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PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR GRANTMAKERS



# FUNDING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

## SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CIVIC PARTICIPATION

In partnership with
THE LINCHPIN CAMPAIGN
A PROJECT OF THE CENTER *for* COMMUNITY CHANGE


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# funding community organizing

## social change through civic participation

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## SPECIAL FEATURES



## IN THIS GUIDE,

grantmakers talk about how and why community organizing works to build community, increase democratic participation, and solve problems. Experienced funders offer a grounding in organizing's basics, describe how the field is changing, and explain how they support relationships (and manage tensions) with grantees.

*This guide was written by Craig McGarvey and Anne Mackinnon. GrantCraft wishes to thank Marjorie Fine, executive director of The Linchpin Campaign, which seeks to expand the field of community organizing by building relationships with new and veteran grantmakers committed to building a better civil society. She offered invaluable help and guidance in conceptualizing this guide. It is part of the GrantCraft series.*

*Underwriting for this guide was provided by the Ford Foundation.*

*Publications and videos in this series are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions; rather, they are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion, and suggest possibilities. Comments about this guide or other GrantCraft materials may be sent to Jan Jaffe, project leader, at j.jaffe@grantcraft.org.*

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# Foundations and Community Organizing

**Many foundations are deeply committed to promoting a vibrant democracy: some see broad democratic participation as an end in itself, while others see it as a way to get better solutions to complex problems. Our nation and society are built on democratic participation, said a grantmaker who funds organizing nationally, "yet we don't do a very good job of teaching how the ordinary resident can participate fully in democracy." Community organizing fills that gap by bringing people into the problem-solving process, including those who are least likely to raise their voices: members of historically marginalized groups, newcomers to the society, or people who don't believe their participation will make a difference.**

Organizing can be a vehicle for encouraging people to get involved in civic life, and for deepening their engagement over time. Here's how a program officer at a community foundation put it: "Sometimes what people want on their corner are really small things like a stop sign or speed bumps near their kids' school. Being able to identify those things and then going through the process and having a victory: there's nothing like it for getting people enthusiastic about democracy." Changes like that "may seem small in the eyes of a foundation," said a consultant, "but they build up, drawing in more people as they see friends and neighbors become political leaders and see a difference in their community."

Organizing can also be part of a wider effort to advance policy change. In recent years, organizing in states

## WHERE THE EXAMPLES COME FROM

This guide was developed by GrantCraft in collaboration with The Linchpin Campaign, a project of the Center for Community Change. It draws on dozens of interviews with grantmakers working in many fields and all kinds of foundations, leaders of community organizing groups throughout the United States, and other consultants and advisers. We also learned a lot from people who generously offered comments — extensive, in some cases — on drafts of the guide. We are grateful, as well, to a small group of experienced funders who participated in an in-depth meeting in New York on the challenges of funding organizing. A list of people who contributed to the guide's development appears on page 33.

such as Massachusetts and Texas has contributed to significant expansions in access to health care. Living wage organizing campaigns, supported by foundations and other funders, helped to produce increases in the minimum wage in 26 states between 2004 and 2007, which in turn built momentum for the first increase in the federal minimum wage in ten years. To cite an example from the 1970s, organizing was an important factor in the passage of the federal Community Reinvestment Act, which barred the discriminatory housing practice known as "redlining" and mandated that banks make investments in their home communities. In each case, national and local foundations provided funds that made the work possible.

Through recent decades, community organizing has matured, grown, and diversified. Partnerships and networks involving labor unions and community groups have spread, leading to the growth of organizing coalitions in large metropolitan areas, states, even the nation. Leadership by women and people of color has grown dramatically. Organizing among youth has caught fire in the last decade, with dozens of groups working on education, law enforcement, and environmental issues. Immigrant organizing has also increased.

Moreover, the field of community organizing has become more proactive about designing the changes that would make a healthy community — things like excellent schools, accessible health care facilities, or better immigration policy — and advocating to get them enacted. According to one foundation executive, community organizing groups have grown "less tied to opposing change at all costs or to 'fighting back' against something; instead groups are more likely to acknowledge that change is inevitable but demand a say in whom the change will benefit."

Foundations, too, are changing their stance toward organizing. Many grantmakers have added organizing to the strategies they support to effect social or policy change, and some participate in funder collaboratives to leverage national and local support for community organizing in education, immigrant rights, environmental justice, and other areas. As an experienced grantmaker explained, "You can fund experts, or you can fund grassroots folks working to build their own objectives — or you can fund both, in partnership, because both play a role in getting change that communities really own." Organizing coalitions, he argued, have also brought new opportunities for leverage: "By supporting a few strong groups around the country," he said, "you can help build better policies that other groups can take up."

The overall lesson is that community organizing has more power than ever before; it's no longer a marginalized effort. Community organizing groups have enough reach, experience, and credibility that foundations need to consider them critical players when thinking through how to achieve program goals in many areas. Funders, for their part, "are a lot more sophisticated about funding organizing," a grantmaker added. "The country's ready for community organizing, and foundations are ready to take it on."

### FUNDING ADVOCACY: IT'S LEGAL, BUT KNOW THE LAW

**Private foundations are allowed to support many types of advocacy, but they are not allowed to fund activities that are closely and directly tied to electing a candidate or passing a law. Here's the distinction: "Funding an organizing group to educate members of the public on wage issues is okay," advised an executive at a private foundation, "but funding specific activities to obtain passage of a minimum wage increase is not okay." For community foundations, however, the rules are somewhat broader. For more on supporting advocacy, see GrantCraft's *Advocacy Funding: The Philanthropy of Changing Minds*.**

# What Community Organizing Can Accomplish, and How It Works

**SEVEN BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

- High level of public engagement
- Cohesion on important issues
- Leadership with an authentic following
- Pragmatic solutions from the community
- Public support for effective leaders
- Greater accountability by public officials
- Attention to how policies are implemented

Many grantmakers see community organizing as a valuable, even essential, part of the work they support. In many instances, it's the *only* approach capable of delivering the community-level benefits funders and grantees have in mind.

To accomplish its aims, community organizing groups use well-defined, deliberate ways of working that are well-aligned with the objectives they seek. Many grantmakers who support community organizing find that the combination of aims and methods – what community organizing seeks to accomplish, and *how* it accomplishes it – are also well aligned with their foundations' grantmaking priorities and programmatic theory of change.

### THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

When grantmakers fund community organizing, it's usually because they believe that the work will strengthen certain factors that underlie fundamental community change:

- **A high level of public engagement — often by people from marginalized groups.** Organizing, said one foundation leader, creates "a public democratic discourse around the most pressing issues of the day." It brings people to decision-making tables, "adequately preparing them," according to a program officer, "to make informed decisions." One grantmaker noted the sense of confidence that can grow from taking part in public action: community organizing "can build a sense of dignity, restore people's sense of significance, relevance. During site visits, community members often tell us, 'What I do can matter.'"
- **Cohesion on issues of importance.** "Essentially," said one grantmaker, "community organizing builds a set of relationships. And in that sense it is reweaving the fabric of a community as the people are engaged in the process of rebuilding community institutions." From another: "Having been an organizer for some time I think the core piece in organizing is the development of trusting, authentic relationships" — a process that involves a lot of careful listening to learn what people really care about. More and more, organizing groups are learning to build alliances across lines of race, ethnicity, class, and age group, recognizing the greater strength those alliances can bring to communities. Funders have provided support for alliances between groups working with African Americans and immigrants, youth and elderly, and low-income inner city residents and middle class people in a broader metropolitan area.
- **Leadership with an authentic following.** Organizing groups make it a priority to develop community leaders from among their members. They are devoted to learning through training, learning through action in the community, and follow-up reflection. "It really makes well-rounded persons who enter into public life in their communities, and are respected and trusted spokespersons accountable to their communities," said a program officer who funds organizing nationally. Members develop skills that help them hold their own in lots of situations, such as "sitting across the table from the mayor, negotiating on policy, managing leadership of an organization in a democratic fashion, being

a spokesperson with the media, motivating members and communities to be more involved in decisions that affect their lives." Another grantmaker noted that a particular skill gained through organizing "is the ability to 'think on the fly,' to reanalyze strategy when faced with changes, to stay a step ahead."

- **Pragmatic solutions that come from the community.** "Organizing comes up with innovation that wouldn't occur from outside of the community that's involved," said a foundation president. A program officer told of a group she funded that organized low-income African American and immigrant women following the passage of federal welfare reform legislation. The mayoral administration "had put in place a very punitive system" that made access to benefits as difficult as possible. The workfare program had people sitting "around somebody's office so they could send you out for coffee or make you do some photocopying four or five hours a day in order to get your welfare check. People were trying to push for real jobs and real job training instead of this makeshift stuff." When workers were placed in public parks to clean up, the group organized protest actions and collected surveys demonstrating "that the public actually thought that they should be paid like regular park workers instead of working off their welfare grants at less than the poverty rate." Members were very good at using the press to demonstrate broad public support, "and so they got 900 or 1,000 jobs that were paid at $9 an hour, like the park workers." Even so, the administration remained very hostile toward the group. Later, when a new mayor was elected, members were invited in to "talk about how to improve the employment training programs. They got a seat at the table, the community was represented, and they could put forth their ideas."

