

CHAPTER 1

How to Learn Something in an Empowerment Project

COMMUNITY HOUSE BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATES Empowerment Projects' complex tangle of crisscrossed sponsorships and crisscrossed missions. It is a very successful Empowerment Project, coming close to fulfilling all the missions at once. Most of its funds come from the government, from nonprofit organizations, and from private donations. A small amount of money comes from its many fundraisers, which involve selling burrito or lasagna dinners, used clothes, old stuffed animals with dirty fur, and rumpled, second-hand books. So, to survive, the program has to act a bit like a state agency, a bit like a nonprofit, a bit like a charity, and a bit like a business. Such programs have to act like state agencies, expertly documenting their successes at preventing disadvantaged, minority youth from entering the futures which social scientists predict for their ranks, of drug abuse, poverty, teen pregnancy, and crime. Programs like these also have to act like civic associations, both by inviting adult volunteers to come help young people do homework in the after-school programs, and by encouraging youth members to conduct volunteer work themselves, on weekends, evenings, and holidays. In addition to acting like state agencies, businesses, charities, and civic associations, the programs are supposed to be "family-like," as organizers put it, thus further blending the kinds of obligations that participants might expect from one another.

The projects also have to "promote our diverse, multicultural community," as flyers and other publicity often advertise. To promote "bonding among diverse youth," organizers like Emily encourage disadvantaged youth from her after-school program to attend evening meetings of county-wide youth civic engagement projects like the Regional Youth Empowerment Project—planning and conducting litter cleanups or gathering food for the hungry—side-by-side with non-disadvantaged youth.

When the disadvantaged youth joined their non-disadvantaged peers in these volunteer projects, the blending grows yet more complex. The two sets of youth volunteers enter the programs on different trajectories, heading toward different projected futures. Most of the poor and minority volunteers like those from Community House come to the evening civic engagement projects in a group, with fellow members of their afternoon "prevention programs" for "at-risk youth." An important implicit

goal of these prevention programs is, as the “van for needy youth” story illustrates, to prevent *them* from becoming future problems themselves. The relatively affluent, mostly white youth volunteers, in contrast, come partly for the purpose of plumping up their CV’s for their future college applications, since they know that college admissions committees will want evidence of an applicant’s good citizenship. Volunteers in this category usually come to meetings alone, driving their own cars, rather than as part of a larger group. *Their* volunteer work has different sponsors—including their families, who do not need to be publicly convinced to spend money (on transportation, food, adult planners’ help, for example) to make these young people into good volunteers and good citizens. No one could avoid noticing these inequalities, but talking about them was taboo, resulting in another typical, everyday tension in Empowerment Projects.

Empowerment Projects are supposed to blend different kinds of people and different kinds of organizations—civic association, state agency, non-profit organization, family, and cultural tradition. Since funding is usually short-term, all of this blending has to happen flexibly, rapidly, and transparently, with documentation for multiple sources, each with a separate form. Organizers celebrate all this melting of stiff boundaries, finding it exciting and empowering. But the blending also produces tensions, as it is often hard to juggle this many different types of relationships all in one place, all at once—as the anger in the awards luncheon shows.

MORALLY MAGNETIC MISSIONS, PREDICTABLE PUZZLES

A tangle of hopes gives Empowerment Projects their “family resemblance.”¹

Like any kind of organization, an Empowerment Project has to make big, beautiful, public promises, both to participants and to outside on-lookers. Organizations often do not fulfill their lofty promises, and, as this book will show, when one promise is met, it often conflicts with another of the many promises, yielding unintended consequences.

While these morally magnetic stories do not guide action in any straightforward way, they are not irrelevant, either. They nourish organizers’ powerful passions, without which Empowerment Projects would be dry and empty—and much more expensive, since paid organizers often lovingly work for free on weekends and evenings.² And even when people do not feel inspired, they still have to do *something* to appear to carry out an Empowerment Project’s missions.³

When focusing on promoting *civic engagement*, people are supposed to associate as independent equals, in an organization whose door should

always be open to any newcomers. When hoping for *safe, comfortable intimacy*, people are supposed to be like family, *not* with an always-open door, not so flexible that their relationships should easily end when the grant ends. Emily, for example, knows how fast the hair on her kids' arms grows. When aiming for *flexibility, innovation, inspiration, and multiculturalism*, people are supposed to connect as respectful, curious strangers, open to new adventures, not necessarily comfortably, but "stretching their comfort zones" and "getting out of their boxes"—the farther out, the better.

