

LEADerTrends Welcomes Angela Glover Blackwell

LEADerTrends, a public event series that provides access to advanced thinking about today's leadership issues, presented Angela Glover Blackwell, PolicyLink Founder & CEO, at a March 2nd breakfast event at The Prado in Balboa Park.

Over 100 LEAD and other community members attended a dynamic and thought-provoking presentation on the topic of "Leadership for a New Era" as we embrace San Diego's changing, multi-ethnic demographics. Sempra Energy and Wells Fargo sponsored the LEADerTrends event, with support from Qualcomm and Gable Cook Schmid Public Relations. It was developed in partnership with the San Diego County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; the Asian Business Association, San Diego; and the Catfish Club.



Angela Glover Blackwell

A renowned community-building activist and advocate, **Angela Glover Blackwell** developed the Rockefeller's Foundation Building Democracy division, which focused on race and policy, and created the Foundation's Next Generation Leadership program. A lawyer by training, she gained national recognition as founder of the Oakland (CA) Urban Strategies Council, where she pioneered new approaches to neighborhood revitalization. In 1999, she founded PolicyLink and currently serves as its CEO. She is the co-author of *Searching for the Uncommon Common Ground: New Dimensions on Race in America*, published in 2002. For more information, visit www.policylink.org.

The issue of the day? What can we do to develop leaders who can address San Diego and America's new reality, and use their expertise and experience to benefit low-income and multi-ethnic communities across the nation? During her excellent 45-minute presentation, Blackwell spoke about the lack of representation of leaders of color in local and national public policy development. Since these policies profoundly affect every American, everyone deserves representation in the policymaking process.

Blackwell quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., who said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Her message was that we have to stretch and spiral upward to find the "uncommon common ground," and go beyond the lowest common denominator. She feels a new generation of leaders is needed who can do this and make a lasting difference; these leaders must also get into the policy arena.

According to Blackwell, we need to create a pipeline to continually feed new people into the leadership system and provide training in policy. She said it is important to make a deep, extraordinary investment in individuals who show great potential, such as the emerging leaders from our high schools, our neighborhoods, etc.

Blackwell said that whenever she goes into communities of color fraught with problems, she finds many leaders at the neighborhood and community-based organizational level. These people are committed because they have “skin in the game.” To put it another way, “the people who need are the people who lead!”

Blackwell asserted, however, that it is hard to be effective at policy if you do not have an organization behind you. Therefore, we need to build individual leaders and help them and their organizations to become more effective at policy-making and advocacy. According to her, all of the following are necessary ingredients for building success:

- Individual skills
- Organizational infrastructure
- Community connectedness (constituencies)

In answering her first question, Blackwell said it was okay for organizations not to be multi-cultural in all situations. For example, while the NAACP remains focused on African-American issues, from their particular viewpoint it can and does speak out on diverse issues of concern to all people.

Another question voiced concern about the lack of good connections between different local groups. Drawing upon her years of experience working with community groups, Blackwell said it’s a common problem: every group feels they are unique because people are not working together! She recommended that we find important issues that can pull our groups together, as opposed to creating artificial collaborations. When people are committed to not just identifying and working on problems, but to solving them and their underlying issues, they naturally find partners and results happen.

Blackwell also addressed the “politics of fear” commonly seen today, such as in the current hot button issue of immigration. She feels that many Americans have narrow minds and perspectives, often making policy based on fear and stereotypes. Instead, as community advocates, we need to do our research, speak the truth, and tell the important stories that illustrate the reality of each issue.

As her thoughtful program drew to a close, Blackwell recommended a report entitled “Leadership for Policy Change,” which can be downloaded from the PolicyLink website, at <http://www.policylink.org/Research/Leadership/>. This 43-page report explains why there are so few leaders of color making local and national public policy, why their presence is important, and what must be done to increase their numbers.