- **Greater accountability on the part of public officials.** A former program officer at a private, regional philanthropy spoke of a general support grant to a local organizing group. "They were pursuing several issues, but improving education was one of the most important to their members. At the time, the mayor and the school superintendent were publicly at odds with each other, not speaking. The organizing group held a large rally, with hundreds of people, inviting both officials. One of the 'asks' was that the mayor and superintendent begin having regularly scheduled meetings. Both officials agreed, the meetings were held, and the public tension was diminished."

- **Attention to how policies are implemented.** It's often about the way systems work, more than it is about an actual policy," explained a health funder who supports organizing. "There's been a lot of effective organizing work about the hours community clinics are open, or how they do intake, or how they publicize their services." An education grantmaker talked about a state policy, enacted because of a court decision, requiring parent liaisons in each school: "The parent liaisons were created to involve parents in their children's education. It was litigation that made it happen.The requirement was being honored in technical

"Organizing comes up with innovation that wouldn't occur from outside of the community that's involved."

terms. That is, parents were being used as attendance monitors, hall monitors, lunchroom monitors, but they weren't really doing the work of parent engagement. Also, many schools serve large numbers of immigrant families whose first language is not English. Ensuring that parents had access to translators and materials provided in their home language was a key issue."

Being clear about the value of results like these can help make the case for community organizing inside one's foundation. As a program officer at a community foundation attested, "When we first started funding in this area, the greatest help in moving our board toward a better understanding of how to view outcomes more realistically and to value organizing for what it *could* do, rather than what

## How Are Organizing Groups Organized?

### By structure

- **Institution-based organizations** are federations of local institutions such as churches, labor unions, and civic associations. When solely comprised of religious institutions, they're known as **congregation- or faith-based organizations**. By design, these organizations are multi-issue, multi-constituency, and interfaith in character and generally devote a great deal of attention to developing members and leaders. Most are affiliated with national networks such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gamaliel Foundation, PICO National Network, and Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART).
- **Individual membership organizations** are comprised of individuals or families who generally contribute dues and time, or make some other commitment to signal their affiliation. In some instances the membership may be defined by a specific constituency, such as women, youth, immigrants, or racial or ethnic identification; in other cases, the membership is multi-constituency and defined by geographical parameters, such as a neighborhood, city, county, or state.
- **Issue-based coalitions** are alliances of existing organizations – unions, churches, advocacy groups, civic or neighborhood associations, and human service agencies – to pursue a common policy agenda. They generally focus on a single issue (such as housing, health care, or education), can be temporary in nature, and tend to be less concerned with the development of individual members and leaders than institution-based organizations.

### By geography

- **Neighborhood organizations** typically focus on issues of local scope and impact, such as schools, housing, zoning, commercial development, or public services.
- **Citywide organizations** are designed to unite neighborhoods, constituencies, or social groups on issues of common concern. They may be unitary organizations or federations of neighborhood and constituency-based groups. **Metropolitan or regional organizations** are similar, but consciously designed to bridge inner-city and suburban communities.
- **Statewide organizations** are typically comprised of local or regional chapters that operate autonomously on local issues but work together on statewide legislative and policy campaigns.
- **National formations** in community organizing range from relatively centralized organizations with local chapters (such as ACORN) to organizing networks (such as National People's Action) whose affiliates are structurally independent but share a common worldview, methodology, training system, and/or policy agenda.

board members believed it *should* do, came when an evaluator for a large national foundation spoke to our board on several occasions. He was able to help them see that results short of actually 'ending poverty' or 'reducing teen pregnancy' were valuable and well worth funding. These results might be growth in leadership ability or research skills that helped residents determine solutions to neighborhood problems." Those results might be "short of" the foundation's big-picture goals, but they represent tangible steps toward reaching them.

### THE METHODS OF ORGANIZING

The results possible through community organizing are not easy to produce. Achieving them takes time, consistent attention, and a mapped-out theory of how small changes — often made one person at a time — can add up to bigger community impact. To stay on track, community organizers have defined a set of core practices that are commonly used by organizing groups:

- **Issue development by the people most affected.** As one former program officer described, "It is the problems of importance to people that bring them out of their living rooms and into the meeting rooms of broader civic life: making those improvements is the motivating factor." Organizing, that is, starts with listening. It's built around a "fundamental ethic," in the words of a foundation executive, that "the people who are directly experiencing and living these issues, facing these challenges, have enormous potential to come up with a course of action, solutions that best speak to those challenges." Many organizing groups are therefore multi-issue in nature, periodically selecting a manageable number of campaigns for change or working serially on different problems. But several contributors pointed out that some groups have organized successfully around single issues: race, gender, or sexual orientation equity; school reform; economic, environmental, or criminal justice; worker or immigrant rights; or affordable housing.
- **Democratic governance.** Intended to encourage collective action and community building, democratic governance also means that community organizing groups operate differently from many nonprofits. As noted above, community organizing groups select issues according to what their members say is important. Also, as the leader of a national philanthropic coalition pointed out, "organizing groups are run and controlled by people in the community. Their boards are filled with people who are well known in the community, but maybe not outside. Funders need to realize that just because the board doesn't include big-name people, it doesn't mean it's not a good board."
- **Constant attention to building membership, or "base building."** Organizing groups depend upon the "power of numbers" to balance the power of the status quo and money-eyed interests in trying to accomplish change. Members will come and go, but good organizing, in the words of a funder, always "rejuvenates and revitalizes" its membership, drawing larger numbers of

"Just because the board doesn't include big-name people doesn't mean it's not a good board."

them into public life and rooting itself in the community.

- **Leadership grown from the membership.** Training, community action, and reflection on that action are all aspects of the intentional learning that helps members become leaders. "The development of people who can act as leaders is a primary function of organizing," said a grantmaker, "whether it's a neighborhood or a city or county or whatever the constituency that's being put together, so that they will have the ability to move forward and take action."

- **Attention to relationships.** Recruitment of new members begins with a leader or organizer sitting down, often in "one-on-one" meetings, getting to know people and their concerns. Organizers and leaders bring members together to get to know one another. "People from diverse backgrounds come into relationships with each other," said a foundation executive, "through the issues, concerns, and values that they have in common, developing a shared agenda."

- **Analysis of community problems and power.** Through ongoing research and exercises like resource and power mapping (see pages 28–29), organizing groups often dig deeply into problems and analyze in detail what it would take to solve them. A campaign to improve neighborhood schools, for example, might involve studying the schools' reading scores, finding out what reading curriculum is used, figuring out who has authority to choose curriculum, and meeting with that person — the principal, the district superintendent, or both — to discuss alternatives.

- **Willingness to confront authority.** In the words of a program officer at a community foundation, "the democratic process involves more than just voting. It's not just electing representatives and sending them off to City Hall or to the State House or to Washington, D.C., to then legislate from on high. It requires people taking responsibility for their own community." The democracy of public decision making, said another foundation leader, can be a rough and tumble effort. Sometimes you have to "remind authorities that you're there and you're part of the political process, and that they ignore people at potential political costs." The reminders might raise some dust. But attracting attention is a tactic to get to the decision-making table, not an end in itself.

**ON POWER, TENSION, AND ANGER**

Reflections on community organizing by a foundation executive director

**"Martin Luther King said, 'Justice is the intersection of love and power,' and I'd like to think that good community organizing is what makes that intersection. So you can go after justice in a lot of different ways, but good organizing has a power side. One face of it is power and the other face is love . . . . I think really good organizing believes fundamentally in redemption of all parties . . . believes that the liberation of those in distress is inextricably linked to the liberation of those that are viewed as the oppressor. And so it's not just beat up on the opposition, but it's imagine as part of your work how will they be redeemed as well?**

**"When we're working toward real change in the quality of our schools or the health care system, those are contentious issues. Organizing is not creating tension for the sake of tension, but using a cleansing process and a clarifying process that comes out of sitting in heat. That's how you create steel. So you have to create that heat, and that's one of the real arts of good community organizing, it creates public tension in a healthy way.**

**"One of our grantees did some really great, really creative work around working conditions in their neighborhood. They went door-to-door with their own membership base, and working conditions along the main commercial strip surfaced as a real issue. And then they went door-to-door among their membership to ask people if they would pledge not to patronize stores that mistreated their workers. And they had a set of standards for what good treatment is in our neighborhood. And then they went and engaged storeowners, tried to get them to sign a pledge to treat their workers at a certain level. They used additional strategies: the power of a threatened boycott, legal action, workplace organizing, all to complement the community organizing. And ultimately they managed to get a number of employers to change their practices around pay, and vacations, and other issues on that street.**

**"I think anger is often a manifestation of grief. Organizing is about trying to harness that grief, and the anger that comes with it, as the fuel for change. When it's not done well, it's really just about letting people vent rage . . . but that's not organizing."**

# The Organizer's Lingo: A Quick Glossary

**Yes, organizers have their jargon, too. Grantmakers can expect to hear at least some of these terms from community organizers as they describe their plans and tactics.**

**Accountability:** Internally, the term applies to things an organization might count, like "turnout" at meetings, member dues, or "one-on-ones" (see below), because they correlate with power to win on issues. Externally, it refers to things like follow-through by a public official on promises made to the community.

