

JANUARY 2021

# SPARKING CHANGE IN 2021

LOOKING AHEAD  
WITH LESSONS-LEARNED

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## 01

## LOOKING BACK & AHEAD

We've been through a lot in 2020. *And* we've learned a lot. At S.P.A.R.K. Equity in Action, while we're celebrating all that we managed to do during a tough year, we also decided to take this opportunity to look forward. We want to take all of our lessons-learned from this past year and use them to inform our plan to make a bigger impact in 2021. As part of closing out one year and welcoming another, we're galvanizing our commitment to taking steps that align our intentions and impact. We're starting a new year remembering that inclusion starts with "I," and community forms from "we." This is an invitation to join us in growing a brighter 2021.

In preparing for a new year, our team kept coming back to the metaphor of working in a community garden. We continued to ask ourselves *What could we do to bring people together and foster habits that help us work toward a common goal?* During the past year, in the midst of these unprecedented times, the team at S.P.A.R.K. has been doing a lot of work in what could be described as our own individual gardens; we've also been helping clients with *their* gardens through the DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) workshops, consulting, and strategy work core to our mission. These are important steps in doing "The Work."

At all levels of our systems, it is important to address inequities and racial injustice. Moments of critical self-reflection and introspection are also crucial steps in DEI work. Without this internal work, it's challenging to ignite courageous conversations about inclusive leadership, change management, conflict resolution, and anti-racism in our communities.



## 02

Further exploring the metaphor of the garden, we reflected on the fact that there are seasons for tending to and tilling the soil, planting seeds, and nourishing the land. Then there are seasons for massive growth, flowering, and harvesting. There are years when S.P.A.R.K. has put out weekly content (videos, posts, and blogs) and then there are years when we've worked on long-term projects (apps, consulting, manuscripts) behind the scenes. 2020 turned out to be the latter kind of year. Lots of big-picture, foundational seeds were planted, leaving less space for engagement on social media. We did a LOT ([here's a snapshot](#)), but we weren't always able to share our focus. Our days were, as always, filled with listening and learning. We learned to accept that it's okay to prioritize inward-work. The introverts on the team enjoyed a focus on projects.

Amidst the challenges of 2020 (and there were a lot of them), we maintained our commitment to being responsive and present with the people in our circle and community. That meant that we opted out of engaging in or adding to the noise of performative activism. For us that also meant choosing *not* to operate in a reactive manner during a year full of triggers.

At the close of a relentless year, which seemed to crystalize the experiences we've shared over this past decade, we felt a renewed desire to both spark and sustain an even bigger impact within our community. We also wanted to grow our community. We realized, as a team, that our inward focus was shifting as we approached 2021. We wanted to take our lessons-learned and engage, build, and collaborate with a growing community of individuals sparking change. As we left one year behind and embraced the potential of a new year, we wanted to honor the work we've been doing in our gardens while at the same time set out to re-focus on the season of working within a community garden that will bring us together.



## 03

## I-WORK TO WE-WORK

In training to become a teacher, one of the first lessons tackled is the “I do, we do, you do” gradual release model. We all have different learning needs. As we take in new information, there is a degree of disequilibrium caused by learning. One of the reasons a year like 2020 was so stressful was that we were in an almost constant mode of having to process new information, integrate different definitions and perspectives, and learn. It was a lot to take in when we were isolated from each other and on our own in a number of ways. At S.P.A.R.K., the challenges we faced reminded us of yet another set of topics crucial to learning: facing adaptive challenges and technical problems ([here’s a quick overview of a model if you’re curious](#)).

As DEI consultants and strategists, we’ve partnered with dozens of clients and codified lessons-learned; as part of that, we keep coming back to the importance of the “I do, we do, you do” model. When we’re developing leadership habits for equity and inclusion, first we learn from a subject matter expert; then there’s some learning we have to do *together* that helps us practice information and develop new habits; and then, ultimately, the learning and lessons are internalized for independent practice and implementation. These three stages are crucial for learning to take root. However, in our rush to learn, we often skip the crucial “we” phase of learning and practicing together. So, we expect to be able to jump from taking in information from a subject matter expert to applying lessons seamlessly without any practice in-between.

The individual phase of work is important. It’s challenging for anyone to focus on a community if there is a lot of work and learning needed on an individual level. Within the “we” phase of work, we build our resilience through mutual practice, as well as grow connections that strengthen communities. We nurture the roots that support growth.



