

Grassroots Leadership Development:



A Guide for Grassroots Leaders,
Support Organizations, and Funders



Introduction

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation invites and encourages you to read, use, and pass on the Grassroots Leadership Development Guide for Grassroots Leaders, Support Organizations, and Funders. The guide was written because of a strong belief that nurturing and supporting grassroots leaders and their organizations is central to sustaining our democracy and to encouraging healthy, vibrant communities throughout the world.

The Kellogg Foundation has a long, rich history of involvement with grassroots leadership, its issues, and organizations. Approximately nine years ago, the Foundation funded a cluster of projects designed to strengthen grassroots leadership in the United States. The essential logic underlying this strategy was that grassroots leadership will grow through Foundation-supported programs that help find and nurture hidden talent, build trust, and encourage cooperation among potential citizen leaders. Such programs seek to improve the capacity of participants to solve broad problems facing society and to deliver better human services to social and cultural groups in local communities. For example, the Foundation might support a program that organizes and trains young parents to help local school officials address the problems of youth in a decaying urban environment. This approach would also lead to strong collaborations and networking.

All programs in this area would seek to:

- *Heighten the sense of public responsibility for individual citizens and improve their understanding of creativity as applied to their activities;*
- *Foster collaboration and cooperation between various sectors within communities;*
- *Enhance the leadership skills and capacity of individuals who are, or will be, active in the civic life of their communities; and*
- *Focus on grassroots leadership needs for traditionally underrepresented groups in inner-city neighborhoods and rural communities.*

In order to learn from its investment and share it widely, the Foundation contracted with Dr. Jeanne L. Campbell of St. Paul, Minnesota, to lead the field research evaluation project. Dr. Campbell visited the 23 grantees and collected information about their work from leaders and staff. The Campbell Report contains five summarized findings and offers new information and insights into the field of practice. It is a rich compilation of information and lessons organized for three distinct audiences central to grassroots leadership development—current and aspiring grassroots leaders, funders, and support organizations that provide skills training and capacity building techniques to grassroots leaders and organizations. A separate workbook specifically targets current and aspiring grassroots leaders and poses questions designed to encourage their development.

Regardless of what this exciting and growing body of work is called, the evaluation research found that an effective grassroots leadership development strategy is an essential component of any community. This guide provides an overview of the research findings and information designed to elicit a thoughtful discussion of grassroots leadership skills.

As this guide points out, the number of people involved with grassroots leadership development is growing. The involved organizations vary widely in size and scope. They include schools, community leadership programs, intermediary organizations fostering community organizing and/or community development, issue coalitions, and local colleges and human service agencies.

Grassroots leaders affect many arenas. Support organizations and funders offer encouragement, training, and technical experience in many different ways. The Kellogg Foundation's intention is to add to the field's body of knowledge and to encourage discussions and learning that help all of us as citizens and leaders to be more deliberate about our efforts to develop grassroots leadership. A quick scan of any community—urban, rural, or suburban—discloses the urgent need for this type of focus.

Read, increase your awareness and appreciation, share your thoughts with colleagues, and keep us informed. These lessons challenge all of us to look more closely at the many contributions of grassroots leaders. The ultimate question is, are we all willing to support this critical movement that helps to keep democracy alive and well in all of our communities?

Acknowledgements

Leaders and staff of 23 organizations participated in the grassroots leadership study. Their passion, commitment, and innovations have made this work possible. Without their involvement and leadership, there would be no lessons. Many thanks to them and those who are following them.

Similarly, WKKF is indebted to the dedication and professional talents of Jeanne Campbell and her team of researchers. They have broken new ground through their thorough review, field visits, and discussion with grassroots leaders and support organization staff that work with them.

The Foundation staff added a rich beginning and context for this work. A special thanks to program directors Freddy Webb-Petett, John Burkhardt, Betty J. Overton-Adkins, Ali Webb and others.

Many colleagues from other foundations and organizations contributed to the essays that follow and to the many rich examples. Thanks to them and all who provided us advice as we shaped this work—they include a sounding board group (Mario Acosta, Robin Epstein, Sara Gould, Jeff Malachowsky, Delores Parker, and Angie Woodward).

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Table of Contents

Overview of the Five Key Findings	6
Why Invest in Grassroots Leadership Development? <i>Sarah Gould and Jeff Malachowsky</i>	8
Finding 1	10
Developing Grassroots Leaders: What's Different? A Funder/Practitioner View. <i>Cheryl Casciani</i>	12
Finding 2	15
Grassroots Leadership Development: An Essential Strategy for Changing Communities. <i>Rinku Sen</i>	16
Finding 3	19
The Triple Focus. <i>Tom Adams</i>	21
Finding 4	24
Finding 5	25
Findings Summary	27
The Cross-cutting of the Grassroots Leadership Strategy. <i>Regina McGraw</i>	28
The Importance of Support Organizations	31
No One Goes It Alone: Types and Roles of Intermediary and Support Organizations. <i>Seth Borges</i>	34
Creative Capacity Building: Developing and Supporting Effective Grassroots Organizations. <i>George Knight</i>	36
Why Support Organizations are Growing	39
Diamonds in the Rough: Funding Grassroots Work. <i>Terri Langston</i>	40
Appreciating Diversity and Building Effective Bridges: The Grassroots Leader's Challenge. <i>Rinku Sen</i>	42
Making the Case—Supporting Grassroots Leadership Development. <i>Spence Limbocker</i>	45
Practices that Work: The Triple Focus in Action	50
Challenges We Face	54
Conclusion	55



Joan Robinett was a stay-at-home mom focused on her family and her infant child's life-threatening stomach illness. While seeking help for her son, she discovered that a nearby chemical plant was polluting her drinking water and worsening her son's condition. Joan's passion for serving her family grew, as she became a leader in her community and eventually throughout other areas of Eastern Kentucky. After a seven-year research and organizing effort, Joan and a coalition she helped organize succeeded in cleaning up the water. Joan used what she had learned and turned her attention to other issues in her own and neighboring counties. County officials told her and her neighbors that there were no illegal trash dumps. Her organization found and documented 230 such dumps. Joan didn't plan to work on illegal dumping. She didn't plan to start organizations or to become a mentor to other new grassroots leaders across Kentucky. But she did.

Thomas James is a retired mailman who has always been active in his neighborhood association in the Barton Heights neighborhood of Richmond. His part of the neighborhood was well maintained with a great deal of pride. Nearby blocks were deteriorating, however, and more and more homes were abandoned. Mr. James got involved with a nonprofit neighborhood development organization working in his community. It was in trouble. Mr. James recruited new board members, surveyed his neighbors about their priorities, and was a leader in turning around the organization and the neighborhood. He hadn't envisioned this work as part of his retirement plan.

Claudia Ortega worked at a university in Reno, NV. She was invited to a meeting with other Latinos after a Latino candidate lost a local election. Those present decided something had to change, and they organized the Latinos for Political Education. She quickly saw how difficult it was to help new Latino immigrants see themselves as U.S. citizens. She learned how to distinguish the reasons for their reluctance to become involved: indifference, lack of information, and fear based on experience with the government in a former homeland. Claudia's goal wasn't to become the first staff member of Latinos for Political Education. She did so because she believed deeply in what she was doing. "I'm so committed to the cause, and in it so deep, I can't get out. I'd keep working on political education even if it wasn't my job."

Getting involved with a youth organization wasn't an accident for **Malika Sanders**. Her parents were civil rights activists, and she was on the picket line in her mother's womb. At age 12, she had a spiritual experience that convinced her that involvement in issues of social justice was her life's work. "I had to do it to be at peace." Her path has led her from being a participant in a youth leadership camp of Youth for the Twenty-First Century to becoming the organization's executive director several years later. She served on the founding committee for the Southern Partners Fund, a new foundation focused on grassroots leadership and social justice issues in the South. She is actively involved in civic activities in her hometown of Selma, AL. Malika doesn't know exactly where her path will take her but it most likely will involve leadership for social change. It's a calling she's choosing to follow.

