**Friday, October 28th (10:15 AM-11;15 ET)**

Session 3 – Supporting Mutual Aid

Led by Lee Guekguezian

Notes by Sonia Torres Rodríguez

Attendees: Ashley Edwards (Baltimore), Nikolai Elsner (Atlanta), Kelly Davila (New Haven), Adelia Jenkins (AISP), Logan Shertz (Baltimore), Donovan Harvey (DC)

Discussion:

* Gift economy - if someone in the community needs something, it’s a transactional exchange - excluding the politics of it
* Different types of mutual aid in New Haven - pool money together to rent a spot to take what you need. Food/clothing. More formal mutual aid, organized by a more structured approach.
* Personal connection - Philly has very formal groups that do mutual aid, crowd sourcing funds, organic movements in different neighborhoods, community fridges. Buy nothing, exchange of goods.
* Saw a lot of mutual aid during covid, related to supporting domestic care workers in Baltimore.
* Data walks are conducive to building personal networks that lend themselves to . Shared services.
* Solidarity, not charity.
* Saw a lot during COVID + George Floyd, social media led social aid. In and out of the state, mutual aid was a useful way to keep in touch. A lot of money to organizations that were very small, saw mutual aid taking a bigger role of donating money to the Freedom Fund, which doesn’t know how to distribute funds, but instead donating .
* Data spaces - mutual aid utilizes very little data, but it’s effective. Works on existing connection. Does being data-driven obscure our ability to do work? Is there a role for data in mutual aid, or does it not become radical. Tracking stuff, did not have to have to track how things are being used.
  + Sometimes it adds more work that we don’t have capacity to use. What is the tradeoff of incorporating 501c3.
  + There is power in the unstructured way - of how it is run
  + Data is useful in telling the stories though - balancing
  + There has been a shift in how Gen Z collaborate with institutions, growing more in the mutual aid donation support. Mutual aid goes directly to who is doing the work.
  + When you are processing a service, it just becomes very traditional
  + Qualitative data is the biggest part, how the biggest stories are going out. When you have the backbone, adds structure into an informal organization. Puts bounds in relationships that are formed naturally. There’s a lot of mutual happening in west Baltimore, a lot of people are already being surveyed. Data that somehow backs up the need.
  + Storytelling is inspirational - north side of Chicago is later to the mutual aid level. We were inspired by the south and west side. Improving effectiveness, capacity of institutions. Conveners, connections that we have, related to policy.
  + Having a higher threshold
  + Community Assets piece - bringing into a “community needs” assessment - measures of social connectedness
  + Run a survey bout civic engagement - many ways to do civic engagement. It would be awesome if we had mutual aid deserts.
  + Mutual aid that transcends geographies - all friends in Minneapolis, to venmo x need. Direct aid to specific individuals, institutions
* It seems to matter who is tracking and for what purpose something is tracking?
* Why does mutual aid exist? Or is it building community centered institutions? Or a combination?
  + Systemic failure, to why mutual aid matters. Working because other stuff isn’t working.
  + Always think about visibility, some communities can’t control their visibility - there’s a shadow now. Or fatigue - what is the effect of controlling their visibility. If data is collected, they would have to be involved in the entire process, can’t control what people say.
  + What even would be the advantage of tracking these data? If it’s not being used positively in tracking and
  + Mutual aid builds political power, there is an element of having to coordinate and strategize. Harnessing the connections
  + Responding to systems failure is a good way to think about it - empowering communities to do what they have always done - a way that is more rooted to the human experience
  + Things are different in Venezuela - relationships between neighbors are so different - don’t know a lot of people, the way you relate naturally, is through these networks, capacity to connecting with who is
  + Map - community voice on the existence of community assets - north and south - colors start changing about how
  + Reframe how we see our own cities, other type of data
* Mutual aid is how people have existed- feels very anti American, collectivist, already existed in other cultures - relied on so many other people - socialism in Armenia, having a hard time adjusting to individualistic.
* Mutual aid in a high resourced suburb - hot topic or an insta graphic - term that is very new, describing very old, anti capitalist - community fridges got instagram accounts - people know about them
* It would be interesting to map the intensity of social networks, opportunity to map, not nearly enough community solidarity. Can encourage people to change their behavior. It is very expensive or potentially unethical.
* Worked in community safety - no networks in middle class neighborhoods, it was very difficult to getting in to do something.
* Organizers on staff - they lead these trainings for organizers in community, train organizers in the twin cities. Have the data of these organizers - second program, neighborhoods next. Organizing program, community based research grants, tracking the networks of who is in movement spaces, matching
* Overall, capacity building, within the community - could connect with mutual aid actions. People being connected to mutual aid, way for people to build connections with other organizers.
* Network, supportive social relationships, moving to opportunity, moving to a low resourced area. It’s bad over people over 13, no explanation of negative social support. In affordable housing, high resourced white area.
* We don’t do a lot of work that captures mutual aid, but there are things that show up, through TOPA. Harm reduction efforts, but spawn from the same political tree. Ethnography would capture this.
* Look at what we have, and frame it differently, if we do put a label on what we are tracking, narratives and maps will change. Do see the opportunities, if we can avoid the survey fatigue.
* Higher level of "engagement” are in white communities. Look at this data, we know that it’s wrong.
* The language, white suburbs, there are names to things. The list of possibilities to help. Questions - one specific neighborhoods didn’t have mortality of elders, grocery shopping for their elder neighbors, questions tying it to day to day actions. Where do you leave your keys when you are going on a trip.
* Regardless of how we collect, that will be the floor, we will be undercounting.
* What can we learn from mutual aid in community centered work?
  + By virtue of the work we do, we have skills that we can contribute to our communities. We can answer questions that come up, disseminate expertise. How do we get on this waitlist.
  + Thinking about mutual aid as an asset oriented way. How can we frame these communities in the positive ways that they collected. What is the benefit we can measure in participation in mutual aid networks?