**Base building:** Membership building for the organization.

**Cutting an issue:** The process by which the organization and its members decide whether an issue is important to them, how to approach it, and their strategy for carrying out and winning a campaign.

**Direct action:** Rallies, picketing, and large-audience events, with people in authority invited as guests from whom "asks" or "demands" are made. The purpose is to increase momentum, visibility, power, and "wins" (major accomplishments) for the organization. Good organizing groups use controversial tactics only when quiet diplomacy has failed to get them into relationships with authorities. If a relationship has developed, the public meeting may sometimes be "scripted" in advance. Sometimes a public meeting is used to demonstrate "people power" and at the same time build a relationship with an official.

**Leaders:** Key people who emerge from an organization's membership; distinct from paid organizers and staff. Leaders usually get recognized by showing that others will follow them — for example, by demonstrating that they can turn out 10 people for a meeting or event. Once identified, they may get training in techniques, such as data analysis or public speaking, that build effectiveness and confidence.

**Network:** A large association of affiliated organizations. Some networks raise dues from member organizations, such as groups based in religious congregations, schools, or neighborhoods. Others have been formed by intermediary organizations around a common interest or identity, such as human rights or immigrant rights. Networks often hold training workshops for members and leaders, where they share information, strategies, and campaign progress.

**One-on-one meeting:** An intentional conversation, usually between an organizer and a prospective member of the organization, in which a relationship is begun and the organizer listens for and brings to the surface issues of importance to the prospective member. Some organizations begin with house meetings of potential members.

**Organizer:** The job of an organizer is to build a group of people to address a common problem. Paid or unpaid, an organizer serves as a convenor, listener, motivator, and coach. Organizers pull people together, urge them to question their ideas, and support them as they produce and carry out a plan of action.

**Power mapping:** A process for creating a "map" showing who has authority in a particular area and must be converted in order to make an improvement, along with strategies on how to get to them. It also shows where the organizing group stands and where its influence and alliances can promote change.

**Turnout:** The number of members and other constituents the organization "turns out" to rallies or other direct action events.

# Getting Acquainted and Other Early Steps

Grantmakers who support community organizing often find themselves in the role of translator, helping people communicate across the cultural divide that separates organizing from philanthropy. Being effective in that role is especially important toward the beginning of a grantmaking relationship, as people are getting to know one another and expectations are being clarified. Our contributors offered helpful advice for a range of early-stage activities. In general, they said, keep an eye out for context, put people at ease by helping them navigate unfamiliar situations, and take the lead in finding common ground.

### ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

Grantseekers and grantees from organizing groups are often very deliberate about establishing relationships with program officers, sharing information about their own backgrounds and encouraging funders to do the same. "I remember my first visit at the office by a lead organizer," said a funder from a regional foundation. "I learned more about him than I had about any other prospective grantee, and I'm certain I shared more about myself. Later, I realized I had been in a 'one-on-one meeting' — the kind organizers use to recruit community members, establish relationships, and build leaders."

Leadership development is central to organizing, and grantmakers should expect to see it. From a former program officer: "When the executive director came in to introduce me to his organization, he brought three members: a nineteen-year-old Latina, a late twenties American Indian, and an African American grandmother, probably in her seventies. Each person took a portion of the meeting, and, although the executive director had plenty of opportunities to do so, he never interrupted to clarify or fill in holes. I was impressed."

Members of organizing groups are also schooled in the politics of power. Said one grantmaker, "power analysis is the heart and soul of what organizers think about," and so, for them, "the funder-grantee power differential is at the heart of the relationship." Another funder elaborated: "The whole issue of how the foundation uses its power, how the foundation relates to other organizations, is explicitly on the table" with community organizing grantees.

### MAKING AN INITIAL SITE VISIT

Good site visits are often prepared for carefully by organizing groups to engage their members and leaders. "They're going to tell you a lot of stories," said a consultant and former grantmaker. "They don't talk in bullet points; it's an oral culture. For foundation folks who are used to doing bullets and being super analytical and getting to the point, it can be a cultural jump." Learning to hear through the stories enabled her to "pull out the bullet points": what the win was, what allies they were making, how many people were turned out, what this did for positioning them in the future. Which is not to say that organizing groups won't be adept at speaking what one grantmaker called "funder language": "Organizers and leaders are trained to talk to people in power, and that's who you are as the representative of a foundation."

Learning to navigate organizing culture can help a funder use the site visit for

good due diligence. The best visits are owned by the organized members. "I think there were about fifteen people in the room talking away," related a funder, "and I said, 'Would you have any questions for us?' A woman raised her hand and she said, 'Yes. What are you doing for leadership development within your foundation?' And it was like, okay, you know, that kind of direct peer-to-peer conversation is very refreshing in this work." A foundation executive spoke of a visit to a youth organizing group in which "the young people really challenged me with questions like, Where does your money come from and how come you don't give away more of it? What other groups are you funding and who sits on your board?" The lesson? It was their site visit as much as hers.

Look for good rapport within the organization — among the executive director, organizers, leaders, and members. If members are completely missing, or if the exchanges seem to be too scripted, or, one grantmaker said, "if the organizers are kicking people under the table," these should

## The Grantmaker's Role

GrantCraft and The Linchpin Campaign called together a group of experienced funders to compare notes on the challenges involved in funding community organizing. They began by choosing a dozen roles from our *Roles@work* card deck that struck them as particularly relevant:

- **Advocate** Make the case for supporting a grantee or a line of work
- **Bridge builder** Make it possible for strange or unlikely partners to work together
- **Connector** Link grantees to one another or to others to maximize outcomes
- **Critical friend** Give honest critique without smashing hopes or undermining confidence
- **Facilitator** Lead or coordinate the work of a group to get ideas on the table or to get things moving
- **Fundraiser** Help grantees raise money from other foundations and donors
- **Idea mover** Take a leap with new ideas or people in a field or community or inside the foundation
- **Sounding board** Listen actively for ideas, opinions, and points of view
- **Strategist** Create and sell a long-term plan of action to achieve a particular grantmaking goal
- **Translator** Help internal leadership understand what's happening in a field or community and vice versa
- **Validator** Affirm good work by grantees and others in the field
- **Voice amplifier** Find and support people at the margins of a field or community

See www.grantcraft.org for the full *Roles@work* card deck and ideas for using it to open up good conversations with colleagues, trustees, and others.

raise questions about the authenticity of the organizing group and the viability of the grant. Good organizers should be trying to "disappear" or "put themselves out of business," another grantmaker noted. Too much charisma or conducting can be a red flag.

One funder went so far as to say it takes two or three site visits to assess the organizing group. "You want to have meetings with the organizers and the leadership. But you also want to watch a training or watch them in action and see how strong the leadership development is and what the turnouts are." You can also find out many of these things, said a consultant, by talking with other funders.

### ASSESSING CAPACITY AND CONTEXT

Experienced funders look at a wide range of characteristics as they size up an organization's capacity to work effectively in its community — and keep on learning, growing, and contributing to the field.

"Don't look at an organization in isolation," said one national funder. "Listen to how they talk about other groups and assess their level of collaboration." Speak with colleagues about the terrain and the relative strength of groups. Turf issues are not unknown in organizing, and foundations can unintentionally reinforce unhealthy tensions. Look for signs that the group is steadily increasing membership, she urged, and taking on greater challenges.

"Organizing needs to be appropriate to the context of place and culture and time and era," said another grantmaker. "And that appropriateness should be, of course, informed most by the people directly affected, who are most directly involved in the organizing. I believe there's no one way, not now and not in the future." Organizing in black communities in the South should look different from organizing in immigrant communities in the Northwest.

An intentional approach to leadership development is also crucial. Several contributors mentioned the importance of top staff leadership being racially and ethnically representative of the community. Organizing has an historical reputation for having white male leadership, and there's still some truth to that image, especially in national networks. But funders noted that the situation is changing as organizing grows new branches and new generations of organizers join the work.