In principle, organizers approve of all of the many missions, but in everyday practice, fulfilling them sometimes feels wrong—to organizers, youth participants, or both.⁴ Despite their feelings and their moral judgments, organizers still have to keep trying. *All* of the morally magnetic missions become harmful or beneficial, depending on how people manage to blend them with the other missions.

In principle, for example, flexible innovation means "breaking out of boxes" and "promoting diversity," which Snowy Prairie organizers relish. But in the conditions of an Empowerment Program, it also means constant fundraising for short-term funding, which organizers do *not* relish. Fresh projects get seed money, and old, stale projects are continually trimmed away; everyone has to be eager to start a new project all the time, even when their previous project is just getting off the ground. Youth volunteers have to want to combat homelessness for six months; next, they have to feel inspired to combat racism or promote literacy, depending on the next funder's agenda. Intimacy has to materialize fast, too, because programs can end when temporary funding ends.

In principle, Snowy Prairie organizers hope to *help the needy*, but saying it directly makes them uncomfortable. They do not want to speak of their work in those terms in front of the youth; to organizers' ears, "help" and "needy" sound disrespectful. They have to speak in those terms, however; as partly government-funded agencies, they have to demonstrate transparency, clearly documenting that they help the needy.

In principle, organizers also consider *transparency* and *innovation* to be fine ideals, but as we will see, these hopes often materialize as a nagging pile of forms on organizers' desks, for new grants every six months, each demanding slightly different data. Organizers dutifully supply the data and then, with an ironic lilt to their voices, mock their own comical precision: numbers of youth volunteers, numbers of minority youth volunteers (which means categorizing and labeling them, which organizers loathe to do), number of adult volunteers, tons of food delivered to the needy, numbers of recipients served, hours and minutes of service rendered to the community by the programs' volunteers, number of pregnancies and crimes and addictions successfully prevented.

In principle, organizers hope to promote *civic engagement*, but sometimes, as we will soon see, even this magnetic mission can be destructive, in practice, when temporary volunteers try to forge instant intimacy with disadvantaged youth. And when it is destructive, organizers still have to try to fulfill this mission, because funders want quality assurance,⁵ which means, in *these* types of organizations, systematic accounting, to demonstrate that these are *not* stiff, top-down bureaucracies. Empowerment Projects' twisted task, then, is to demonstrate to distant bureaucrats that they are grassroots, intimate, and non-bureaucratic.⁶

This book tells how these morally magnetic missions transfigure when they materialize in the everyday lives of Empowerment Projects.

What Organizations Fit the Category "Empowerment Project"?

Different Empowerment Projects develop different organizational styles, but the family resemblance is clear: An Empowerment Project is an organization that blends most or all of these missions, using a complex mix of government, nonprofit, and private funds to transform whole groups of people's personal feelings and sense of self, to cure them of their social ills by "empowering" them. These projects' goal is to bring people closer to government, to bring people closer to each other, so that the participants can make decisions in a democratic way. The projects aim to make people take responsibility for—or unfairly make them feel responsible for—their own fates.⁷

Included in this newly recognizable, newly prevalent constellation of organizations are "participatory democracy" projects that invite local citizens not just to contribute to local decision-making, but to transform their attachments, their feelings of belonging, responsibility, community, and self.

Included also are many current economic development schemes. In the past ten years, governments, intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank, and non-governmental organizations have been aiming to build democracy and better economies, simultaneously, by bringing citizens closer to each other, and bringing citizens closer to government.⁸ The idea is that changing "the culture" and "empowering" poor people to run small businesses or cooperatives—in Cairo, or Santiago, or rural Malawi, for some examples⁹—will promote economic development. This approach took off when development experts began noticing that an active economy develops in informal places: the people who gather in the local chorus, or the café, also network with one another—the shoemaker finds himself across the table from the shoelace maker and they make a deal, based on feelings of trust.¹⁰ Empowerment Projects draw upon these informal ties as resources for creating a better economy. These

projects' common phrases include: "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime,"¹¹ "asset-based community development," "capacity-building," "participation," and "community."