What do these four leaders have in common? They come from different parts of the country, different family and ethnic backgrounds, and are concerned about different kinds of issues. What they share is an identity as a grassroots leader. But unlike many grassroots leaders who struggle in isolation without support, these leaders and their communities benefited from a deliberate strategy designed to identify and nurture grassroots leaders. While teaching leadership skills and building confidence in their abilities, this approach added two additional dimensions to leadership skill building. In each case, there was support to help these emerging leaders to build and strengthen their local organizations and to focus their efforts on specific, concrete outcomes in the community.

The four leaders on the preceding pages represent a few of the thousands of leaders involved at the grassroots level every day. They and their stories are part of what the W.K. Kellogg Foundation discovered when it undertook an evaluation of its work in support of grassroots leadership. Over a four-year period, the Foundation invested more than \$20 million in grants to 23 local, regional, and national organizations involved in grassroots leadership development. Dr. Jeanne Campbell, a Minnesota-based research consultant, was retained to lead the research on this project. Her charge was to visit these 23 organizations and capture what they had learned about grassroots leadership. Largely based on the Campbell Report, this guide provides new insights that sharpen and clarify assumptions about grassroots leadership and its power.

Healthy communities need involved citizens. A civil society depends on citizen concern and citizen action as its lifeblood. How we sustain and strengthen communities is an enduring question. These grassroots leaders' experiences offer practical, proven suggestions on how to strengthen and build healthy communities.

Whether you are interested in solving a problem in your community, involving more of your neighbors in your cause, or being more effective as a support organization or funder of grassroots leadership, you'll find something of value to your work in these findings. Some of the findings give weight and credibility to the obvious or assumed. Others break new ground and point to approaches that can help all of us get more results from grassroots leadership efforts.

What follows are the five main findings from this research and related work by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. These findings have particular value for three specific audiences: grassroots leaders, support organizations, and funders. An overview of how the lessons apply to these audiences follows.

Grassroots leadership development is both art and science. In few places are the five findings practiced in any comprehensive or ideal way. These are hindsight interpretations by observers of efforts in 23 organizations. At their best, they represent an invitation and challenge to an ongoing conversation. Collectively, these lessons offer a vision to be shaped and refined by grassroots leaders and by those who work with them. Our goal is to nurture a growing appreciation for the contribution grassroots leaders make, and to motivate communities to support grassroots leadership development as a deliberate strategy.

OVERVIEW OF THE FIVE KEY FINDINGS

While the challenge of visiting and exploring 23 organizations working with grassroots leaders was great, it uncovered some startling similarities. Each organization was different, yet there was a striking pattern that developed throughout the interviews that led us to five key findings.

The Campbell study upon which the findings are based concluded:

“During the past five years, ... we have found that the strategy of (grassroots) leadership development has come to be viewed quite widely as the most effective mechanism to address the outcomes of healthy communities.”

The five key findings are listed below.

- 1) Grassroots leaders have different motivations and needs than those of traditional “positional” leaders.
- 2) Investing in grassroots leadership development leads to increased community well-being and encourages long-term problem-solving.
- 3) In developing grassroots leaders, the best results are achieved by using a triple focus on the individual leaders, the involved organization, and the community or issue of concern.
- 4) Grassroots leadership works best when the decision to invest in developing grassroots leaders is a deliberate strategy, i.e., intentional, proactive, and consistent.
- 5) Grassroots leaders encourage funders and support organizations to take actions that support the efforts of grassroots leadership.

EXPLORING THE FIVE FINDINGS

The Foundation contracted with Campbell & Associates in 1993 to conduct an evaluation of grassroots leadership. The sample was selected from over 30 organizations the Foundation had funded to carry out leadership projects aimed at grassroots community change. Fifteen organizations were initially selected; eight others were added at their request and after their participation in a networking meeting hosted by the Foundation.

The geographically diverse projects were funded at various times, and at varying levels, and were of different sizes, focuses, and lengths. The common elements that made the group a cluster were: their focus on community social change; their specific orientation to grassroots participants; and their use of leadership development as a strategy to achieve community change.

All of the projects targeted their initial work on leadership development for individuals. As work at the individual level progressed, some projects recognized the need to provide organizational development and capacity building to participants' home organizations. The theory was that the ultimate outcome of stronger and healthier communities would be achieved through leadership development at both the individual and organizational levels. Based on this premise, the cluster evaluation, together with the projects, identified three primary outcome areas to study:

- 1) Change at the individual (participant) level;
- 2) Change at the organizational level (participant's home organization); and
- 3) Change at the community level (participant's individual communities).

A five-member cluster evaluation team was selected, providing for ethnic, geographic, and professional diversity, thereby enriching both the data collection and analysis. A set of 12 questions were developed as the basis for the evaluation and covered the following five areas: 1) Outcomes; 2) Lessons; 3) Policy Analysis; 4) Spin-Off Effects; and 5) Other Policy Issues. Questions included:

- What strategies of leadership development work best in the various community settings?
- What changes are occurring in communities as a result of trained leaders?
- Who are the beneficiaries of the projects?
- What lessons were learned that will enhance grassroots leadership development, and what factors contribute to or constrain such efforts?
- What implications do the lessons learned have for future grantmaking?

The data collection methods included site visits, interviews, and focus groups. Networking conferences of the participants added another important vehicle for obtaining information and for shaping ideas and consensus with staff and leaders of the participating organizations. This investment in networking proved to be especially useful and highly valuable to the projects and the cluster evaluation.

In addition to posing questions and analyzing the findings of the Campbell study, this Guide includes pertinent articles on related issues by practitioners and experts in the field of grassroots leadership development. In the first such article, Sara Gould and Jeff Malachowsky discuss the underlying reasons for investment in this particular type of leadership development.

Why Invest in Grassroots Leadership Development?

By Sara Gould, Executive Vice President, Ms. Foundation for Women, and Jeff Malachowsky, former director, Western States Center

Hidden between the pages of our grant applications and between the lines in dockets is a potent force for change. While it is dynamic, and at the same time steady, we in philanthropy may not easily recognize or understand its relationship to the issues we care so deeply about.

The force is grassroots leadership.

Yes, we often look for “community participation.” And we know that change must take place “at the community level.”

But how does that happen? Who are the real agents for change? In fact, grassroots leaders are key. Grassroots leaders connect disadvantaged constituencies with the institutions of our society. Whether large or small; government, business or non-profit; local or national; urban or rural; institutions are unable to meet the social and economic challenges of disadvantaged communities without the participation of community members and their grassroots leaders. On this score, the evidence is in.

What roles can we play and what actions can we take to generate and support growing numbers of effective leaders at the grassroots level? A five-year initiative of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, reinforced by the experience of hundreds of funders, provides some answers. The study reveals lessons about defining grassroots leadership and designing grassroots leadership programs. Its findings can help us within philanthropy link the power of grassroots leadership to our issues and the changes that we seek. And it offers us assistance in designing strategies that bring the resources of our institutions to bear on the baseline tasks of building and supporting grassroots leadership.

First, data from the Kellogg Foundation study identify grassroots leadership as a distinct and recognizable form of leadership. Grassroots leaders share identifiable characteristics, work within definable structures, and regularly affect unique and quantifiable change in their communities and among their followers.

