement to continue building the program. Present at that advisor meeting were Elizabeth Betita Martinez, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Nisha Anand and Paul Kivel. We had phone and in-person conversations with our advisors Linda Evans and Max Elbaum about the program. Max raised serious concerns about a program designed specifically for white anti-racist activists and pushed us to help white activists see their overall humanity and not become fixated on their privilege in ways that undermine their ability to meaningfully contribute. Max's critical feedback and disagreements with our proposal helped us strengthen our approach, and clarify our politics and goals.

In May of 2007, we hosted a community meeting with organizational allies to get feedback and input. We invited over 60 of our allies representing more than 20 organizations including people of color led community based organizations and primarily white anti-racist organizations. This gathering also included mentors and allies we wanted to take on different pieces of building the Anne Braden Program. At the meeting we gave a presentation on our proposal and asked folks to give us feedback on how they thought this program could best contribute to left movement building in the Bay Area and nationally. We also asked people to give us suggestions on specific content that they saw as crucial to including in the workshop, and then gave people many options on how they could continue to support developing the Anne Braden program.

We had follow-up meetings with some of the organizers who were unable to attend the community meeting. Through this process we gathered feedback from allies in the Women of Color Resource Center, Just Cause Oakland, Ruckus Society, Critical Resistance, Movement Generation, Heads Up Collective, SF Day Labor Program and the Women's Collective, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, POWER (People Organized to Demand Employment Rights), Y-Step (Youth Stepping to Address Racism), the Institute for Multiracial Justice, Left Turn, Center for Political Education, Matchbook Learning Project, SOUL, Childcare Collective, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, Katrina Solidarity Network, and War Times/Tiempo de Guerras.

In the fall of 2007 we reached out to all the CWS alumni for whom we could find email addresses. We sent a letter with our vision of the Braden program and requested their reflections about participating in CWS and asked if they had advice on how to shape this new program. We asked them the following questions: What were the biggest lessons you took away from your experience going through CWS? Where there specific exercises, activities or conversations that really impacted your understanding of racism and social justice organizing? Where there conversations or experiences that you wish you had had that you think would have really strengthened your understanding of white supremacy and organizing? We are incorporating much of the feedback we got from CWS alumni into the way the Braden program is set up and run.

Naming the Program after Anne Braden

When we decided we wanted to lift up the legacy of long time anti-racist organizer Anne Braden by naming this program after her, we knew we needed to make sure we had the support and blessings of her political community. We reached out to Catherine Fosl, who wrote *Subversive Southerner* (a biography of Anne Braden's life). We informed her of the program, the work of our organization more broadly, and our desire to name the program after Anne Braden. We asked for her thoughts on who we should reach out to about the use of Anne Braden's name. She suggested close friends of Anne's at The Carl Braden Memorial Center in Kentucky, home to the Braden-founded Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression and the Highlander Center in Tennessee. We reached out to all of these individuals and organizations to inform them about the program and ask if they supported us naming it after Anne Braden. All of the people we reached out to gave us their blessing and at that point we began publicly calling this project "The Anne Braden Anti-Racist Training Program."

Later that year we had the opportunity to sit down with an organizer and the director from the historic Highlander Folk School. They shared more about their current work and gave us their thoughts and ideas on the Braden program.

Building the Curriculum

We collected feedback from some allies on the overall flow of the curriculum as well as specific sessions. We also reached out to specific organizers to get advice on readings, pedagogy, and incorporating spirituality and cultural activities into the program. We met with a white working class anti-racism discussion group (made up of CWS alumni) to get their suggestions on the program and help in thinking about the culture of the workshop, and how to support the leadership and participation of working class participants.

We have had lots of support and feedback from some of our advisors and allies as we build different components of the program. Some of the Catalyst advisors have put a bunch of time into helping us build our fundraising strategy, helped to shape the Mentorship component of the program, and sat down with many of us at different times over the past year to discuss various questions. Former coordinators for CWS met with us to give advice on the volunteer placement component and grassroots fundraising component of the Braden program.

We have deep appreciation for all the thoughts, reflections, ideas, critical questions, love, and enthusiasm so many people have given us as we have been creating the Braden program. The program would not be possible, or what it is, without all the vast and humbling community support it has received. These conversations are not finished--- we will be in ongoing dialogue with our extended community throughout the Anne Braden program, and afterwards to help us evaluate the process.