Without emphasizing the "civic" side as much, some projects bear a family resemblance to Empowerment Projects that is a bit less immediate, but clear, nonetheless. For example, alternative women's prisons with mixed government-nonprofit funding sources encourage prisoners to transform their desires and become "empowered" to eat healthful food, avoid drugs, and get a good education. While the prison project does not aim to cultivate grassroots political participation, it aims to transform intimate feelings of a whole group, and to teach the women to "take responsibility" for social conditions, even those that are beyond their control.¹²

Not included in the galaxy of Empowerment Projects would be social service organizations that receive mixed funding but do not aim to promote personal transformation and empowerment. For example, a pre-school that takes care of clients, but in which "fostering community ties within the organization is not part of [the] focus,"¹³ or a health clinic whose employees harbor no dreams of transforming clients and their communities, would *not* be in this strangely intimate, civic territory that I am calling the Empowerment Project.¹⁴ A purely corporate-sponsored volunteer project, such as Disney's Showyourcharacter.com, or Georgia-Pacific's "Angels in Action" award—of a year's supply of toilet paper for exceptional youth volunteers—would not be an Empowerment Project; funding comes only from one private source, and is mainly a clever form of public relations. Many American school districts require community service as a condition of high school graduation. While they use Empowerment Talk, student participation in them is not optional, and they usually do not have multiple funding sources, so they are not Empowerment Projects.

Organizers often expect Empowerment Projects to work the same way everywhere, regardless of conditions, as if "where there is a will, there is a way," as if keeping your eyes on the prize will get you there. This book shows how keeping your eyes on the prize can work, in certain conditions, but not just *regardless* of conditions. To make it work more often, participants would have to ask themselves why they had not gotten to the elusive prize yet. They would have to comb through their past and present conditions, to locate obstacles to the prize. This rarely happens; participants have usually run off to join another project before any serious questioning has begun. This disregard for past and present conditions is a central theme of this book—a predominant color braided through our rug.

Through reading studies of similar projects around the world, I saw that Empowerment Projects routinely face similar crisscrossed requirements,

but have different routine, everyday, patterns for meeting them. In most, the hope of being able to start with a blank slate is a recurrent theme. When organizers try to empower people, they often assume that if a program worked well in affluent, egalitarian Denmark, for example, they can export it and make it work in Albania. They do not carefully consider how it matters that the two places have very different degrees of class inequality, different degrees of ethnic diversity, different charitable practices based in religion, family, civic association, and/or government, different etiquette, different levels of literacy, different degrees of access to running water, electricity and the Internet.¹⁵ So, our second step is to notice participants' everyday, routine ways of keeping their organizations going, as if no past or current conditions might get in their way.

AN ARCHEOLOGY OF AMERICAN EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

Empowerment Projects missions have strong, long-lived roots in American history.¹⁶ Americans have long treasured “local, close-to-home civic engagement,” “soul-changing inspiration,” and “innovation and multiculturalism” as sources of good citizenship and good personhood.

Organizers' eagerness to link civic engagement with comfortable, intimate domestic life has a long history. When French observer Alexis de Tocqueville visited the youthful America in the 1830s, he was amazed and amused at peppy, optimistic Americans' eagerness to fix local problems without any help from a centralized government. His example is a man who has to decide, with his neighbors, whether a road should be built in front of his own home. While it would be “hard to pull a man out of his own self, to interest him in the fate of the whole state,” it is much easier for him to get involved in a local, close-to-home issue, in which, “he discovers, without even knowing it . . . a tight link between his private interest and the common interest.”¹⁷ In this long-standing American tale, the man's efforts to protect his domestic comfort imperceptibly slide into a broader concern for the whole society. The man's circle of concern expands. It may never have been as effortless as Tocqueville makes it seem, to move from private to public, but the parable is a powerful inspiration for American ideas about volunteering, nonetheless. If we were archeologists, this would be one layer in Empowerment Talk's sedimented riverbed of morally alluring stories.