What motivates grassroots leaders? They are motivated and rewarded, by faith, a commitment to service or specific issues, and/or a broader commitment to justice and change. Knowing this helps us think about the design of leadership support programs. The Kellogg Foundation study identified a “triple focus” for effective programs. They must reach leaders at three levels:

- **Personal change** – helping them develop necessary skills;
- **Organizational change** – affecting the organizations within and through which they exert leadership; and
- **Issue or community change** – addressing the civic goals and values that drive leaders forward.

Not surprisingly, the most effective programs are ongoing and based on deepening relationships of trust and respect, rather than time-limited and based solely on discrete workshops or classes that isolate leaders from their daily lives.

The data holds even better news for philanthropy by confirming that specific strategies consistently yield measurable results—new and stronger leaders, organizational and societal change.

Philanthropy can play a vital role by supporting community-based programs *dedicated* to developing grassroots leadership. Disadvantaged, disenfran-

chised, underrepresented and overlooked constituencies that most *need* grassroots leadership generally *lack* access to appropriate programs to develop their leaders' skills or encourage their growth and success. This makes sense—most leadership programs are aimed at established constituencies making a contribution *to* mainstream institutions—academics, business leaders, public officials, non-profit executives. Specifically targeted and appropriate leadership programs, offered by training intermediaries or other support organizations, are crucial to developing grassroots leadership.

The Kellogg Foundation study also reveals that resources from *outside* leaders' communities are vital to the success of leadership programs, and they must reinforce good program design. Funders entering new regions must be sensitive to the particular needs of grassroots leaders relative to other kinds of leaders. They must be willing to provide multi-year funding and to provide a level of support sufficient to sustain the program's triple focus while retaining the trust and valuing the experience of grassroots leaders.

What about that link between our funding institutions' priority issues and grassroots leadership? The great news is that supporting grassroots leadership holds the potential to create new and exciting opportunities across all of our issue agendas. Consider these examples:

- Environmental victories like land use planning or wildlife protection need a political constituency to defend them—built and sustained by grassroots leaders. Who else knows the ground, and can lead conversations about community values, benefits and tradeoffs?

- Real economic development takes the benefits of economic growth into communities lacking traditional development resources and deeply impacted by years of disinvestment. Local organizations play a vital role in creating new economic opportunity—but they cannot accomplish it without grassroots leaders.
- Renewing and building civic participation doesn't really happen through one more direct mail piece or a better television commercial. It requires person-to-person connections, leading to positive experiences within a supportive community addressing personally felt issues. Effective grassroots leaders are active at the heart of these endeavors.

To reap the benefits of grassroots leadership, you probably don't need to create a new program area or necessarily reallocate funds. But once you recognize the role of grassroots leadership in bringing about and sustaining change, you will want to begin to design a strategy for your institution.

This booklet puts forward many specific and practical ideas for you to consider (or to help you). For example:

- Examine your priorities, issue areas, and portfolio of grantee organizations with a watchful eye to the role of grassroots leadership in bringing about the changes you seek. How can your guidelines be changed to reflect your new understanding? Do you have opportunities to support grassroots leadership programs or key intermediary organizations in your fields?
- Look for evidence that grassroots leaders of your grantee organizations are benefiting from participation in well-designed leader support programs and respectful relationships with intermediary organizations. Can you bolster these programs or intermediaries, or get your grantees connected to them?
- Train yourself and your staff in the best ways to work collaboratively with grassroots leaders. Learn how to build and grow relationships and how to communicate effectively,

taking into account the differences in culture, resources, and experience of funders, and grassroots leaders. Consider techniques for evaluating proposals from grassroots organizations that can give you new insight into what they will do and how they will do it.

As we enter the new century, philanthropy faces a deeply troubling landscape. Even as business endeavors and investments create new wealth at an unimaginable pace, the differences between the wealthy and the poor are both enormous and accelerating. New immigrant communities have successfully established footholds in our neighborhoods—but not in our civic life. Color and poverty are concentrating in cities as new jobs and economic opportunities move to the suburbs. New strains of bigotry and discrimination pop up like hotspots in a forest fire, drawing new lines around groups who must fight for their civil rights. As philanthropies, we know more about funding medical research that might decode our most basic molecules than we do about funding programs that would guarantee basic health care to our children. Our international grants support civil society programs that are unleashing explosive democratic energies and pent-up hopes and dreams. Few of us see the same opportunities here, in our own country.

How will people in our communities gain voice and the capacity to get things done? Where will they find the footholds that lead to greater civic participation and political power? What strategies will work when voting rates drop precipitously as one moves down the economic ladder?

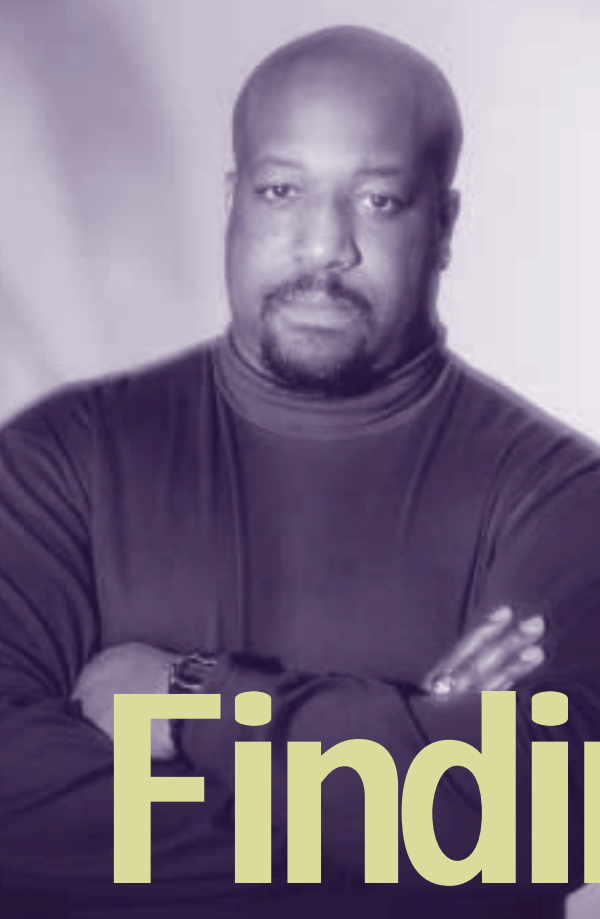
Grassroots leadership offers an answer, a tool for connecting people into a base and empowering them to act on behalf of themselves and others. Grassroots leadership is a key—to community cohesion and mobilization, to community economic development, to political protection and representation. Grassroots leadership can restore, expand, and reorganize the coalitions that have long guarded the political space in which jobs programs, health care, public education, and civil rights survive. And, it can build new ones—it is *necessary* to build new ones—around the challenges of multi-

legalism, welfare reform, closing the digital divide, harnessing globalization to serve the public good. New problems and new constituencies need new leadership—and it cannot be sent down or assigned to them, it must come from the grassroots themselves.

We hope that you will read the ensuing pages and ponder your own commitment to grassroots leadership, and the ways you carry it out. Perhaps you will help your institution ask some of the questions we pose. Perhaps you will be able to use elements of this booklet as resources for discussion. You might want to contact any of the funders or individuals mentioned herein, or maybe seek out some of the grassroots organizations to take a look at effective leadership programs for yourself. But in one way or another, we hope that in one year, two years, three, and more, your investment in grassroots leadership as a strategy will grow, and with it the numbers and effectiveness of grassroots leaders themselves. A democracy can not be self-governed only from the top, or only by the wealthy, or only by those who've "made it" in the economy or who arrived on our shores long ago. Grassroots leadership ensures the renewal, vitality and contribution of every part of our national community, and we as funders have a vital role to play.

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Jeff Malachowsky is the former director of the Western States Center, a support organization to grassroots organizations and coalitions in the Western United States. He currently co-directs a national nonprofit research program on campaign finance, and consults on organizing, strategy, evaluation, and resource development related to grassroots community change.