Just as the boards of organizing groups may look different from those of other nonprofit grantees, budgets also look a bit different because they are so heavily weighted toward the salaries of organizers and other staff. This is not necessarily a sign of weakness, nor is a relative lack of technological capacity. Organizational development grants may help build fundraising or other infrastructure capacity, and some funders have worked with groups to develop new expertise on their board, especially in finance or other important skills. Some funders provide grants to help organizing groups upgrade their communications capacity and become more technologically savvy.

### NEGOTIATING THE GRANT

One of the greatest tensions in making grants to organizing groups, particularly for funders new to organizing, is that issues pursued must be important to

"Organizing in black communities in the South should look different from organizing in immigrant communities in the Northwest."

"The program officer is a bridge builder between the community and the board room, and nowhere is this possibly more true than in the funding of organizing."

and selected by the membership. As a grantmaker explained, "You can't say, 'Oh, by the way, I'd like to pay you to adopt our agenda,' because, one, they won't, and two, it's just not what a sincere community organizing approach represents. It wouldn't realize the goals of community empowerment, leadership, and cohesion." At the same time, a program officer needs to be clear about what sorts of activities the foundation is willing and able to support: a narrow focus on a specific legislative or electoral goal may entail activities that can't be funded by a private foundation, while a broader approach to policy change is usually fine.

When a foundation's interests overlap with the interests of an organizing group, a project grant may be a good introduction, a step toward a deeper relationship involving general support and capacity-building grants. When negotiating a grant on an issue that's a priority for the foundation but new to an organizing group, both sides need to be transparent about their interests, clear about what they're willing and able to do, and upfront about any doubts or hesitations they may have. Such work takes time.

In any case, the issue of power will likely appear. "Organizing groups are so used to dealing with power," said a grantmaker, "that they are simply more comfortable calling funders on it, or wanting to make sure that it is on the table from the very beginning because they know you can't get too far until you talk about it." Tensions can arise. "At this particular juncture in my career," reported a funder, "I know without a doubt that relationships are extremely important, but being credible and upfront is even more important. The tension always seems to come when a grantee and I stop hearing one another and when our view is solely trained on the short-term — just getting the grant — as opposed to the potential long-term partnership."

### BUILDING BRIDGES TO YOUR BOARD

"The program officer," said a former funder, "is a bridge builder between the community and the board room, and nowhere is this possibly more true than in the funding of organizing. People on the board will usually have completely different resumes than those in the community, completely different life experiences." That is, the difference in cultures may be even greater than that for the program officer. Contributors spoke of using careful yet accurate language to describe organizing inside their foundations: "civic participation," "building civic infrastructure," "civic engagement," "collective community problem solving," "community-driven solutions," "participatory policy making."

Several of those interviewed spoke of a closely related, more subtle issue — the "invisible" issue, in the words of one grantmaker. The differences in life experience between board members and residents of marginalized, low-income communities can sometimes hinder members of boards, oftentimes unconsciously, from believing fully that community members have anything to add to the improvement of social problems. The approach to this issue, mentioned more than once, was to get the board into the field for site visits. "Only after a prolonged site visit that demonstrated the importance of

'organized power' preceding program development" did board members at a major national foundation really begin to understand organizing.

One foundation narrowed the gap by creating an advisory committee that guided its early funding in the field. Committee members were drawn from the board and from local community groups. The trustees who served on the committee included "a bank executive whose bank had been the target of an anti-redlining campaign and a power company executive whose utility had been the target of an anti-cold weather heat shut-off campaign led by the very organizing group that the foundation was beginning to work with. . . . As the trustees saw how useful the organizing group was in helping residents get involved in shaping the future of their own communities, they went from bitter opponents of the organizing group to enthusiastic funders."

A funder who has advised many newcomers to the field encourages grantmakers to "start with an issue or age group that the board is interested in." Since they understand the complexity of change in that area — whether it's increasing health coverage for children or improving the conditions of young people's lives — they're more likely to be receptive to "the case for policy over services." If you organize a site visit for board members, he continued, ask the grantee organization to focus on that group or issue.

It's also important, grantmakers said, to translate the culture of the foundation in the other direction — to the community organizing group — so they have a better understanding of what's going on. The inherent tension, said one, is that "to remain professional, you can never open the window of transparency all the way." To manage this tension, here's a strategy used by one funder when counseling an organizer about a repeat proposal. "I drew a chart of the foundation that started with me and went up. This person is A — same level with me but with more authority. Her issue when reading your proposal will be B. Above me is C, an important gatekeeper to the president. His concern will be D. At the board level, one can always be surprised. But if we get there, the concerns will likely be E."

**PREPARING FOR CONTROVERSY**

Experienced grantmakers emphasized that the goal of good organizing is relationship building, negotiation, and compromise with those in power. But, as a foundation executive and her staff reported, "direct actions" like press conferences, protests, pickets, boycotts, marches, and rallies can also be part of the strategy: "We've had situations where grantees organized direct action that targeted a corporation where one of our trustees served on the corporate board." Once an organization protested against a sanitation commissioner who was a neighbor of the foundation's executive director.

So foundations with an interest in organizing must have an appetite for public action. Avoid the temptation to hide the tactics organizing groups may pursue, grantmakers said, and prepare the foundation's board and executive leadership in advance. "I've been careful to be clear that part of what these groups do as they try to build power is

occasionally take these public actions," said a program officer. "That's part of how they demonstrate their resolve and power to their membership and to whomever they're trying to influence. But I've always made clear that they only do that when quiet, relational meetings have failed. It's not done lightly, if the organizing group is any good. And it's just one tool of many tools."

A grantmaker at a national foundation described how she explains a grantee's confrontational tactics inside her foundation: "I've found that if it's a question of democracy and fairness — all those American values — your board and your management want to come along." For her, it's a matter of referencing their own values and aspirations, what they think the country stands for. "If you remind them of those things," she concluded, "then they want to be brave and stand up. This is their chance to do that. That's why they donate their time to philanthropy and this kind of work."

## LEARNING FROM SITE VISITS

A site visit is often the best and more reliable way to learn about organizing and how a particular organizing group operates. Grantmakers use site visits to get to know a group initially, help board members and colleagues understand the work firsthand, and keep in touch with progress over time.

As a starting point, consider accompanying an experienced funder into the field for a site visit, meeting, or action with an organizing group. You might even want to do this with more than one funder. Here's a short list of questions to keep in mind as you go. Ask your companion for help with understanding the context.

- ✔ Are members in lead roles, rather than staff organizers? Does the group seem dependent on the charisma of the staff organizer?
- ✔ Do the membership and leadership represent the larger constituency in gender, race, ethnicity, etc.?
- ✔ Are there regular methods for bringing in new members? Is the organization growing, renewing?
- ✔ How do members describe leadership development in the organization? Are they continually being asked to take on greater leadership?
- ✔ Do the group's strategies fit their goals?
- ✔ If the group has taken controversial public actions, can members explain the specific goals? How do they describe past "wins"? Is reflection on past action a regular activity of the group?
- ✔ Is the membership moving toward larger, systemic issues? Are they learning?

If your own interest is piqued, consider taking colleagues and board members into the field to experience organizing for themselves.

For help with finding a colleague to talk to or accompany on a site visit, check with *Interfaith Funders* (www.interfaithfunders.org), *Grassroots Grantmakers* (www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org), *Grantmakers for Education* (www.edfunders.org), *Neighborhood Funders Group* (www.nfg.org), *SmartLink* (www.smartlink.org), or your regional association of grantmakers.

Over time, site visits can also help deepen a relationship between a funder and a community organizing grantee. A grantmaker at a community foundation described the value of rigorous periodic site visits to a major local organizing grantee: "The group does an extraordinary job of gathering neighborhood leaders to describe the work, tell how they've grown as leaders, and explain what they've accomplished for their communities. The group spends a lot of time evaluating its own work and are able to elaborate on how many leaders have been trained, how many different campaigns its leaders are involved in, and the results of these campaigns, including interim results that might influence power holders or make them aware of issues, even if a final goal has not been accomplished. Board members have come away with a strong appreciation for the value of the work."

# Entry Points: Four Funders Make Their

### CASE 1: ADDING ORGANIZING TO THE TACTICAL TOOLKIT

"We've been fairly project-based in the way we crafted our funding," said a long-time program officer at a statewide health foundation in the West. "We took a broad view of health," embracing "policy, advocacy and other kinds of systems change, and were fine with multi-year grants, but we made few basic capacity-building grants." The foundation supported organizing groups, but the groups tended to bring them project proposals, "such as how to navigate families toward health care providers that offer language services."

"With projects," she continued, "the grant would end, and the grantee would have to make a decision to either seek additional funders, try to get the same funder to renew, or change projects. . . . We realized that if we wanted to sustain a partnership with community organizing organizations, it would be more helpful to them and, frankly, more helpful to our agenda if we were to think of a different approach."