Snowy Prairie organizers' eagerness to honor deep, spiritual inspiration also has long roots in American culture. In a canonical essay, “Self-Reliance,” Ralph Waldo Emerson¹⁸ says that it is a moral duty to “Insist on yourself; never imitate . . . (for) God is here within.”¹⁹ Organizers wanted youth to “get in communication with the internal ocean,” as

Emerson put the idea. This internal ocean stretches, infinitely blue, past the limiting, constricting horizons of social institutions, to a place where each individual stands whole, free of social conditions, independent. In this image, moral vision cannot come from waiting for some bureaucrat or pious church official²⁰ to tell you about goodness; the only reliable source of morality is the sacred ocean within, the place where rivers of deep personal feelings, intuitions, and passions merge in a communion where “the most personal is the most universal.” In Emerson’s extreme, mystical, solitary, cosmic vision, all ideas and all people are one vast unity. Empowerment Projects somehow have to tame inspiration, to make it useful for mundane, day-to-day organization-building.

Snowy Prairie organizers’ faith in innovation and multicultural experimentation has deep American roots, too. Social reformer Jane Addams reflected on her hands-on volunteer work with immigrants in early twentieth-century Chicago, saying that in a diverse society, it is citizens’ “moral duty” to explore, to throw themselves into close contact with people who are very different from themselves, to seek out situations that she says should, if experienced slowly, delicately, with sensitivity, leave them feeling “perplexed.” Addams’ thinly veiled self-portrait painfully describes how the “daintily clad charity visitor” starts off wanting to help poor immigrants without questioning her own morals, but soon discovers that if she wants to help the poor, she has to challenge her own moral assumptions. If, for example, a poor family has to choose between forcing their children to drop out of school to take paid jobs, versus becoming homeless as a family, Addams realizes that her initial indignation about child labor, based on her own elite upbringing, rings false, because she has misunderstood how their moral decisions make sense in their real-life conditions of poverty. To help them, she realizes that she has to change her own life, by changing the society that they all share. In this example, she has to make child labor unnecessary by becoming a political activist, advocating for minimum-wage laws, so the parents can make enough money without relying on their children’s wages.²¹ What initially seemed like harmless, apolitical volunteer work undermines the charity visitor’s taken-for-granted sense of reality. Addams says it is her moral duty to question the ground while walking on it, and not just to question it, but to *change* the ground—to change laws regulating the economy, in the minimum wages example.

Addams’ life illustrates Snowy Prairie organizers’ ideal model for soul-changing, world-changing volunteerism. Such slow, delicate, tentative groping is indeed possible for a very long-term, paid organizer like Emily, but not for adult volunteers or youth volunteers. And as we will see, fighting to change laws like Addams’ minimum-wage battle is not possible in these organizations, since organizers assume that they have to avoid

political conflict. Addams' vision shines through Empowerment Projects, but like Emerson's stringent vision, hers is tamed: Empowerment Projects speed it up, vacuum any political conflict out of it, and make it accessible to people who may not be ready to change their souls.

It may seem as if Empowerment Projects' treatment of the young is not new, either. Following a strong current in American child-rearing patterns,²² Snowy Prairie organizers do not want to pass down any oppressive, pre-set rules or rituals to youth, refusing, for example, to give curious teens in the Martin Luther King Day planning committee any hints about how the holiday has been celebrated in the past. Organizers want youth participants to take the future into their own hands—"never imitate," as Emerson said, to "make the road by walking it," as activists since the civil rights movement have said,²³ to "learn by doing," as American schoolteachers say. If, they think, young people just started doing things together, working together, they will learn to get along, and will make discoveries that no adult could ever have imagined. Organizers consider this process to be better than imposing any dusty, confining old rules and limits on the young.

Another aspect of Empowerment Projects echoes common, long-standing patterns of child rearing: If the caregiver makes the young person feel more independent than he or she actually is *so far*, the young person may feel strong and proud, and may grow into the feeling, growing to fit the projected image. Making her feel competent and confident by attributing more capability to her than she actually has may be a normal part of good, respectful nurturance. This feeling of "prospectancy" may be the necessary leavening in a hopeful, buoyant personality.²⁴

