



Many communities are diverse; few are integrated. Diversity may find people of different races and ethnicities living near each other, but integration finds them living with each other—interacting, forming friendships, participating fully in the community’s economic, political, civic and cultural life.

The **South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race** is a nationally recognized non-profit organization committed to building a thriving racially integrated suburban community. The Coalition created successful strategies that have resulted in stably integrated residential neighborhoods throughout these two towns – an achievement that has drawn the attention and respect of individuals and municipalities throughout the state and across the country.

In 1997, South Orange and Maplewood determined to move beyond diversity and take intentional steps towards integration. At that time, property values were stagnating and there was a growing perception of decline in the quality of local public schools. The Coalition was founded by a diverse group of citizens who realized that underlying these critical community concerns was the issue of race.

The members of the newly formed Coalition agreed that they would not shy away from difficult or uncomfortable conversations. Rather, they created a safe place for candid discussions to promote understanding, dispel misconceptions, and surface the very issues that perpetuated segregative patterns and impeded the community’s strength and stability.

And they did more than talk. They took concrete action to revitalize and re-envision their beloved community. They developed an array of pro-integrative strategies, including a marketing campaign promoting the towns’ vibrant, cosmopolitan suburban environment, initiatives aimed at addressing racial academic achievement gap in the schools, and arts programs as a catalyst for building authentic relationships among people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

For the past sixteen years, the Coalition has developed pro-integrative strategies that have had real, visible benefits for all people and that have engaged residents, state and local governments, realtors, and faith-based organizations to achieve broader, regional objectives.

The results of this work are exciting:

- Racially integrated housing patterns in South Orange and Maplewood spread to almost every census tract.
- Home prices in these two towns rose at a higher percent age rate between 1999-2009 than virtually all of the surrounding predominantly white communities and have rebounded since the economic downturn at a faster pace as well..
- Residents embraced a commitment to integration as a distinguishing community value.
- The two towns established a reputation as a vibrant, forward-thinking community – where small town security meets big city sophistication. A great place to live and raise a family.

In addition to working to maintain stable integration, the next phase of the Coalition’s work will focus on creating pathways to full participation and shared leadership in civic life as well as expanding opportunities to build authentic relationships across racial barriers.