That insight enabled the foundation to ask, "What are the priorities of our grantees, and how might they match the priorities of the foundation?" One clear matching priority was universal children's health coverage, an issue that resonated for the foundation and had surfaced in organizers' one-on-one meetings across the state. What followed was a five-year partnership in pursuit of children's coverage. The foundation funds the organizing network for "polling, communications, policy research, as well as community organizing." The foundation also pays the costs of "a 'kitchen cabinet,' or steering group, to help guide policy development," which includes representatives of both advocacy and organizing groups. The organizers have "a lot to say about what will work and what won't work."

What have been some of the challenges? Well, there's the "two steps forward and one step back, or sometimes the one step forward and two steps back nature of policy," said the funder. But when working with organizing groups, "some of the intermediate outcomes really are about community cohesiveness, leadership, and a sense of being stronger together to work on problems. When you acknowledge those as being part of change, then you're less dependent on meeting a particular timeline."

### CASE 2: PARTICIPATING IN A FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE

When colleagues from two East Coast foundations, one family, one private, learned of a new national collaborative fund that would invest in education organizing, they saw an opportunity. After working collaboratively on a proposal with other local funders and education organizing groups, their region was selected for one of the grants.

As the director of the family foundation recalled, her board had never funded "anything without the very clear goals and outcomes you get in other kinds of funding situations. Saying you're going to get parents more interested in the schools is great, but exactly how are you going to do that and who are you going to rely on? It's a very complicated process." Conversations were sometimes "difficult. Board members would say, 'What are we really doing here? Can you really do anything in a relatively short period of time?'"

A prominent member of the board had a family background in labor organizing, which was very helpful. Even so, said the executive director, "I don't think we would've done this had it not been a collaborative venture with seven other funders, both local and national. I think I was able to sell this because it has a lot of sophisticated thinking behind it, complete with a major evaluation component."

The eight grantmakers were able to help one another in conversations with their boards. A question came from one board member: "Are you telling me this is a better use of money than training a teacher or equipping a library?" The answer came from a colleague at another foundation: "The parents are going to advocate for more money for those libraries, and they'll get it."

What have been some of the early concerns? Worries about the pace of change and priorities have surfaced. For example, the school system in one city needed to hire a new superintendent, and the funders wanted the organizers to get involved. "How can we encourage the community organizing groups to take this up as an issue without violating their process? That's an interesting challenge for grantmakers," one funder explained. In the end, the organizers decided to tackle the superintendent search as well as school construction issues.

# First Organizing Grants

### CASE 3: SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

Hoping to expand their reach, a small coalition of organizing groups and foundations decided to invite additional funders from their mid-size city to join their ranks. Several grantmakers expressed interest, and the group soon grew to include family foundations, community foundations, private foundations, a donor-advised fund, a health conversion foundation, and the city office of economic development. Some were already funding organizing, some had been dabbling, and some had no experience. As a program officer explained, the group adopted a simple ground rule: membership was open to anyone who was interested, but "'by the end of the year, everybody's got to make an investment, or they've got to leave.' You've got a year to learn, to sit together, to figure this out, to see what you can do."

The organizing groups proposed a resource mapping exercise, which would enable them to pull together information on issues such as immigration, economic development, and education. A grantmaker at a large and historically rather cautious foundation saw an opportunity. The board of directors had only recently adopted advocacy grantmaking to advance its goals, and she felt they weren't quite ready to support community organizing. Recognizing that the initiative involved "resource mapping," she saw an opening to recommend a discretionary grant of $20,000 toward a total budget of $55,000. Hearing her plan, a grantmaker at another foundation said, "You know, that's a really good idea. I could use this as an opportunity to educate my foundation."

The resource mapping project was funded, and a local "atlas" was produced. It was "a pretty incredible piece of work," according to the grantmaker, including maps that showed immigrant enclaves, regional sprawl, low-income neighborhoods, underperforming schools, and tax subsidies to local businesses. Taken together, the information demonstrated that poor and minority areas were being short-changed in a number of ways. The organizing groups used the information to help residents see the patterns and begin to work together. The city's response included a new approach to negotiating community benefit agreements with developers.

The program officer who had worried about her foundation's willingness to support organizing brought the atlas to a board retreat and "made an argument for why organizing should become part of our larger advocacy agenda. The board unanimously adopted it."

### CASE 4: BUILDING A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

An operating foundation in the Midwest was accustomed to working in a "respectful and responsive" way to improve conditions for families in its city's low-income neighborhoods. Still, "it became pretty clear to us over the years that we weren't quite hitting the mark," the executive director recalled. Things changed in the late 1990s, when the foundation agreed to be a local intermediary for a national foundation's community-building initiative. The national program officer wanted to emphasize community organizing, and, said the local grantmaker, "that exposed us to some folks and organizations that, quite frankly, we had not been exposed to."

The foundation did a scan of community organizing groups in the city. "We literally invited every organizing group we could find to talk to us about whether or not some sort of partnership might be in order. It was pretty interesting how many groups weren't interested in doing that. They said, 'We don't work with anybody; we work by ourselves.'" The grantmaker was experiencing a dynamic she believes has been caused in part by competition for philanthropic support among "grossly under-funded" groups.

But the initiative required partnerships, including partnerships with large nonprofits and city agencies. The breakthrough came when one faith-based group — "a stellar organization," with an "innovative, out-of-the-box director" — became interested in striking up a conversation. "But they were clear that they didn't want money for money's sake," said the program officer. "What they wanted was to have people who believed in what they were doing."

The grantmaker entered a "crash course in the culture of organizing," attending a week-long training and other events. And, she said, "while we were getting immersed in their stuff, they were getting immersed in ours. How do foundations work? What is this thing called an initiative? How does that initiative intersect or not intersect with organizing strategies and models? Are there places where we can come together — or agree that we can't come together?"

As the foundation began to change its behavior, so did the organizing group. They started organizing in schools around educational issues. They began to do youth organizing, learning that the one-on-one meetings that are a staple of organizing adults didn't work so well with young people, who worked better in groups. "But what really happened," according to the program officer, "is that we ended up in this partnership where all of the decisions were being made together, including grantmaking decisions."

# Managing Grants and Relationships Over Time

Many elements of the ongoing relationship are set in motion early, when the funder is considering an organizing group as a prospective grantee. How close will the relationship be? What will be the grant objectives? How mature must the organizing group be to accomplish the objectives? Should this be a project grant or general operating support?

Conditions will undoubtedly change, and strategy, if the group is good, will follow. Differences of opinion in the community, and between the grantee and the funder can arise. To manage the relationship as the work unfolds, grantmakers handle challenges that call for patience, flexibility, humility, and the occasional dose of diplomacy.

### UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIZATION

The maturity of an organizing group comes into play because of the way organizing tends to operate: first take on smaller issues, get some practical wins, build optimism and momentum, seek a deeper understanding of the broader social and economic problems facing families, then move on to larger issues.

A grantmaker described the steps that gradually increased one organizing group's influence and power, first at city levels, then in the state. When the group "first started organizing, they found issues that were what they called 'winnable.' They took on issues like better streets, traffic lights, stop signs, or more coverage by the police for a certain area — issues that could be taken in small chunks and that could be won within a month or two."

As they won those campaigns, building morale, membership, and leadership, they talked with members and found that "a major problem was a lack of good jobs and wages. So then they began to take on the issue of raising the minimum wage, first in a major city of the state, then in the state itself. They were eventually able to raise the minimum wage. It was kind of a step-by-step process of always building the confidence and the strength not only of the organization, but of the individual leaders, who developed the public skills to enter into larger and larger public arenas."

The development process can also bring changes in priorities. Speaking of two organizations in Los Angeles, a funder at a national foundation noted that one "started working on police accountability, and now they're doing career path projects to green jobs and have established political power in the city." The other began by "closing down nuisance liquor stores and now is a major force in foster care."

A foundation executive who called earlier wins "stepping stones" urged grantmakers "to understand that those victories, which are not at the level of change we're seeking ultimately, are important and count for something."

On the other hand, funders with a specific neighborhood or issue focus may worry that organizations will abandon their issues for larger-scale policy work. That's unlikely to be a problem, since "most community organizing groups continuously renew their commitment to the smaller issues in order to keep regenerating their base of leadership and to keep in close touch with the felt issues of their membership," one grantmaker explained. Often, a "mature" group will take on

an issue at local, state or regional, and even national levels simultaneously.

### BUILDING CAPACITY

"Organizational development is the biggest need" in community organizing, argued a grantmaker at a national foundation, "and a challenge philanthropy ought to do more to take up. There's a field-building side to this." But figuring out how best to provide support can take time — especially if the groups themselves aren't certain what kind of help they need. Moreover, the bottom-up structure of many community organizing groups can complicate issues of management and control.