These fears and hopes are new neither for American social policy, nor for American civic life, nor for American childhood. They are built into the very structure of our government. In other wealthy nations, policy makers and voters assume that the face-to-face process is not enough; that citizens cannot *become* equals in the civic realm if they enter it as extreme unequals in the first place—if some are too poor, too sick, too uneducated, homeless, or disabled to enter on equal footing. Rather than waiting for private charities or nonprofits or volunteers to take up the slack, those other nations developed sturdy—or "expensive and inflexibly centralized and disrespectful," depending on your point of view—social safety nets. Voters in those countries have considered equality worth the price if it means that no one has to enter civic life through the servants' door, as a second-class citizen. Most Snowy Prairie organizers favor welfare, but they *also* hope to lessen inequality directly, themselves, right now, before government policies might change. They hope that people can *become* equals by working together, step by step, regardless of their divergent starting points. They hope that respectfully treating people

“prospectantly,” as if they are independent equals will begin to make them so, and might even set them on the path of upward mobility.

Snowy Prairie’s organizers echo Emerson’s, Tocqueville’s, and Addams’ and others’ long-lived, potent tales of good citizenship,²⁵ along with our deepest intuitions of how to raise creative and competent children. Empowerment Projects’ many missions might then seem like timeless manifestations of American culture: Tocquevillean civic engagement + Emersonian inspiration + Addams’ experimentation and multicultural curiosity + common child raising patterns. But the result is not a simple addition problem.

These old, nearly sacred ideals transform when they materialize in Empowerment Projects. In them, volunteers’ “internal ocean” is explicitly put to use as, for example, a form of pregnancy and drug abuse prevention. Emerson’s vast ultramarine ocean has a rapidly approaching deadline on the rushed Empowerment Project’s short time horizon. Addams’ slow cultivation of moral perplexity transforms, as well: civic participation, inspiration, and appreciation of diverse cultures all have to be rendered transparently visible, for quick and easy assessment by multiple, distant, hurried audiences. The tradition of honoring youthful freshness also transforms, in these short-term projects: it has high financial stakes and has to be constantly publicized.

THE FLIGHT FROM THE BUREAUCRAT’S GHOST

Our local organizers often tell a tale that derides distant experts—specifically, the government planners of the 1950s and ’60s who bulldozed the charming, mixed-use, slightly ramshackle ethnic neighborhood of three-story wooden houses near Community House to build efficient, impersonal high-rise housing projects. Organizers say that those tidy modern projects destroyed local, grassroots, informal comfort, where the friendly old neighbor could sit on a stoop keeping an eye on the kids as they freely roamed, where the corner grocery store, the school, and home blended together, in the exuberant, creative life of the street.²⁶ Distant experts knocked down the homey neighborhoods without noticing what was good about them.

The old twentieth-century bureaucrat’s ghost haunt organizers, motivating them to try to bring government close to the people and bring the people close to each other. With visceral disgust, organizers and funders alike revile anything that smells of inflexible experts, inflexible government, rigid rules, and rigid roles, people who are trapped in the past. Instead, they want open-ended, spontaneous voluntary participation; appreciation of diverse cultures; a bridging of differences between rich and

poor, white and non-white, expert and average non-expert citizens; they want intimacy and exploration. They want organizations that can break down borders and hierarchies, not be trapped by past expectations but be open to limitless, seemingly impossible dreams. They want youth volunteers to open up their imaginations, in organizations that they say are *open and undefined and up to you to decide 'whatever.'*

Organizers' desperate flight from the bureaucrat's ghost does not necessarily yield the rosy outcomes for which they hoped. Making rigid distinctions and relying on experts had predictable opportunities and dangers in the "modern" organizations of the mid-1900s. Trying to do the opposite, and imagining that everything and everyone can effortlessly blend, brings predictable opportunities and dangers to Empowerment Projects.

Now, volunteering has become flexible, temporary, "loose connections."²⁷ Volunteers are supposed to be capable of helping the needy quickly, and without any need for expertise. Diverse participants are supposed to be able to bond quickly and easily, and separate just as easily. The past is no longer supposed to be a rigid model. On the contrary, it is supposed to be completely irrelevant. Instead of making stiff judgments based on narrow rules, organizers have difficulty pronouncing any judgments at all. In this, Empowerment Projects echo trends that resonate throughout society, with its temporary jobs, temporary marriages, temporary government programs. They embody a future-oriented, doubt-filled spirit that filters through many aspects of contemporary life—a point to which we will return in the conclusion.