Why do people at the grass roots get involved?

Finding 1)

Grassroots leaders have different motivations and needs than those of traditional “positional” leaders.

In most communities, reliance on grassroots leadership is growing. We expect citizens to take on our biggest challenges and help forge workable solutions. The lessons about who they are, what motivates them, and how to best support their efforts are important. Using this information can help leaders involve more people, find greater enjoyment in leading, eliminate unnecessary disagreements, and build relationships with funders and support organizations that make the most sense for your community.

The Campbell study and follow-up focus groups made clear that grassroots leaders are unique in three ways.

First, grassroots leaders are most often not persons in “positional leadership.” They aren’t elected officials, commissioners, or business executives, though there are certainly exceptions in communities of all sizes and particularly in rural and smaller communities. Sometimes grassroots leaders are unconnected to the broader community due to limited income and education, coming from isolated neighborhoods in less desirable locations, or as a result of some other disadvantage. Race and class often limit opportunities for grassroots leaders. Unlike many positional leaders, they are not paid for their leadership activities. They have responsibilities to jobs and families and must make time to be involved.

Second, grassroots leaders are usually driven by passion and by one or more specific motivations. Their passion and motivation are distinguishing features and go beyond self-interest. A higher purpose was consistently found to be the driving force behind a leader’s involvement.

The three motivations found throughout the study were: *a commitment to service, a commitment to social justice and social change, and/or actions based on faith or spiritual beliefs.* For many community organizers trained with a philosophy that leaders are motivated purely by self-interest, recognizing these three motivations or driving forces breaks new ground.

People at the grassroots often feel unconnected to their community and disenfranchised. A large part of the challenge of leadership development is connecting with and involving people at the grass roots. People who get involved at this level are responding to some sense of higher purpose that goes beyond individual interests.

Understanding the higher purpose that motivates grassroots leaders is important to understanding their actions and needs. Consider for a minute why someone not in a leadership position would take the risk of getting involved and speaking up. There’s usually little or no initial support and encouragement, and such leaders often face resistance from outside and inside the community and even from within their families. Some focus group participants spoke of resistance to their community involvement and leadership role from spouses, parents, and children.

How does understanding their passion and motivation help to involve more people?



Why is understanding grassroots leaders important to funders and support organizations?

What's different about grassroots leaders?

Despite these hesitations, the power of faith, the desire to serve, or the commitment to social change leads citizens to get involved. These motivations are not surprising to those who work with grassroots leaders or to those who have reflected on their own personal commitment to working for change. What is empowering is the opportunity to be more conscious and overt about what motivates leaders and organizations. Understanding what's driving a person or an organization's involvement can strengthen our connections and broaden the results in our communities. Assisting leaders in recognizing their own and other's motivation and consciously working towards their higher purpose are attributes of effective leadership development programs.

Third, grassroots leaders' development and support needs are often different from mainstream or positional leaders. Throughout this booklet we use the words "mainstream" or "positional leaders" to contrast with "grassroots." This is a convenient—but admittedly much too simple—way to distinguish between the generally accepted and established parts of a community—government, businesses, service agencies, etc.—and the less recognized, less powerful, underrepresented, and often newer segments of the community where grassroots leadership is found. In distinguishing between these areas, we don't mean one is better than the other—but we do mean they are different.

In most instances, grassroots leaders have less access than positional leaders to training and educational opportunities, technology and "standard" equipment and infrastructure. Money for such resources is often scarce. Additionally, grassroots leaders more frequently come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and have less formal education. These differences necessitate a different form of support and training. The hesitancy of most grassroots individuals to become involved and their reluctance to identify themselves as leaders further argues for a support and training system geared to their needs.

Community colleges and other educational institutions can meet some of the needs of grassroots leaders. But many communities find the development of some form of support and training specifically aimed at grassroots leaders to be an important part of a proactive, intentional leadership development strategy.

In this essay, Cheryl Casciani offers both a funder and practitioner perspective on who grassroots leaders are and how working with them differs from working with positional or more mainstream leaders. Cheryl left a position directing the Fellows Program at the Annie E. Casey Foundation to become executive director of a 55-year-old citizen action organization in Baltimore, MD, Citizens Planning and Housing Association. Her dual perspective as funder and practitioner provides an interesting view of who grassroots leaders are and of some of the ways we as funders might relook at how we connect with and invest in grassroots leadership development.

Developing Grassroots Leaders: What's Different? *A Funder/Practitioner View*

By Cheryl Casciani

For four years (1992 -1995) I developed and ran a national leadership development fellowship program for mid- to senior-career professionals for a national foundation. The fellows were education, health, human services, and community development professionals. The year-long program was designed to provide new skills, information, knowledge, and networks to people who aspired to local, state, and national leadership positions where they could affect change on behalf of disadvantaged children and their families. Each of the participating fellows brought to the class complex leadership challenges that they had faced in their work, and they all clearly benefited from the experience.

The program provided a very safe learning environment. People were taken out of their work situations for a year, provided with extraordinary learning opportunities, and protected—at least in the short term—from the challenges of implementing their new ideas. The program was also safe for me as the funder. I was working with a group of people who had been selected through a very competitive process and helping them to chart

their next high-level career move. The program was intellectually challenging and stimulating and successful in that it helped to establish a strong network of effective change agents.

For the past four years (1996 -1999) I was the executive director of a nonprofit organization which works with and for grassroots community leaders. In this case, the leaders were primarily volunteers from community-based associations who participated in my organization's leadership programs both as individuals and as members of community teams. And, for the most part, they were residents of low-income neighborhoods that were facing a wide range of problems due to years of disinvestment, neglect, and abandonment. I learned very quickly that there were remarkable similarities—and differences—between the two types of leadership development and support.

I'll quickly note the similarities, but I want to focus on the differences. While the similarities are instructive, I believe that the differences offer some important lessons to funders who want to support grassroots community leadership.

Leadership Program Similarities

I have learned from a range of experiences—managing a national leadership program for a foundation, supporting a grassroots leadership program as the director of a local intermediary, and participating in a local leadership program for business and nonprofit leaders—that there are some common elements which cut across these programs, despite very different purposes, constituencies, and designs. These similarities include:

(1) Building and sustaining learning networks – Ask participants in any leadership program that involves the same group of people coming together multiple times what they valued most from the experience and most will tell you that the best part was the other participants. Some programs are better than others at nurturing the development of the learning community and in supporting the network after the program ends. But for most programs, it is almost a given that what people learn from having the chance to spend time with others, learning about their experiences, sharing ideas and stories, and building new relationships is the main benefit. The best programs are those

that recognize this from the beginning and consciously create time for this relationship building and learning to take place.

(2) Creating access to new information and skills – Most people expect to learn new things in leadership programs. I learned in both programs—grassroots and mid-career leadership—that people are isolated in their jobs or neighborhoods and do not always have access to information that could enhance what they are trying to do. Leadership programs connect people to new sources of information and build people’s knowledge. In both programs, new knowledge was enhanced by also developing skills through which to use the knowledge. For example, both programs provided training in public speaking and negotiation that enabled participants to bring their knowledge to life.

(3) Enhancing personal leadership visions – The impact of the first two similarities is that most people—regardless of the type of program and target audience—have a broader vision after the experience. Whether it is the influence of a successful community development approach in another part of town, or the lessons from a leader of a human service agency from another state, or the discovery of a new ability to articulate a more complex advocacy position, people come away from these experiences thinking bigger, and in many cases, more confident about their personal ability to affect change.

