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Organizing Works. And We Can Prove It.

Last Update: Wed, June 13, 2007

Description

How do we measure the impact of community building, organizing, and resident engagement strategies? What is the return on each dollar invested in this work to bring about concrete improvements in peoples lives? This workshop will take participants through an interactive mock assessment process and role-play, and tell the story of the assessment process carried out by several foundations to answer these questions. The findings were dramatic and very measurable.

Handouts

[Organizing Works. And We Can Prove It.](#)

Session Detail

Time:	<u>Wed, September 19, 2007 10:00 am - 11:30 am</u>
Presenter(s):	<p>David L. Beckwith Session Designer, Speaker Executive Director The Needmor Fund</p> <p>Laurie Craft Committee Liaison Program Director Grand Rapids Community Foundation (MI)</p> <p>Lisa Ranghelli Speaker Consultant</p> <p>Marcos Vargas Speaker Executive Director Central Coast Alliance United for Sustainable Economy-CAUSE</p> <p>Spence Limbocker Moderator Executive Director Neighborhood Funders Group</p>

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BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Drawn from the NFG *Community Organizing Toolbox*

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For a copy of the Toolbox go to www.nfg.org under publications

Community organizing is one of many strategies that seek to benefit low-income people and the communities where they live. In its simplest form, community organizing is a process that brings low- and moderate-income people, previously absent from the decision-making tables, together in organizations to jointly act in the interest of their “communities” and the common good. At its best, community organizing is a participatory process of working for identified changes. Individuals involved in community organizations take greater responsibility for the future of their communities, gain mutual respect and achieve growth as individuals. Community organizers facilitate the effective development of the organizations by identifying and building the leadership and relationships among people.

The single element of community organizing that makes it different from other forms of social change, such as community development, advocacy or direct service, is that its purpose is to build power. Community organizing invests all of its resources and energy to build power to address community issues. Low-income residents and people directly impacted by the issues own and control these organizations that work to effectively bring about community changes. These community organizations work for change most often to achieve social justice for those who are disadvantaged in society.

These organizations are democratic in governance, open and accessible to community members, and concerned with the general health and well being of the community and not just a specific interest or constituency. They seek policy and other significant changes determined by and responsive to the people. Typically, these organization move into action after going through a careful process of data gathering, research and participatory strategic planning.

According to Seth Borgos and Scott Douglass in an article that they wrote for *Social Policy*, the key principles of contemporary community organizing are:

- **A Participative Culture.** Community organizations view participation as an end in itself. Through leadership development, the organizations devote significant time and resources to enlarging the skills, knowledge and responsibilities of their members.
- **Inclusiveness.** Community organizations are generally committed to developing membership and leadership from a broad spectrum of the community not just from business or professional elite’s. These organizations foster participation from those who have been “absent from the table.”
- **Breadth of Mission and Vision.** Every issue that affects the welfare of the community is within the purview of community organizations and they have

proven very adept at integrating a diverse set of issues and linking them to a larger community vision that has been developed by the membership.

- **Critical Perspective.** Community organizations seek to change policies and institutions that are not working. They also promote institutional accountability and responsiveness.

In the last twenty years, these organizations have become significant long-term players for change through several national organizing networks that provide training and support to the local groups. There are literally thousands of community organizing groups in the United States today, and many have been around for over 10 years. In a national study of faith-based community organizations recently completed by Interfaith Funders they found that more than 1% of the U.S. population is involved in faith-based community organizing groups. The study also found that there were over 134 faith-based community organizations with more than 4,000 member institutions and more than 24,000 core leaders. The community organizing field is studded with powerful organizations achieving important results. These groups are becoming more sophisticated in attracting allies, developing community cohesion, and marshalling power not only locally, but on regional, state and national levels.

Why Funders are Investing in Community Organizing (CO)

- CO is a baseline strategy for effective community revitalization. It is fundamental to revitalizing communities because it engages its constituents in determining what should happen and it develops the necessary leadership and power to win on concrete improvements.
- CO can help find solutions to the critical issues of poverty and race. CO has fashioned numerous multi-racial efforts among poor people and people of color. These efforts have eased racial tensions and provided purpose and hope for previously unorganized communities.
- CO can affect change by building the capacity of people and groups working at the grassroots level.
- CO can revitalize our democracy. CO reflects and practices democracy – in its principles, in the way they are structured and operate and in its continuing efforts to foster informed dialogue and build common, participatory efforts in their communities and among their constituents.
- CO gets the best mileage for grant investments. CO groups rely on and inspire an unusually committed brand of volunteerism to get results. They have a proven track record in attracting resources and winning victories.
- CO is a long-term strategy that makes a significant difference. Many funders are convinced that the resolution of social problems requires years of sustained efforts to build the necessary community capacities and power to address them.

In hundreds of communities across the country, people are building powerful organizations, training community leaders, building long-term relationships, researching problems and identifying solutions, negotiating with public officials and winning

significant victories. These groups are rebuilding the fabric of our democracy and changing the power dynamics in their communities.