Empowerment Projects promote ideals that once were uncommon, fresh, radical, and "anti-establishment." Now, these ideals are common, established principles in all sorts of organizations.²⁸ And so, in the course of volunteering, I was struck with the possibility that I was witnessing how big processes were materializing, step by step, in little organizations like Snowy Prairie's youth programs, in themes and variations all over the country and perhaps around the world.

TYPICAL PUZZLES IN EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

Part One portrays puzzles of *cultivating civic, open equality*. Part Two portrays the puzzles of *cultivating intimate comfort and safety*. Section 3 describes the twists and turns in *promoting multicultural experimentation*. Since organizers were supposed to be fulfilling these missions at once, while also helping the needy and being both transparent and flexible, starting at any of these three points ends up looped together with the others, where they all meet. So, my three categories follow organizers'

attention, my gaze following the aspect of the Empowerment Project that they themselves lit up most brightly at the moment.

Within part one, chapter 2, “Participating under Unequal Auspices,” shows what happened when the two different sets of youth volunteers were supposed to meet as equals in the civic engagement projects. Disadvantaged youth often overheard the public speeches about them, documenting their programs’ effectiveness in preventing crime, drug abuse, and pregnancy. So it made sense that they spoke of themselves as outcomes and variables; they understood that they themselves were considered the main problem to solve. Non-disadvantaged youth assumed, in contrast, that they were supposed to solve the problems of distant others. The two sets of volunteers could not talk about this inequality together, but they had to know about it, just in order to make sense of action in the programs.

In chapter 3, “‘The Spirit that Moves Inside You’: Puzzles of Using Volunteering to Cure the Volunteer’s Problems,” we see that when the soul-changing spirit flickers inside you, it can be exciting. It can also be frightening. Since organizers also had to help needy or troubled youth volunteers, volunteering usually had to be easy, not frighteningly soul-changing.

Chapter 4, “Temporal Leapfrog: Puzzles of Timing,” portrays the programs’ possibly mismatched time lines, and shows how participants aligned them by focusing on future potential. Sometimes this temporal leapfrog worked, for example, when organizers patiently kept treating needy, troubled youth participants as if they were self-propelled leaders, even before they really were self-propelled leaders. After a year or so, some of them grew into the “prospective” hope. But sometimes this focus on future potential came at the expense of any focus on the past or present. For example, hungry, homeless recipients of youth volunteers’ aid might not be able to wait until volunteers become inspired and competent enough to find them food and shelter. There were other temporal disconnections as well: organizers needed to apply for grants over the summer—often on specific topics such as tobacco prevention, promotion of the arts, or literacy—before new youth volunteers arrived each September. Another temporal disjuncture was that organizers tried to “build community” by “drawing on community,” “build leadership by drawing on leadership,” treating “the community,” “leadership,” “good choices,” and other potentials “simultaneously as diagnosis and cure.”²⁹ This chapter shows how even with these mismatched time frames, people still managed to coordinate everyday action.

Chapter 5, “Democracy Minus Disagreement, Civic Skills Minus Politics, Blank ‘Reflections,’” opens with some organizers’ passionate dream: to encourage youth volunteers to care about politics and “the big picture.”

Doing so would have required discussion and possibly led to conflict, which most organizers considered depressing and difficult, not inspiring and easy. There was not enough time for reflective discussions, anyway. So, the youth programs all just conducted projects with which no humane person could disagree—gathering mittens and cans of tuna for the poor, but not asking why there is hunger, for example—thus severing any connection between civic volunteering and political engagement, and tending to breed, paradoxically, hopelessness about finding any solutions beyond one mitten at a time.

Part Two follows organizers' activities that aimed to cultivate intimacy, comfort, and safety. Chapter 6, "Harmless and Destructive Volunteers," portrays adult volunteers who came to help in the summer and after-school homework programs. Adult volunteers' presence symbolized, in funders' eyes, that a program enjoyed local grassroots support, so paid organizers could not shut out these volunteers. However, when they came to the after-school programs for one or two hours a week for a few months or a year at most, their short-term, optional, sporadic efforts at creating intimate bonds with youth participants undermined the intimate atmosphere that a devoted paid organizer like Emily managed to create.