Leadership Program Differences

Despite the similarities, there are important differences to consider as a funder interested in supporting grassroots leadership development. Among the most important considerations, in my experience, are the following:

(1) Exercise patience and a willingness for longer timeframes – Many grassroots leaders are not accustomed to having people invest in their learning and development. They are, for the most part, volunteers with full-time jobs who are doing their best to improve their communities. They are frequently not community development experts. But,

they understand their neighborhoods and know that it will take time to implement their visions for their communities. What they need in return for their time investment both in the leadership program and in their neighborhoods is for funders to have patience.

When I moved from the large, national foundation to the local intermediary and got involved with the community leadership program, I immediately began to ask questions about outcomes. I had the sense that people had no idea what I was talking about. What I learned over time was that they did understand me, but they

Community leaders are working against enormous obstacles without the benefit of many resources. Community leadership programs should nurture and celebrate their spirit and treat the participants as very special people who are making enormous contributions to their neighborhoods, their cities, and society as a whole.

were taken aback by the nature of the question. I was always asking longer term questions about how we were helping people in the leadership program translate their community experience into important system changes for police, public works, and criminal justice agencies, for example. It was true that people wanted there to be changes in these systems. But, in the short term—one to two years—they needed assistance in mobilizing people, building their local community association, and engaging young people to be constructive community members. As I noted above, people emerged from the community leadership program with larger visions for what is possible and what needs to be done. It was as important, however, that my organization and the funders helped people to craft multi-year plans to achieve their goals and continued to provide resources for their efforts.

(2) Meet community leaders where they are – Related to having patience is the willingness to customize support to meet the immediate needs of community leaders. Again, big visions matter, and long-term community revitalization outcomes are desirable. More important in the short term, however, is to support efforts about

which community leaders care, such as crafting a plan for a vacant lot or building, developing a youth program, or supporting their organizational development. This does not mean that the leadership program should not address the need for thoughtful, comprehensive community plans with many partners. It only argues for paying as much attention to the smaller community building projects that are immediate and allow people to celebrate progress. Change from these smaller projects is incremental. But, this type of movement combined with sustained support for the community leadership team will ultimately lead

to work on their larger community visions.

While there were some elements of this in the national leadership program, there was much less discussion and appetite for “projects.” The focus was much more on large-scale systems change, and the expectations for the participants was that they would tackle change on a large scale. I suspect that participants from this program also needed to implement small projects along the way and would have benefited from support for these incremental efforts. In my experience, though, attention to the immediate needs of community leaders is critical to the success of the program.

(3) Treat community leaders like the special people they are – The work people are doing in communities is hard and can be depressing at times. Community leaders are working against enormous obstacles without the benefit of many resources. Community leadership programs should nurture and celebrate their spirit and treat the participants as very special people who are making enormous contributions to their neighborhoods, their cities, and society as a whole. I was struck each year at the graduation

ceremony by how proud everyone was to receive the continuing education certificate from a local, prestigious university. Our program was offered in partnership with the university, and while partnerships like this require extra time and energy, the benefits were astounding. Many people can take for granted such recognition, but for these community leaders, many of whom had no higher education, receiving the certificate was a life moment. The same was true about the weekend retreat at a corporate conference center. Many participants had never spent a weekend away without a family member, and virtually none of them had ever spent two days in such an upscale atmosphere. This treatment matters, given all that we are asking from these leaders.

This type of respect and care is certainly needed in all leadership programs. For people who are professionals, like those in the national leadership program, travel and recognition are more frequent and can be taken for granted. For grassroots leaders in a community leadership program, taking the extra time to respect each person's pace of development and investing in celebrating and recognizing each leader's gifts and contribution is more than worth it.

Conclusion

Investment in grassroots leadership development is an investment in the social fabric of our communities. Funders are to be commended when they support such programs. I hope that my experiences not only encourage funders to support community leadership, but also provide some insights that will help the programs be successful for participants, funders, and ultimately, our communities. In many ways the process of leadership development is the outcome. The payoff for everyone is stunning—more and diverse leaders and stronger, healthier communities.

Cheryl Casciani is currently director of programs at the Baltimore Community Foundation. She writes from her two previous positions at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and as executive director of Citizens Planning and Housing Association.



Finding 2)

Investing in grassroots leadership development leads to increased community well-being and encourages long-term problem solving.

How building a community-wide vision and grassroots problem-solving capacity makes a community a healthier, more desirable place to live.

There are many outcomes from investing in grassroots leadership development. You know the most common—problems get solved, more people become involved, and the number of potential future leaders grows. More is possible! All over the country grassroots activists and organizations have moved beyond their individual concerns to work at changing systems and underlying causes. Previously uninvolved citizens are learning new problem-solving skills and are beginning to work with others to shape a shared picture of the long-term change they desire. Leaders, funders, and support organizations are being challenged as to whether they are getting all possible benefits from the time, money, and talent they have invested. Those who are not involved are getting a better picture of the potential benefits to the community and may begin to realize that there are many different possible ways to achieve those benefits. Build on your strengths, solve problems and expand your problem-solving capacity, and head into a shared vision for a better community. Interested?

The Campbell report summarizes the positive change that resulted from the efforts of thousands of grassroots leaders. Increased community well-being, the study concludes, is the outcome of the efforts of grassroots leaders and those who invest in their work. This finding is obvious to those involved who have struggled to change something important to them and who have emerged victorious. When people get together because they believe in something—their neighborhood, their children's school, safety in the streets, fighting discrimination against the disabled—the community is stronger and healthier.

Many problems are solved through the efforts of grassroots leaders across America and throughout the world. As important as their accomplishments are, researchers found that when the development and support of grassroots leaders becomes a priority, there is an opportunity to go beyond issue- or problem-specific approaches. More can happen than having a problem solved or a service provided. The report points out: "Organizing around community well-being means coming to see specific problems in a larger context—to see them as part of a web of community issues. This shift in perspective opens up the possibility of identifying and building on assets as resources when confronting community needs."

Sustained investment in grassroots leadership development results in an expanded long-term leadership capacity for the community. When community well-being is seen as the desired outcome, leaders begin to create a shared vision for the community, to build on strengths and assets and to positively resolve issues and problems. Developing grassroots leaders becomes a tool for creating a problem-solving capacity or environment in a broader and more positive community context.

This approach requires developing skills to work with people who represent a wide range of interests, issues, and communities. To go beyond a specific problem or issue requires:

- *Embracing a cross-discipline approach that incorporates different issues and concerns;*
- *Bridging political, racial, cultural, and economic boundaries and handling social differences;*
- *Establishing a sense of mutuality and reciprocity among different interest groups and priorities; and*
- *Maintaining a big-picture perspective that focuses on long-term community vitality, health, and sustainability, rather than short-term solutions to immediate problems.*

As the stories in this guide remind us, many new leaders become involved because of a specific concern or issue. Attention to nurturing this form of grassroots leadership development is vital. The Campbell study argues that if the focus stops there, however, a tremendous opportunity to contribute to the long-term vitality and strength of the community is missed. By investing in community-wide grassroots leadership development an environment is created where leaders are increasingly able to see connections, build on collective strengths, and resolve problems or issues.

In this essay, Rinku Sen reminds us of the challenge of becoming a society where ethnic and racial diversity is the norm, not the exception, and where a significant part of every community is not benefiting from growing economic prosperity. Grassroots leaders are at the center of these issues. Our year 2000 national census will confirm that the United States is the most ethnically and racially diverse nation in the history of the world. For this experiment in democracy to continue to succeed, we need to continue to find new ways to build connections across all kinds of boundaries. In this essay, Rinku shares her experience as a leader and director of programs to identify and develop grassroots leaders from ethnically diverse and low-income communities.