"We created a separate set-aside fund for technical assistance," explained a member of a local funders' collaborative for community organizing. "We all put funds in the pool and agreed to write a check when a request was made. This seemed to fit the philosophy that the groups themselves would know best what they needed, and we should get out of the way. But the funds languished, or when a request was made it was for something short-term and of benefit only to one group, like a new computer."

"As our relationship with the organizers became stronger," he continued, "we realized that several of them were really struggling with the nuts and bolts of organizational growth, as well as with how to advance the overall field of organizing in our region. We gradually were able to talk frankly about what each group needed and what the collaborative needed. The funds are now thought of in a different way, with more attention to field building and organizational development, with lots of input from funders. One foundation, in collaboration with its grantees, provides a small grants pool for networking, travel, conferences, training at institutes nationwide. The same philanthropy (and at least one national intermediary group) also provides support for summer internships at organizations to introduce young people to organizing.

### HANDLING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Sometimes organizing groups take on issues that may seem trivial or even counterproductive to a funder. An organizer described one sticky situation: "Parents were successful in getting additional security guards at two schools. More security guards may be a good short-term answer, but it may be the wrong answer in the long term. That's what the parents wanted, so they got them. Is that going to make the school safer? Probably, but it might also increase the alienation the students feel from the school. So that's a tough one. I think you have to consider some of these demands in the longer term context."

Strategy differences can also divide grantees. One foundation executive described a grantee that located "a vacant lot on which to build a new school building. They've been working on this for years. But it turns out the lot is on a brownfield, and we get another proposal from a group that wants to organize against building the school because they don't believe the Department of Education is really going to clean it up. So what do you do? Do you choose sides in a battle like that?" Funders will take many views. But it's important, said this grantmaker, "not to

### ON SALARIES AND FIELD BUILDING

**Community organizing delivers a lot for the money. But are organizers' low salaries and long hours limiting the growth of a promising field? Here's what one funder had to say:**

**"There's a danger here, in that community organizing is often a low-paid job, certainly lower than salaries for people doing other forms of advocacy or service provision. As funders, we need to ask ourselves, Is this okay? Do we want to perpetuate the inequity of heaping on organizations the very conditions they are fighting to correct in their communities: low pay, few benefits, long hours, less time for family? I would like to see us do more to take responsibility for building this important field and not just take advantage of it."**

insert ourselves in the differences" of democratic dispute.

### COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

Our contributors felt that funders must be able to rely on grantees to keep them informed of their work, especially when there's a problem or if something dramatic is planned. One funder who supports a collaborative of immigrant organizing groups asked to be informed in advance about press conferences so they could discuss whether the groups should identify themselves as grantees of the foundation or simply organizations working together.

Another program officer emphasized the responsibility of an organizing grantee to keep the foundation aware of activities that could put the foundation in the public eye, so there are no surprises. "We don't want to stop them from doing anything, but we do need to make sure that they're giving the foundation a heads-up if there's anything that could potentially cause conflict within the foundation because of their actions. If they're going to release a report that's going to name names, we need to make sure that we've seen the report so we can vouch for its accuracy." The expectation here is no different from what funders normally ask of any grantee or project. "We're all used to the idea that if we make a grant for a documentary, we want to know what's coming before it hits the airwaves," one grantmaker pointed out. "That doesn't mean we can change it, but we want to know."

### DEALING WITH SETBACKS

Many of the most serious setbacks a grantmaker can face are not particular to community organizing grantees. How do you support an organization through the turbulence of a leadership transition? How do you judge impact when a change in the policy environment wipes out an important victory? How do you respond to evidence of organizational mismanagement? These are difficult challenges, but they're the generic problems of philanthropy and nonprofit organizations. In the words of one experienced funder, "Community organizing grantees are basically more similar to nonprofit organizations already in your docket than they are peculiar."

Yet it's also true that tense situations can arise when a funder shares power with an organizing grantee. Expect them, said grantmakers; try to drop your defenses and deal with them as openly and transparently as possible.

# When an organization is under attack

A scandal or allegation of mismanagement can bring public criticism — sometimes justified, sometimes not — to any organization. When trouble comes to a community organizing group, though, the attacks can be especially hostile. "Let's face it," said one grantmaker, "a lot of these groups have made enemies over the years." The funder's job, she argued, is to be a constructive influence in a tense situation. Here are a few rules of thumb, offered by seasoned grantmakers:

- **Make sure grantees know that you strongly prefer to hear bad news from them first.** (This requires a basis of trust, grantmakers said, that needs to be established from the start.) If you do hear a report or accusation that has enough credibility to cause you concern, take it directly to the organization. Give them the opportunity to dispel or confirm what you've heard. Don't spread rumors.
- **Consider not taking action.** Organizing groups sometimes have opponents who seek to undercut them by amplifying (and even distorting) negative reports or comments. Think about ignoring them altogether. Where there's smoke, there's not always fire.
- **If the concerns prove legitimate, urge the organization to take action on the issues quickly and forthrightly.** "Being swift, transparent, and direct in responding helps blunt criticism. Make sure the grantee knows this," a communications expert advised. A slack, secretive, or inadequate first response often hurts more than the original allegation.
- **If action is needed to rectify a problem in the organization, ask the grantee to specify clearly what they intend to do.** Request regular updates on progress. Work only with the grantee's board and staff leadership. Communicate in writing.
- **Encourage the grantee to engage its full governing body in addressing the problem.** Consistency is essential in the face of controversy. Ask if the organization has communications resources (such as board members from the PR or communications field) that can be harnessed. Suggest that they assign a spokesperson to handle media queries professionally and expeditiously.
- **Bear in mind that the grantee is the organization, not a person or a faction of the board or staff.** Stay out of internal fights and messy controversies between individuals. Encourage the organization to keep the integrity of its own internal governance process foremost.
- **Consider your own communications, as well.** Core funders will inevitably be cited in media reports and may be called for information or comment. Have a clear, simple, forthright statement ready. And remember that your first loyalty is to your own organization. Your obligation is to ensure that funds granted are used appropriately.

# Tandem Tactics: Strategies that Complement Organizing

An old adage in community organizing is called the *iron rule*: "Never do for people what they can do for themselves." Our contributors articulated the rule in several ways. "By putting regular people squarely in the middle of the action about how to effect positive social change, it says you're an actor who can make a difference, not a victim, not someone just acted upon," said one. Or, as another explained, "The essential difference is that organizing treats its constituents as engaged subjects of actions, not objects of actions."

This fundamental belief in constituents as agents distinguishes organizing from other tactics with which grantmakers may be more familiar. Many of those tactics are complementary to organizing; they may be carried out by a collaborating organization or even by the same group. Yet distinctions among them can be important for defining the work, figuring out what organizing can accomplish, and identifying objectives that need to be approached through other activities.

Here are some non-organizing tactics that funders often support in partnership with organizing:

**Service delivery.** Some successful organizing groups offer services such as legal assistance, housing aid, citizenship and English as a second language classes, or job placement. "Many immigrant groups provide service delivery as well as organizing," said a funder, and there are some organizing efforts that use legal or other services to draw people in the door before introducing them to organizing ethics and activity. The basic distinction is that the recipients of those services are "clients"; in community organizing, members are not clients.

**Policy advocacy.** There are many excellent foundation-funded advocacy groups that develop and press for policy change. "But they tend to pick their issues based on expert perspective and what experts think is the right thing to do," said a consultant to foundations. By contrast, community organizing engages members and leaders in "framing and selecting the issue," developing policy recommendations, and advocating for themselves. Working "bottom up" from their community experience, organizing groups may partner, sometimes very powerfully, with advocacy organizations. But members and leaders will be found in the middle of virtually every aspect of the activity, from analysis through legal promotion of change. Staff does not speak for them; they speak for themselves.

**Research.** Foundations fund research from institutions or academics that may lead to important new insights into social conditions and the need for change. Although organizing groups may use the products of such researchers, sometimes forming partnerships with them, their members and leaders have decided on the issues and are educating themselves to strengthen arguments and strategies. Research is used for action; indeed, in some cases organized communities use "participatory action research" (PAR) themselves, with assistance from researchers, participating in research techniques that can lead to the positive action they seek. (For more on PAR, see GrantCraft's *Participatory Action Research: Involving All the Players in Evaluation and Change*.)

**Short-term mobilization.** Bringing large numbers of people out in mobilization to demonstrate the power of their numbers is definitely a tactic used by organizing groups. "But if all they learn to do is to carry the placard or chant the chant," said a funder, "they really have learned only one small part of the democratic process." "There's a lot of mobilization work that goes on," said another grantmaker, "that doesn't take into account the longer range: the real purpose of community organizing is organization building and leadership development."

**Public education.** Many foundations interested in moving ideas in the public domain have funded public education campaigns and related efforts that target community members. But unless the campaign itself rises from the grassroots of a community, it's not organizing. Public education that qualifies as organizing also engages community members and leaders, builds the capacity of the community, and carries momentum that can be leveraged for other organizing activities.

