PROFILES OF COMMUNITIES ADDRESSING RACIAL EQUITY

WAGNER, SOUTH DAKOTA: After using “study circles” to address poverty and build prosperity, residents of the rural town of Wagner, S.D., realized that there was something holding them back from making real progress: they needed to address the long history of racial tensions between the white people living in the town and the American Indians living nearby.

Through multiple rounds of dialogues, residents have been taking steps toward understanding one another and ending racism in their community. They can point to many successes including:

- The establishment of a small business incubator. Half of the board members are American Indian, and half are white.
- The redefinition of the Secretary of Indian Affairs to a liaison between the state government and the American Indian community. This position was formerly housed in the same department as tourism.
- A significant increase in graduation rates of American Indians, which is now 30%. Before the program, very few American Indians graduated high school.

NEW YORK CITY: residents are taking a stand against systems that limit access to affordable, healthy food.

As a result of various food policies, a disproportionate number of people of color and low-income residents live in “food deserts,” including many residents of the South Bronx.

In October of 2010, more than 150 people from all five city boroughs participated in a day-long community conversation to decide which actions could make their neighborhoods healthier. Here are some actions participants are working on:

- Educating the public about the Farm Bill.
- Developing incentives for people to make healthy food choices.
- Influencing the Mayor’s office to incorporate food policy into PlaNYC, a long-term sustainability plan that affects the entire city.
LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA: More than 2,000 people have been involved in the “Many Voices – One Community” dialogue-to-change program.

Initiated by the city, with support from community partners, it was designed to address rising racial tensions following the 2006 death of Clarence Beard Jr., a black man who died during a struggle with two white police officers. Their efforts have led to many positive outcomes, including:

- Citizen participation has become an established part of Lynchburg city government, used on issues ranging from policing to budgeting to planning.
- Improved diversity training in the Lynchburg Police Department, the Criminal Justice Academy, and the City of Lynchburg.
- The creation of a non-profit organization, Beacon of Hope, that provides support for all students to have access to resources in order to reduce the achievement gap.

About Everyday Democracy

A national leader in the field of civic participation and community change, Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to create communities that work for everyone.

www.everyday-democracy.org