Grassroots Leadership Development: An Essential Strategy for Changing Communities

By Rinku Sen

American democracy faces major challenges, some would say of crisis proportions. The dual phenomena of increasing economic inequality and rapid-fire demographic changes have exacerbated the gap between powerful institutions and individual residents and citizens. Conflict and competition between populations struggling for basic survival resources disrupts the potential for seamless public policy and its implementation.

Transforming this state of affairs requires direct investment into communities. Certainly, institutional decision makers and opinion leaders can be educated and challenged to fulfill their roles in ways that are responsive to the needs of the vast majority of our population. But their reach into communities will only extend so far. For a true renewal of democratic values and systems, leadership is required from people closest to struggling communities. Programs that find and develop multiple leaders from marginalized communities play a critical role in connecting community needs to institutional responses.

Some examples of this kind of work in action include:

- The Environmental and Economic Justice Project and their STEP Program involving a variety of organizations of color;
- Urban Habitat's Leadership Development Program for Bay Area environmental justice organizations;
- The Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates offers programs in Chinese and Korean; and
- Direct Action for Rights and Equality offers its field program for grassroots leaders.

Grassroots leadership provides significant advantages for meeting community needs. Grassroots leaders emerge directly from the cultural, political, and economic conditions that shape local communities, and they embrace family and friendship networks that keep them closely linked. These leaders understand the dynamic issues and traditions of their own communities, especially important in these days where institutions are stretching themselves to address a huge variety of racial/ethnic and generational differences.

Grassroots leaders tend to live in the communities they represent and work with, providing long-term, stable, and direct access to other residents, unlike most elected officials or public administrators. One can walk across the street or address a problem in the grocery store with one's local leaders, rather than making appointments through a secretary with someone more removed. These leaders begin with higher levels of trust and confidence from community members than externally-based, formally named, leaders—often because they operate from real, rather than projected, accountability to community needs. These people are critical to resident participation in a representative democracy—they provide a conduit between the voices of their community peers and institutional leaders.

Because this kind of leader works in conditions very different from those of the large nonprofit or the university, the

traditional leadership development program has to be adjusted to maximize his or her potential. Often grassroots leaders have very little formal education, and they enter leadership roles through informal activities and local organizations. This means their developmental path is going to be less linear, more meandering, than that of a person on an elite leadership career track who emerges from academia. Grassroots leaders often require more orientation and support in address-

Grassroots leaders emerge directly from the cultural, political and economic conditions that shape local communities, and they embrace family and friendship networks that keep them closely linked.

ing the formal aspects of community development and institutional decision making. They also make important decisions slowly, using a process of consultation and consensus building with other community members. Indeed, that process often becomes one of their major functions in the community, requiring skill and attitudes honed over many years. These leaders squeeze in leadership responsibilities with other life responsibilities, and their time has to be loosened up for them to be effective.

Effective programs for grassroots leaders are forced to innovate because of the tremendous challenges of designing systems that can encourage and sustain such leadership. The most successful of these incorporate the following common principles:

(1) They understand the difference between leadership identification and leadership development. Identification models of program planning seek out people whose authority to take leadership is already established and requires only improvement and promotion. Deep and thorough leadership development requires starting with people very early in their acceptance of responsibilities, and providing consistent support to them over time. Such programs have to be willing to take risks on people, and accept attrition and disappointment as the price that must be paid in search of the real gems.

(2) They use both formal and informal pedagogy, which is participatory and engaging for adult learners with little formal education and groups with uneven language ability. In addition to classroom-type training, they also require a consistent process of hands-on work and evaluation through which emerging leaders learn new skills and develop beneficial attitudes. People have to have opportunities to learn on the job, and the job has to be crafted to make a

contribution to the community, while taking up mostly evening and weekend time. For example, in addition to a formal session on meeting facilitation, the leader might be apprenticed through several community meetings, taking increasing responsibility until she is comfortable with the full range of tasks involved.

(3) Hands-on aspects of the best grassroots leadership development programs have the added benefit of addressing live community issues as well as developing individual skill and networks. Many public policies related to health care, education, job discrimination, environmental health, housing, and immigration have been negotiated while emerging leaders were learning from mentors, working with their communities and reflecting on lessons for their leadership.

(4) Programs that serve diverse constituencies build their crew of staff and teachers to include the language capacity and cultural connections needed to support immigrants and other marginalized groups. It's impossible to evaluate someone's work if you don't know the context they are coming from, if you cannot measure their contributions against their peers', rather than a pool of established traditional leaders. Often these leaders move their communities through political changes, changes in ethnic and national identity, and generational conflicts that emerge from assimilation and

resistance to assimilation. They need analytic support to understand the challenges facing their communities and respond to them thoughtfully, rather than with cookie-cutter methods like having the right kind of food at meetings.

(5) They provide one-on-one evaluation and attention to growth. They measure growth by specific skills, but also in terms of confidence gained, ability to withstand high levels of conflict, productive interventions in community conflicts, accurate and accountable representation of the community, and the level of self-awareness in the leader. Excellent leadership development programs will take participants through a consistent cycle of assessing strengths, challenges, and goals; matching the participant to an assignment; assisting the participant through formal training or one-on-one coaching through that assignment; returning to assessment and evaluation for the next step.

Foundations will have to apply a more hands-on approach to cultivating excellent proposals from grassroots leadership programs. Many existing programs are short staffed and under-resourced, and program planners may need significant support to produce a fundable proposal. Most importantly, these kinds of programs do not produce results overnight. A leader can finish one phase of a program, but what next? In order for a reasonable next

Foundations will have to apply a more hands-on approach to cultivating excellent proposals from grassroots leadership programs.

step to exist, the program has to continue to exist, and has to have room for new and returning participants. Individualized attention requires a much higher staff-to-participant ratio than most professional development programs provide. Guaranteed multi-year funding, with technical assistance and other resources made available, will make a tremendous difference in programmatic longevity, and in producing effective leadership.

Most support organizations are busy doing the work rather than promoting themselves. Foundations can encourage programs to spend their time on documentation, reflection, evaluation, and promotion, rather than the relentless cycle of raising money. Site visits tend to provide a fuller picture of such organizations than paper applications, but foundations and organizations will have more productive site visits if the foundation provides

some guidelines for site visit planning, and is willing to conduct them when program participants and graduates can be available. If foundations are willing to take some risks, they can make themselves more accessible to grassroots leadership.

Rinku Sen is the former codirector of the Center for Third World Organizing. She has also served on the Allocations Committee of the Vanguard Public Foundation, the Bannerman Fellowship Program, and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.



Finding 3)

In developing grassroots leaders, the best results are achieved by using a triple focus on the individual leaders, the involved organization, and the community or issue of concern.

What the triple focus on individual, organization and issue/community means and how to use it.

Hocus-pocus, triple focus. It sounds like mumbo-jumbo! It really is a kind of magic. The mystery is in all the positive benefits that occur when current and potential leaders are able to get useful training and support that:

- *Respects each of the leaders and their unique backgrounds and contributions;*
- *Allows newly involved people to decide their own pace and not be rushed through a cookie-cutter model of leadership development;*
- *Alerts leaders to typical issues about their organizational growth and change;*
- *Offers flexible and affordable capacity-building assistance to increase the organization's ability to achieve the leaders' desired results;*
- *Assists leaders and organizations to see how one issue connects to others and to develop longer-term approaches to systemic change when the time is right;*
- *Connects leaders and organizations beyond their specific areas of interest and fosters systemic change when the timing is right; and*
- *Encourages increased community cooperation and building of a shared community vision as a desirable and achievable goal.*

"To most effectively address community-wide solutions at the grassroots level, funders (support organizations and leaders) should focus on grassroots leadership in ways that simultaneously: a) meet the needs of the individual leader; b) address the capacity-building needs of community-based organizations; and 3) keep the overall vision of community well-being in clear view," Dr. Campbell concludes in her report's Executive Summary.