## 04

## WORKING FOR "WE"

*We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.*

*—Grace Lee Boggs*

During one of our recent team meetings, we discussed how it felt like a lot of us were tending to our individual gardens during 2020. Due to circumstances, we were focused on the I-work as an act of self-preservation; moving forward, we want to re-focus on community impact through more We-work. DEI work—and the effort required to sustain it over time—is somewhat like transforming an individual's garden into a community garden. Within a community, a shared garden provides a common purpose that holds space for individuals of all backgrounds, talents, and strengths to come together with specific intentions. It provides space for practice. A garden also involves variables that influence both short-term and long-term growth: soil, weather, water. All of these factors are interconnected, and encourage people to practice and work together for a shared outcome.

## 05

Like DEI work, a lot of things happen in community gardens that cause disequilibrium: We make mistakes, things get messy, we have disagreements, and curve-balls come our way. Even a novice gardener will tell you that a sudden storm, a drought, an insect infestation, or a plant-based disease is never ideal, but things are bound to happen. It's better to assume such events will happen at some point, because it allows us to plan ahead and respond rather than react or give up. What matters is that, in the midst of challenging circumstances, we're showing up, committing to the cause, practicing patience, and learning how to work together over time to sustain change for the collective. In other words, *just like DEI work*, community gardens involve complexity and require change-management capacity. We wish we could control variables and have the foresight to know which spots get the best balance of sunlight and shade; however, we only learn by doing.

At the end of the day, we just gotta pick up the shovel and start the work—balancing the I-work with the We-work. What matters with both community gardening and DEI work is that we do it with integrity. We commit to the practice and follow-through. It's hard work—physically, mentally, and emotionally. But, if we are committed to a shared purpose, then we're committed to learning from each other and tending the garden. In the same way that a community garden will grow wild if unattended, DEI work is sustained by individuals and teams coming together strategically and consistently in service of our priorities, goals, and needs. There's I-work, We-work, and You-work. If all three types of work aren't present, it's not a garden that serves a community's needs. If all three types of work aren't present, DEI conditions are not present.

This year, more than ever before, people asked for us for help—for resources, tools, skills, ways to make a difference, and more. People want to grow at an individual level *and* become part of a community dedicated to anti-racism, equity, and inclusion. In 2021, we'll continue to respond to those requests and inquiries. To do so, we'll create resources that help people learn as individuals and as groups, so that we can grow our impact across communities.

## JOIN THE COMMUNITY

As we start 2021, we're asking people to join us in our quest to spark change at multiple levels: within ourselves, among each other, and across our communities. We're committing to publishing more resources, understanding that people need help for the messy, challenging work that we all have to tackle, and that we all need help to practice, sustain, and galvanize our growth. At S.P.A.R.K., our 2021 focus is on equipping folks with the resources that will help individuals build capacity *within* organizations, groups, and communities, as well as catalyze equitable and inclusive community conditions for the collective.

“This work is head and heart work. It involves co-creation, with individuals and groups. It is within the dynamic interconnection that the seeds of change are planted and nurtured.

—Rachel V. Rosen”

We're developing tools that will help folks learn, practice, implement, and sustain the work as individuals, groups, and communities. With that spirit and with a lot of fiery excitement, we're sharing what it's going to look like for us to pick up the shovel and get to work expanding our impact, sparking change, and igniting equitable and inclusive conditions in our sphere of influence.





# OUR 2021 GOALS

## THE S.P.A.R.K. COMMUNITY ROADMAP

*Facilitating community growth and increasing impact by providing:*

- **RESOURCES THAT...**

- Help people start the I-work as well as learn through the We-work and You-work
- Develop critical self-reflection skills
- Normalize that this is both head and heart work
- Establish the crucial *why* for the work
- Provide information that informs and grounds, but helps move toward action instead of just theory
- Reinforce that learning and change occur in stages, and the work never ends

- **LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT...**

- Catalyze change through DEI committees and teams
- Bring communities together through different formats for learning
- Ignite leadership growth in masterclasses
- Hold space for unpacking and untangling complex topics together as part of a community for growth and support

08

## OUR GOALS TO YOURS

3 QUESTIONS DRIVING OUR WORK IN 2021 ARE:

“

*How can 2021 be more impactful for you, for us, for humanity?*

*How do we co-create equitable conditions that have sustained impact?*

*How do we deepen our commitment to DEI work and spark change in a bigger, more intentional way—as individuals and as a collective?*

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**WE'VE SHARED THE S.P.A.R.K. GOALS FOR 2021.  
NOW, WHAT ARE YOURS?  
AND HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU?**

## 09

We'd love to hear from you. Our growing community is important to us. Please share your thoughts with us so that we can learn more about you and learn *from* you. We're committed to the I-work, We-work, and the You-work. If you have questions, observations, or reflections you'd like to share, [shoot us an email](#) or connect with us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), or [LinkedIn](#).

