



IM4HI PROFILE: Strategy Work—Connecting Immigration to Incarceration

// We needed more coherence around our programs. We were doing many things. It was like every staff person generated different grants or projects. At one point, someone was doing something on health in the form of community gardens and wellness; one was working on police stopping and confiscating; one was working on drug policy. We were doing immigration and sanctuary work and organizing warehouse workers. It was all over the map! It was also the time of Donald Trump where race was being weaponized against people of color. We had to be much sharper and clearer to act within that environment.

So Saúl came on the scene and helped us analyze the work we were doing. We were a faith voice—that was the thread. We were a faith voice.

And it became like, ‘Okay, well this work on criminal justice here that was being done in Los Angeles and the work on immigration that we are doing here in Northern California, actually should be hooked together around an understanding of history and race and white supremacy in the United States. And because we’re a faith organization, what has been the role of faith communities in perpetuating historical structural racism, and what’s the role of faith communities in challenging and transforming that?’ Then it became clear, that the work we are doing is about racial justice.”

—Reverend Deborah Lee, Executive Director, IM4HI

IM4HI staff and Board worked closely with FLA consultant Saúl Sarabia to develop a framework for unifying its immigration rights and anti-incarceration work. Our staff and Board members relished learning about Critical Race Theory, which was central to this work.

// We had one meeting with butcher paper—there is immigration work and criminalization work, and looking at how POC were criminalized. We then studied critical race theory with our staff and our Board. We developed a slide show, there were readings. And then, most importantly there is the practice. How do we look at things that happen using this framework?”

—Reverend Deborah Lee, Executive Director, IM4HI

We were committed to partnering with FLA to fortify and strengthen their organization. We created space for learning and inquiry and rigorously integrated the outcomes of our process. We made this process our own.

// People contributed from different parts of the organization...they wanted everyone across programs to be in some inquiry around this and see what they could contribute to this collective product. I think they were way ahead of the curve in that. In fact, I don't think I've had a client, in the 11 years that I've been consulting, who specifically said at one of our staff retreats, 'We want you to just break down the tenets of critical race theory; we want to understand what it is and how it relates to the areas of work and how we will apply this framework to our own work internally.' That spoke a lot to what they were up for."

—Saúl Sarabia, FLA Consultant

// Saúl is just a brilliant, brilliant organizer and strategist. He helped me, and helped us, to understand the importance of racial equity and how to practice and advocate for racial equity. Also, he was very helpful in terms of outlining our social theory...really looking at how systemic racism is so embedded in our culture...not allowing us to compromise our values...that we should really advocate from the standpoint of our values."

—Reverend Dr. Larry Foy, Regional Director, Los Angeles, IM4HI

Centering racial justice gave IM4HI a shape and container for our program work. It helped us to name and embrace our racial justice values openly and to apply these to all aspects of the organization.

// It is something we can continue to go back and look at. When our communications person is putting out communications - are we weaving these into our messaging? Planning an event - how is this coming through in our event? Or hiring - how is it coming through? It is part of our canon, part of our organizational sacred texts - our history, our values, our mission. As we onboard new Board and staff, at our staff retreat - we go back to our sacred text. Racial equity is now part of our canon."

—Reverend Deborah Lee, Executive Director, IM4HI

This work was core identity work, creating an underlying theory of action and an operating lens that informs how we work in the here and now and also in the future.

// You need those good roots and good foundations, otherwise you keep sliding around. It's hard to build from the foundation—and that's what needs to happen—and still remain flexible to the long-term and the immediate. FLA helped us with that kind of thinking, to develop a pedagogy for transmitting the anti-racism work."

—Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Board Member, IM4HI

// When the FLA's capacity coach community of practice was learning (we are still in learning) about how leaders and their teams were making their analysis about racial equity 'live' in their programming and operations, we turned to Rev. Deborah and her team for insights and their experiences. They were generous in sharing how they arrived at their framework, and the paths - smooth and bumpy -- they walked to infuse and bring to life these values and intentions throughout IM4HI's operations, programs and culture."

—Holly Delany Cole, Program Director, TheLeadersTrust