# Evaluating the Effectiveness of Organizing Grants

The objectives of community organizing run from human development through community strengthening, positive community outcomes, policy and practice wins, and strengthening democracy. To grantmakers, it seems obvious that evaluation should be targeted to the original grant objectives. Yet, as one former program officer noted, "some organizers don't give enough attention to the reflection side of the cycle. Some have even told me that they know they can fall prey to being 'action junkies.'"

But things are changing. "Not all community organizers collect data," said a grantmaker, "but, in fairness, the good ones do. Some community organizers are very good about measuring themselves and seeing how they're doing," reflecting on the meaning of the information they collect, and differentiating between data and real knowledge.

"We've moved away from the inclusion of 'hard' outcomes in our grant agreements with organizing groups," said another grantmaker. He and his colleagues have decided over time that there's "as much to gain from growth in leadership abilities, self-confidence, and civic participation as from seemingly hard outcomes like changes in the crime rate, school test scores, or access to health care. In fact, some of those may turn out to be very temporary or caused by factors well outside the control of the organizing work."

### MEASURING OUTCOMES

Our contributors advised give-and-take discussion to involve grantees in shaping expected grant outcomes. "We try very hard to put evaluation back in the hands of our grantees," said the director of a foundation that supports youth organizing. "So we try, in the application and proposal processes, to have them tell us what success would look like. We've started to think about evaluation in an iterative way, rather than asking 'Did you hit those marks?' we ask them to define what they're trying to achieve and how they're going to know that they've achieved it, to be very concrete about what outcomes they're looking for, but not to impose them."

Another pointed out that the conversation about outcomes may need to continue over the course of the grant. "Policy changes don't happen on the grant cycle calendar," he said, so "mid-course corrections are often as important as sticking to the original plans."

A former grantmaker with many years of experience supporting organizing made a related point about grantee self-evaluation. "I've found it useful to incorporate the self-evaluation criteria of organizing groups into my evaluations. When I used strictly 'objective' or external criteria, I missed major successes or problems. For instance, I had an organization win a major victory, then fall apart right when I was touting their success! This taught me why doctors always ask, 'How do you feel?' even though they've got lab results, blood pressure readings, etc., to go by. Self reports carry significant information."

### ASSESSING COST-EFFECTIVENESS

"Organizing," said a foundation director, "is a very economical tool to bring about social change. I say 'economical' because, relatively speaking, a small investment, in terms of a salary for a trained organizer, can activate and

# THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZING: WHERE DO YOU SEE IT?

Community organizing has visible outcomes, grantmakers said, if the funder and the grantee look in the right places and ask the right questions.

**Individual member change**

- Are members becoming more active in the community? In what ways? Are they associated with other community organizations new to them? Are they learning and growing through their activity?
- What skills and knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors have members gained? Have they broadened their circle of relationships? Have they taken on new leadership roles?

**Organizational change**

- Has the organization grown in its internal capacity to govern, diversify and increase funds, manage financial affairs, and improve technology?
- Has it increased or diversified its membership base, created new social networks?
- Does it have well-developed ladders to leadership? Has it developed new leaders and given them more responsibility? Has it increased gender, racial, and ethnic diversity in leadership?
- Has it built collaborative relationships with other organizations or foundations?

**Community change**

- Has the organization moved issues into the domain of public opinion?
- Has it established relationships with people and organizations such that it is listened to, considered a "player" on relevant issues?
- In the words of one funder, has "the actual or perceived power of the organization" grown? Has its example spawned new organizing efforts or groups?

**Policy wins**

- In the early stages, has the organization made a plan to influence change in a particular area? Have they done resource and power mapping and gauged their own capacity to exert influence? Have they engaged key decision makers by holding meetings and developing relationships?
- Later on, but prior to achieving an actual victory, is there evidence that the group's influence has grown on the policy topic? Do they know how they would measure success?
- At the final stage, has policy change been achieved? Can the group measure or describe what has been accomplished and what measurable difference it will make?

**Policy to practice**

- Has the change been implemented? Is the organization monitoring implementation and its on-the-ground impact?
- What does the evidence say? Is the change making a difference? Is the group communicating its findings about what has changed and what still needs to be done with public officials, the press, funders, and others in the community?

motivate and help train and develop hundreds of volunteers to be active on a particular issue or around a particular focus of social change."

As noted earlier, the passage of the Community Reinvestment Act "was the result of some very powerful organizing," one funder recalled. "The people who were actually sitting there and depositing their paychecks every week realized, 'Wait a minute, they're holding my money while I'm saving – and why aren't we benefiting in any way in the community?' They didn't go out and say, 'We want the government to come in and make our community better.' They said, 'No, here's an institution that's actually benefiting financially from our community, and there needs to be some reciprocity in that.'"

There are challenges when attempting to analyze dollars won for the community through organizing campaigns: challenges of methodology and of attribution, particularly when the work has been done through a coalition. Most studies acknowledge the challenges and are conservative in their estimates, but results are nonetheless eye-catching in magnitude. Working with a consultant, one major national network of local affiliates estimated its monetary impact over the decade from 1995 to 2004 to average $1.5 billion *annually* as a result of campaigns for living and minimum wage raises, predatory lending, loan counseling, local infrastructure and public services, and budget cutbacks averted or restored.

A foundation that supports organizing nationally analyzed 20 grantees over a ten-year period in which, according to the director, "our grantmaking was pretty stable in type and scope and range." Over the decade, they made grants totaling $2.6 million (other funders supported the organizations, too, but the foundation was trying to get a handle on the impact of its own investments). With help from a consultant, the foundation estimated what the organizations had gained "that could be delineated by a dollar sign," such as "a commitment for a $200 million loan fund." A win was counted, he said, if the organization "worked on this issue itself and no one else did, or if it worked with a coalition that it built and led." With gains over the decade of "about $1.3 billion," the director explained, "I'm pretty confident to say the 'multiplier effect' of our philanthropic investment was 512."

# Mapping resources and power

**Resource mapping and power mapping** are collaborative activities that a group might use to analyze a problem and design a plan of action. Both activities involve pulling information together from many sources — including the library, the Internet, public records, interviews, and the personal knowledge of participants. As the term "mapping" implies, the process often involves presenting information visually, using charts, diagrams, photographs, neighborhood or community maps, and other media. The maps let people see information from new perspectives, discuss it, and notice underlying patterns.

### RESOURCE MAPPING

Resource mapping involves two steps: gathering information about social, economic, or political problems and identifying community resources to address them. A group might use resource mapping to look at a wide range of issues, like the consortium described on page 19, and then decide what to tackle first. Or, if a group has already selected a problem, resource mapping can be used in a more targeted way. For example, an organizing group whose members wanted to do something about high arrest rates of young men in African-American and Latino neighborhoods might take several steps:

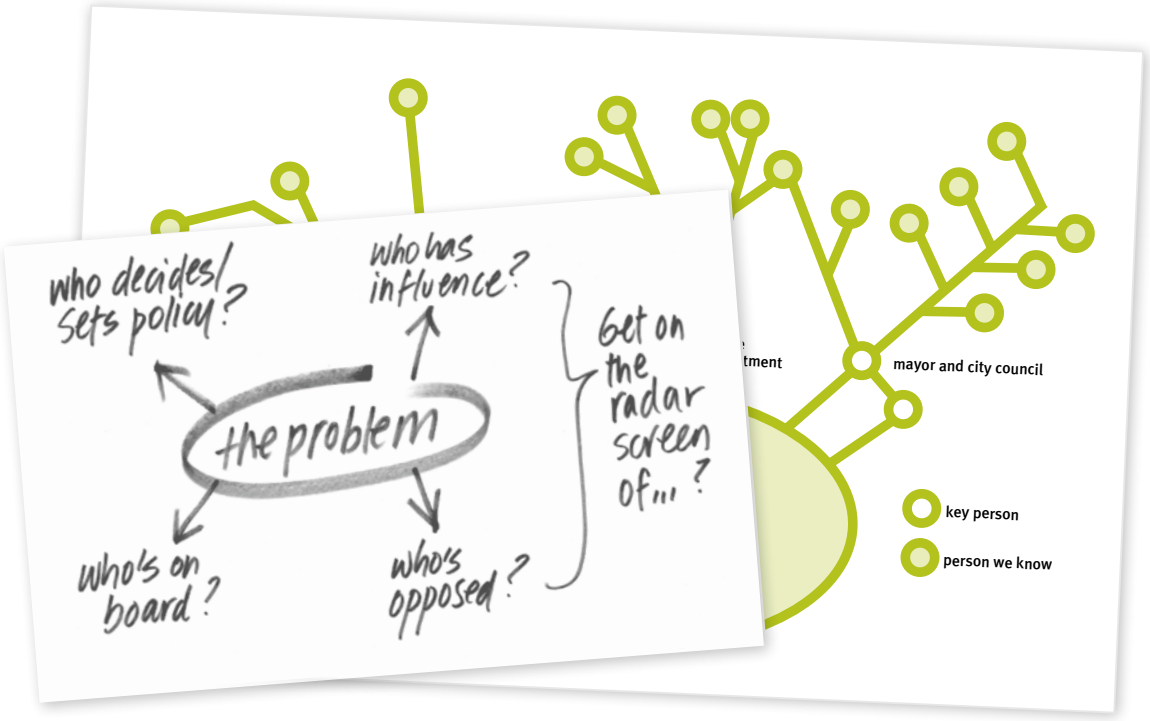
- Gather information about the problem by collecting data on the problem on "no-knock raids," curfew violations, and other arrests; getting US Census information about neighborhood demographics; and checking police department arrest policies
- Create a map showing the neighborhoods of the city, with the percentage of minority households; chart the number and location of arrests onto the map
- Look at patterns, including "hot spots" where the problem is especially acute and places where the problem is less severe despite similar demographics; brainstorm explanations that might explain those patterns
- Locate resources to address the problem, including community groups and congregations, political leaders, schools and afterschool programs, maybe even police precincts that seem to have better practices