Perhaps the most powerful finding from the study—the triple focus recommendation—argues convincingly against reliance on stand-alone skill training or capacity building as the most effective grassroots leadership strategy.

What makes the triple focus so powerful? It puts learning in the context of the leaders and assists them in advancing their community change goals. The investment in skill building is leveraged by the growing self-esteem that results from being a part of an effective organization and by making progress on issues or action goals.

Grassroots leaders are very personally involved in their communities, organizations and issues. All are tightly connected and bound together. Grassroots organizations are

typically small and fragile. As a result, it's often difficult for leaders to separate their concerns for the organization and issues from their interest in developing as leaders. If a leadership development program is able to effectively support the organization and the issues, it can help make sure the leaders' attempts to lead are successful. It's quite difficult for leaders to focus on learning when they are concerned and distracted by a crisis in their organization. At the same time, because leaders are driven by passion for their issues or community, they often are not looking to abstractly acquire new skills. They merely want to make progress on today's issues in their community and organization.

Progress on their issues and in building an effective grassroots organization are among the most important measures leaders use to judge their own effectiveness. Grassroots leaders want to work with people who understand these interconnections and who want to help them succeed on these terms. Leadership programs that meet this test have the greatest opportunity to develop grassroots leadership skills because they engender trust and respect. Programs using the triple focus approach assist participating leaders because the learning is relevant to individuals in the context of their organization and issues.

Here are some examples of how the triple-focus approach was applied in the work of two of the leaders who opened our overview:

•The Democracy Resource Center works with leaders and organizations throughout eastern Kentucky. Their outreach staff learned of Joan Robinett and her battle against toxic dumping. Their involvement included assisting Joan in researching the issue and legal liabilities, organizing and building the Anti-Toxic Waste Coalition, and providing coaching to her and her organization on strategies and tactics as they worked for five years to end the dumping.

•The Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation is a national nonprofit organization that works with a network of locally based community development organizations across the country. Thomas James got assistance from the staff of Neighborhood Reinvestment and an organizational development consultant provided to rebuild the board, clarify the community change goals, and recruit an effective new executive director. Mr. James and other grassroots leaders from Richmond attended workshops at Neighborhood Reinvestment's Training Institute that added skills and knowledge on the issues they worked with at home.

While using the triple focus approach might appear to be straightforward, it is difficult to do and even more difficult to do well over an extended period. In fact, many of the organizations visited in the study offered only parts of the three components or lacked the resources to offer them in an ongoing way. However, the collective experience of the organizations studied demonstrates the power and potential of this approach.

Those committed to supporting or funding grassroots leadership efforts have plenty of choices about where and how to focus their efforts. Such choices often confound emerging leaders and organizations, however. Support opportunities vary widely from community to community. Typically, community colleges or service organizations offer some form of leadership skill training or leadership self-assessment. Less often there is local access to technical assistance intended to improve some aspect of a non-profit organization's functioning, e.g., board-staff relationships and roles, financial management, resource development, etc. A few communities have organizations that assist grassroots leaders in developing a community-wide plan or in shaping a strategy around a specific, troubling issue.

Each of these support needs is important. The Kellogg Foundation review found attempts at grassroots support to be most effective when combined. Simply said, more positive benefits occur when skill training addresses the capacity-building needs of the participant's organization as well as the local issues and the community change goals. This notion runs counter to much of the "prevailing wisdom."

Implementing a combined approach requires overcoming a number of obstacles. The investment of resources required to develop grassroots leaders in the context of their organization and issues is often greater than they or their organizations can afford. Further, the cost is a lot more than tuition to a typical leadership training course or program. This approach also runs counter to theories more prevalent in business, social services, or government, namely that the best training is specialized, standardized, and value-neutral. Unlike this more traditional approach, grassroots leadership development works from a value system and responds to the higher purposes that drive those involved.

The triple focus doesn't happen all at once. It may involve more than one organization supporting a grassroots leader. Not every leader or situation is ready for this approach from the outset. Often, concerned citizens get involved because of a specific issue. In the beginning, most of their focus is on working on that issue with anyone who will help. Over time, where resources are available, people like the four leaders profiled in the introduction look to connect their personal learning with building their organization and promoting community issues. Ultimately, training and capacity building based on the triple focus approach leverages and expands the results of any investment in grassroots leadership development.

As the Campbell findings point out, focusing training and technical assistance on the connections between the individual leader's skill building and capacity building for the organization towards the community change goal makes total sense. Sometimes this approach just happens. Other times it is totally elusive, and focusing on skill building and issue development or skills to strengthen the organization is all the leader or the trainer can do well. Triple focus is an ideal and a way of thinking about effective delivery of training and technical assistance for grassroots leaders and organizations. Triple Focus: An Approach to Grassroots Leadership Development offers more details on the approach and how it works.

The Triple Focus

By Tom Adams

The triple focus finding has lightning rod potential for those interested in supporting and strengthening grassroots leadership efforts. From visiting more than 20 grassroots leadership projects around the United States, it became clear that the best and most successful programs focused on more than leadership. The approaches that worked best and produced the most results for the leaders themselves and their community or issue areas were those that went beyond either individual skill building or organizational capacity building.

In this important way, grassroots leadership development programs differed from other leadership programs. In a single-focus program, a new nonprofit executive might attend a skill-building workshop. The president of a community coalition might learn skills to run a meeting or build a network. While these trainings are helpful, the Kellogg Foundation research found that the most impact came from a strategy that simultaneously focused on, and could deliver on, three distinct areas: the individual leader, the organization the leader represented, and the community or issue wherein the leader sought change. Successful grassroots programs get their kick, not from narrow specialization, impartiality and non-involvement in “issues,” but from understanding and supporting the participant in the grassroots leaders’ environment. It’s the attention to the connections between the individual’s learning and the organization and community where the most potential for change occurs.

Why would this approach, referred to here as the triple focus, have more impact for grassroots leaders? First, the individual grassroots leader is different from more traditional learners. At the beginning and sometimes for a long time, some people don’t see themselves as “leaders” and aren’t sure they want that title. They are often torn between an unquenchable desire to do something about a community or issue they care

Moreover, the identity of grassroots leaders are generally bound up with the organizations they are invested in, and the issues that motivated them into leadership and that they work on through their organizations. And they are experiential learners -- learning while doing what is highly important to them.

deeply about, and fervently wanting to not be involved. Leadership is probably unfamiliar and certainly risky, inviting failure, controversy, unwanted attention and even attack. They’ve often not had opportunities to give voice in public to their concerns or beliefs, or to learn basic skills of organizing a group, running a meeting, developing a plan, and carrying it out. Depending on their ethnic, cultural, or economic background, many leaders have their own personal barriers to overcome arising from internalized negative messages that get in the way of being effective as a leader. Moreover, the identity of grassroots leaders is generally bound up with the organizations they are invested in and the issues that motivated them into leadership, and that they work through their organiza-

tions. And they are experiential learners —learning while doing what is highly important to them.

For these reasons, offering the individual the opportunity to expand self-esteem and learn basic leadership skills is a key part of grassroots leadership development, even for the most promising and advanced leaders. However as a stand-alone focus, it is limited in how much

leadership development or community change will result. The leader’s first priority will be the organization, and connecting the leaders to their organization adds significantly to the impact of leadership development. Focusing on both the individual and the organization adds an ability to both support and train the leader in the context of the organization in which they lead, and to better identify where capacity building is needed to keep that organization healthy and out of crisis. Leadership programs that help support organizations while training their leaders ensure positive experiential learning grounds for the application of new leadership skills. There are normal and predictable issues that occur in organizations such as leadership transition, growth, and an occasional funding or interper-

sonal crisis. Working with the leader and the organization increases the odds of the organization remaining healthy and developing the skills to manage these normal organizational changes.