Chapter 7, "Paid Organizers Creating Temporally Finite, Intimate, Family-like Attachment," shows how some of the paid organizers became intimate with some of their program's members. Organizers wanted to become family-like with all of their program participants. But they were not expecting to share a lifetime with them, and their intimacy was on display for public judgment. Nevertheless, some full-time, long-term paid organizers managed to become "like family" to their youth program participants. Puzzles of loyalty—another set of temporal puzzles—ensued.

Chapter 8, "Publicly Questioning Need: Food, Safety, and Comfort," focuses on desires that organizers were not supposed to call "needs," but I do: for food, safety and comfort. Part of an organizer's job was to make participants question their feelings, and to treat all desires as "choices." Empowerment Projects invited participants to draw on deep, intimately comfortable feelings, but also to challenge these feelings, never taking anything for granted. The projects put participants' feelings on display, lit up and explicit, in the glare of multiple, crisscrossed lights. In this shadowless light, organizers could, without offending any of the program's multiple audiences, say neither that their participants had any unmet "needs," nor any bad habits and desires, nor could they explain why participants had ever any unmet needs or bad habits or desires in the first place. The programs were supposed to do more than fulfill basic needs, but were supposed to retrain participants' habits, to learn to satisfy their need for food in healthful ways, for example. Organizers found that funders would not pay for food unless the request for funding cast "food"

as something more important than a mere “need,” saying that good nutrition enhanced brain development, prevented obesity, or established a homey feeling in a program. Programs still hardly ever got any food, but did offer many theoretical lessons about food.

Chapter 9, “Drawing on Shared Experience in a Divided Society: Getting People Out of their ‘Clumps,’” shows organizers’ heroic efforts to get the socially diverse youth volunteers to bond quickly, easily, and comfortably. Organizers hoped that sharing their tastes, habits, and desires would help, but the only desires that these diverse and unequal youth ever said they shared were for pizza and blue jeans. Paradoxically, these exercises showed participants just how uncomfortable diverse, unequal people felt when they were thrown together: an important sociological lesson in just how deep social divisions go. It was an important lesson, but not what the programs aimed to teach.

Part Three examines the promotion of *multicultural experimentation and diversity*. Chapter 10, “‘Getting Out of Your Box’ versus ‘Preserving a Culture’: Two Opposed Ways of ‘Appreciating Cultural Diversity,’” shows that, for people who considered themselves minorities, multiculturalism meant safety and protection—protecting a tradition by staying apart from the mainstream. For people who felt “mainstream”—usually white, middle-class—it meant exploring and mixing, not staying apart.

Chapter 11, “Tell Us about Your Culture: What Participants Count as ‘Culture,’” shows how participants used the terms “culture” and “diversity.” People used these terms so constantly, they seemed to mean everything and nothing. While Empowerment Talk summons us to draw on our unique cultures, no cultures fit the bill. All were too hard to understand quickly, or were considered too sexist, racist, hierarchical, inaccessible, constraining, frozen, or ossified. Participants had to cleanse their cultures before allowing them to enter the open, flexible, optional, transparent, egalitarian civic arena. While the term “cultural diversity” never led to exploration of anyone’s religion, history, or language, this chapter shows that this cleansing still had an effect. It made the differences feel transparent, weightless, and easy to doubt.

Chapter 12, “Celebrating . . . Empowerment Projects!” describes the bewildering, over-stimulating form of Empowerment Projects’ public events. In roughly similar words, all flyers for these events invited people to “celebrate our diverse, multicultural community.” The events had no center stage, but loud music from multiple stages, each playing its own music. Organizers would not specify what the celebrations were about, intentionally leaving it “open and undefined.” Nonetheless, anyone who attended a few of them knew exactly what to expect: a jumble of non-profit, activist, and government programs—drug abuse programs, high blood pressure prevention programs, prison rights projects, home heating

projects—making the celebration of “our multicultural community” seem like a public service announcement offering instruction in how to avoid the heartbreaks that disproportionately touch the poor and the ill. “Our diverse, multicultural community” became, in everyday usage, a way of avoiding a conversation about poverty, and simultaneously, of celebrating Empowerment Projects.

Having quietly, patiently, watched and waited for patterns in the rug to appear, throughout these chapters, we can now piece together practical proposals. Based on this now-solid ground that helps us see what we can reasonably hope for or expect from them, the conclusion offers some urgent proposals for Empowerment Projects.