**Resource maps offer a way of seeing the relationships and adjacencies between players and problems.**

**POWER MAPPING**

Power mapping also involves gathering and mapping information, but the real point is to figure out who has power to change the situation and make a plan of action. To extend the example at left, the group concerned about high arrest rates might use power mapping to build on what they learned from resource mapping. One way to start is to name the problem as specifically as possible, then work outward to identify institutions and people with influence over some aspect of the problem, and draw lines to show connections among them, following roughly these steps:

- Name the problem and the institutions involved: in the example described at left, that might include the police department, mayor, and city council, which have formal authority, and religious and community institutions, which could help press for a solution
- List key people associated with each of the institutions — whether you know them or not; then list everyone you know who is associated with those key people; draw lines showing the connections
- Look carefully at the map and identify power relationships; think about who has decision-making authority and who has influence; list allies, opponents, and people in the middle
- Make a plan to get your problem on the radar; figure out who can contact people on the map; decide what to say; discuss direct action and other means of applying pressure; assign tasks and choose target dates for getting them done




Power maps can be created with sophisticated mapping software or a pen and a piece of paper. The object is to visualize a course of action.

# What Grantees Wish Grantmakers Knew

**"Process" is key to achieving "outcomes."** "Many foundations seem skeptical about funding process," said a leader of an organizing network. "But wherever there is significant, irreversible impact, a substantial constituency must be built." The process of organizing is the way to build such a constituency. Doing research, educating people, convincing people, building alliances, dealing with those who hold power, coming to consensus. And the products will come, he said. After four years of work and the support of several foundations, he pointed to increased public demand for transportation improvements, leading to the recent passage of a $6.2 billion progressive transportation bill in his state.

**Organizing takes time and requires sustained support.** "We struggle to open a window long enough for necessary resources," said a director of an intermediary organization helping to network and build capacity among smaller youth organizing and independent, often minority-based groups. Organizing groups find themselves scrambling to follow the "windows" that open in foundations, the trends in philanthropy.

**A healthy democratic process can advance a wide range of philanthropic goals.** "What does it mean to have a democratic society when so many people are not participating?" This question comes specifically from an organizer working with smaller groups, but it is of course the fundamental concern of large networks as well. Can a foundation's objectives be fully reached if ordinary people are not drawn into civic life?

**Congregation-based organizing is not a form of religious proselytizing.** "I am constantly amazed at how little funders understand the importance of values, of spiritual faith" in the motivation of people to enter public life, said a former leader of a group working with foundations. He could not believe the "negative reaction" that was generated by discussions on values and faith by some funders. But religious institutions have moral authority as one of our society's last "mediating institutions" between individuals and public space, and organizing is about democracy building, not proselytizing.

**Organizing can be a natural extension of service delivery or advocacy.** "This is often a good way for foundations to get their feet wet," says the director of a large network. And organizing groups inside and outside networks have used such strategies to develop resources and make first contact with new foundation partners. For example, said a director of an organizing group, a couple of program officers from a large national foundation "liked our minimum wage ballot initiative strategy, but knew this would be a hard sell upstairs." So, they funded a respected institution "to do research on the minimum wage," which subcontracted with the organizing group, with full approval from the foundation, "to disseminate the research and train local leaders on it."

**Face-to-face organizing and Internet-based networking can go together.** There seems to be something of a generational divide evolving in organizing on this question, as in larger society. A leader of a long-established network with whom we spoke says that some of the newer foundations "think you are in the Stone Age if you feel the best way to do politics is face-to-face work. Why spend time in someone's kitchen?" That same network, though, has developed an impressive Internet newsletter, as have other networks and groups. And although one-to-one and small-group relationship building remains the foundation of all organizing, many younger organizers are also exploring on-line networking to draw in young people.

**Training for organizers is a field-wide need.** "The development of an organizer talent pool is a bottleneck that holds back organizing," says a leader of one of the large networks. Groups and networks need support for "staff development, career development, the development of a learning culture" that builds for the future.

**Scaling up looks different for organizing groups.** Funders' attention and support can help a grassroots organization grow in size and scope. Yet simply scaling up doesn't work for democratically controlled organizations. They need help, and funder support, in thinking through new organizational structures and systems that allow them to reach as high or far as they need without sacrificing the democratic ideals that make them invaluable.

"Process" is key to achieving "outcomes."

## Ways to Use This Guide

Share it with colleagues or board members to introduce the idea of funding community organizing or prepare for a discussion. Here are some questions to get the conversation started:

- Do any of the "entry points" scenarios (pages 18–19) apply to your organization? Are there funder collaboratives or coalitions active in your field or community that you could join?
- What community organizing groups are working in your field or area? Are you already funding them to do something else? Would it make sense to add organizing?
- Would community organizing help you reach your goals? Can you think of a grant or program, past or present, that could have been strengthened by including community organizing?

## To Learn More About Organizing

A lot has been published about organizing in the past few years: books, case studies, research reports, toolkits, web-based materials, and more. Grantmakers recommended some excellent resources, which we've compiled on the GrantCraft website: www.grantcraft.org/commorgresources.html. The list includes materials on organizing in general and on some of the major branches of organizing in the United States, including congregation- or faith-based organizing, education organizing, immigration organizing, and youth organizing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank the grantmakers and grantseekers who generously shared their experiences and insights, and all those whose contributions of time, talent, and perspective have helped to make this guide possible.

Henry Allen
Terri Bailey
Dave Beckwith
Candace Bell
Lori Bezahler
Consuella Brown
Don Chen
Ernie Cortes
Cris Doby
Aaron Dorfman
Julie Drezner
Cyrus Driver
Diane Feeney
Nancy Feller
Marjorie Fine
Andrew Friedman
George Goehl
Simon Greer
Molly Schultz Hafid
Connie Heller
Sue Hoechstetter
Laura Hogan
Patrick Horvath
Alfred Ironside
Alice Ito
Taj James
Madeline Janis
Sara Kay
Randy Keesler
Steven Kest
Jee Kim
Gara LaMarche
Barbara Lawrence
Spence Limbocker
Laura Livoti
Geri Mannion
Paul Marincel
Steven Mayer
George McCarthy
Katherine McFate
Regina McGraw
Jim Metzinger
Yvonne Moore
Maria Mottola
Anita Nager
Kathy Partridge
Shuli Passow
Jeff Pinzino
Victor Quintana
Scott Reed
Barbara Reisman
Adriana Rocha
Ben Ross
Ron Rowell
Kevin Ryan
Frank Sanchez
Robert Sherman
Alta Starr
Chris Sturgis
Shel Trapp
Bill Vandenberg
Ron White
Sondra Youdleman

Alliance for Justice
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
The Atlantic Philanthropies
Beldon Fund
Building Utopia Consulting
The California Endowment
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Marguerite Casey Foundation
Catholic Campaign for Human Development
Center for Community Change
Community Voices Heard
The Nathan Cummings Foundation
The Daphne Foundation
The Denver Foundation
The Discount Foundation
Drezner Group
Effective Communities Project
Ford Foundation
French American Charitable Trust
Gamaliel Foundation
The Edward W. Hazen Foundation
Industrial Areas Foundation
Interfaith Funders
Jewish Fund for Justice
Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)
Make the Road New York
MetisNet
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Movement Strategy Center
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
National Training and Information Center
The Needmor Fund
Neighborhood Funders Group
New York Foundation
Open Society Institute
William Penn Foundation
PICO National Network
The Piton Foundation
The San Francisco Foundation
The Schumann Fund for New Jersey
Surdna Foundation
The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation
Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock
Wieboldt Foundation
Woods Fund of Chicago

**Underwriting for this guide was provided by the Ford Foundation.**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