Long-term involvement with individual leaders and their organizations provides opportunities to assist leaders in their environment and with the issues they face and to identify and address important organizational capacity-building issues. While this dual focus is powerful, the ultimate objective of most grassroots efforts is community change. Therefore the third aspect of the triple focus is key—the community, or for many, the issue. This is how grassroots leaders judge their own efforts, and the value of related activities—does it move their issue forward? Does it help their community—help them help their community? Leadership programs that accept responsibility for commitment to their leaders' issues, and are able to provide training and additional support that are directly connected to those issues, will have more credibility with grassroots leaders, and a higher rate of success. And the success will be twofold—developing the skills and capacity of the individual, and sharing in the community betterment they cause.

These, then, are the three keys—the triple focus—that yielded the greatest success among the 23 programs the Kellogg Foundation funded—attention to the individual, the individual's organization, and the issue or community change the leader and organization were committed to. A wide range of organizations were included in the Kellogg Foundation study, ranging from an Urban League Chapter to a university-based training program to several regional leadership centers. The triple focus examples among these groups stood out for their success.

A grassroots leader in Baltimore had a secure job with the local government. She chose to buy a home in the neighborhood where she was raised, a “distressed” neighborhood facing many challenges. She saw that her mother’s generation was no longer trying to keep the neighborhood associa-

tion going, and it was heading downhill. She got involved and encouraged other younger residents and homeowners. She and her mother signed up for a year-long leadership program offered by a city-wide citizen action organization, the Citizens Planning and Housing Association. Through this training, she received individual skills training and she developed a plan for revitalizing her neighborhood and the association. She and her neighbors sought money for a full-time organizer and

Intentionally focusing on the connection between the individual leader, her or his organization, and the community or issue to be changed adds tremendously to the potential impact of grassroots leadership development programs, and hence to any investment by funders in grassroots leadership.

when successful she was asked by her neighbors to take the position. With a lot of reservations, she gave up her government job and began working in the community. Continuing to work with the association, she connected with a newly forming city coalition seeking to expand resources for neighborhoods like hers and to influence the policies of the newly elected mayor. The effort has succeeded to the point that it’s been recognized in the national news. This leader benefited and her neighborhood benefited from a triple focus strategy.

Cheryl Casciani, senior program officer at the Baltimore Community Foundation and former executive director of the citizen action group, Citizens Planning and Housing Association, explained it this way: “I’ve been watching Mareda and her organization since she first started showing up at our trainings. It’s impossible to imagine her or her organization making as much progress in just over a year without this mix of attention to her as a leader, to her evolving organization and to assisting in developing a strategy for her neighborhood and connecting her to neighborhoods with similar needs. She has been able to help bring about major changes in resource allocation and policies for neighborhoods in Baltimore!

Timing certainly helped, but there is no way her neighborhood would have progressed this far without the mix of supports available to grassroots leaders in Baltimore.”

In Boise, a young librarian grew concerned about censorship and intolerance towards gay people in her community. Tentatively at first, she joined a brand-new “human dignity” group. Soon Idaho found itself at the center of a national campaign to

pass or defeat laws restricting the civil rights of gay citizens. By now the librarian, Jen Ray, had enrolled in the leadership training program of the Western States Center. The conflict in Idaho grew larger and more heated, and Jen applied skills learned through Western States to help her group grow, and encourage many smaller groups to get involved as well. Leaders from some of these groups joined the Western States program as well, and worked together to develop skills, strategies, research, and educational workshops to apply in their communities. Jen eventually left the library and became executive director of one of the largest and most successful public interest groups in Idaho, the Idaho Womens’ Network—and during this transition she received further training and support from Western States through their year-long Advanced Leadership/Mentorship Program. Jen is now one of the most highly respected statewide citizen leaders in Idaho, a regular spokeswoman for human rights in both Idaho and national media, and a board member of the Western States Center—where she works to ensure that ever-growing numbers of grassroots activists have access to leadership development programs.



Betsy Dunklin is a veteran observer of grassroots leaders in Idaho. Now a leader in the Idaho State Senate, Betsy is a former journalist who became a grassroots leader herself, working for the YWCA and later as founder of the Idaho Womens' Network. According to Dunklin, "The multiple facets of the Western States program provided just what grassroots leaders in our state needed. We are a small state, thinly populated, and people who "stand up" to take leadership are often isolated, even threatened, in their communities. But they are brave to "stand up" and with support and training and connections to other leaders, folks can accomplish astonishing things. Jen Ray is a perfect example. Our community is a better place for her efforts, safer and more open-minded. That she could accomplish so much in so short a time is astounding —what's more, she is just one of a dozen or more leaders all coming up together through these programs. It just wouldn't have worked out this well, if we'd had to ship everyone off to a training school, or had consultants drop in to put on a couple workshops."

Long-term involvement with individual leaders and their organizations provides opportunities to assist leaders in their environment with the issues they face, and to identify and address important organizational capacity-building issues. If the goal of grassroots leadership is improving community well-being, as Dr. Campbell suggests, then connecting leaders and their organizations to the issues they care most about is a key to expanding impact and results.

There are thousands of examples, new ones daily, of grassroots leaders digging in to change something in their community. In Wyoming, a welfare mother was concerned about health care and took action. In the Mississippi Delta, African American mothers in a tiny rural town fought the powerful white school board and won, stopping corporal punishment of their children. In Kentucky, a mother who'd lost one son to cancer got involved to stop the pollution that threatened other families. In each of these situations, the leaders benefited from a connection to a leadership program that focused on com-

munity change and did it through both individual leadership development and connecting to the organizational context. For neighborhood-focused leaders, the community is where they live, their immediate surroundings. For others "community" may mean an ethnic group, or people affected by a common problem or concerned with a common issue. Regardless of how "community" is defined, intentional focusing on the connection between the individual leader, her or his organization, and the community or issue to be changed adds tremendously to the potential impact of grassroots leadership development programs, and hence to any investment by funders in grassroots leadership.

Tom Adams formerly directed leadership programs at the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, a national nonprofit that works with community-based organizations, and is currently a consultant and writer in areas of leadership, leadership transitions, and organizational development for nonprofits.

Finding 4)

Grassroots leadership works best when the decision to invest in developing grassroots leaders is a deliberate strategy, i.e., intentional, proactive, and consistent.

How to get more from the time, money, and talent invested in grassroots leaders, and who benefits.

There are many people and organizations involved in grassroots issues. At times, all of this activity looks unconnected, somewhat disorganized and perhaps even random. This may or may not be the reality in your community. It certainly doesn't have to be. This guide provides you with a variety of examples of communities and groups which are taking actions to proactively support grassroots leadership development. They are acting because they know that everyone wins when people decide together how they are going to invest in grassroots leadership development.

Not every leader or community has access to needed support—institutional or financial. In many cities, suburbs, and rural areas across America, grassroots leaders are isolated and struggle to get started. Many give up or never take the risk of becoming involved. Our civil society counts on that decision to become involved, however. Time pressures, fear, family commitments, and the growing complexity of life at all levels do make the decision to get involved a bigger deal in today's brave new world.

The work of support organizations and others demonstrates the power and the potential of an intentional decision to engage in the development of grassroots leadership as a strategy. This decision allows the community to go beyond the efforts of individual grassroots leaders. The product becomes much more than the sum results of all of the involved leaders and organizations, despite their individual importance.

A deliberate approach to leadership development work means to be intentional, proactive, and consistent. It also means to

view grassroots leadership development as a distinct strategy with proven methods and outcomes. In communities that are truly intentional about grassroots leadership, there are many benefits to the whole community, including:

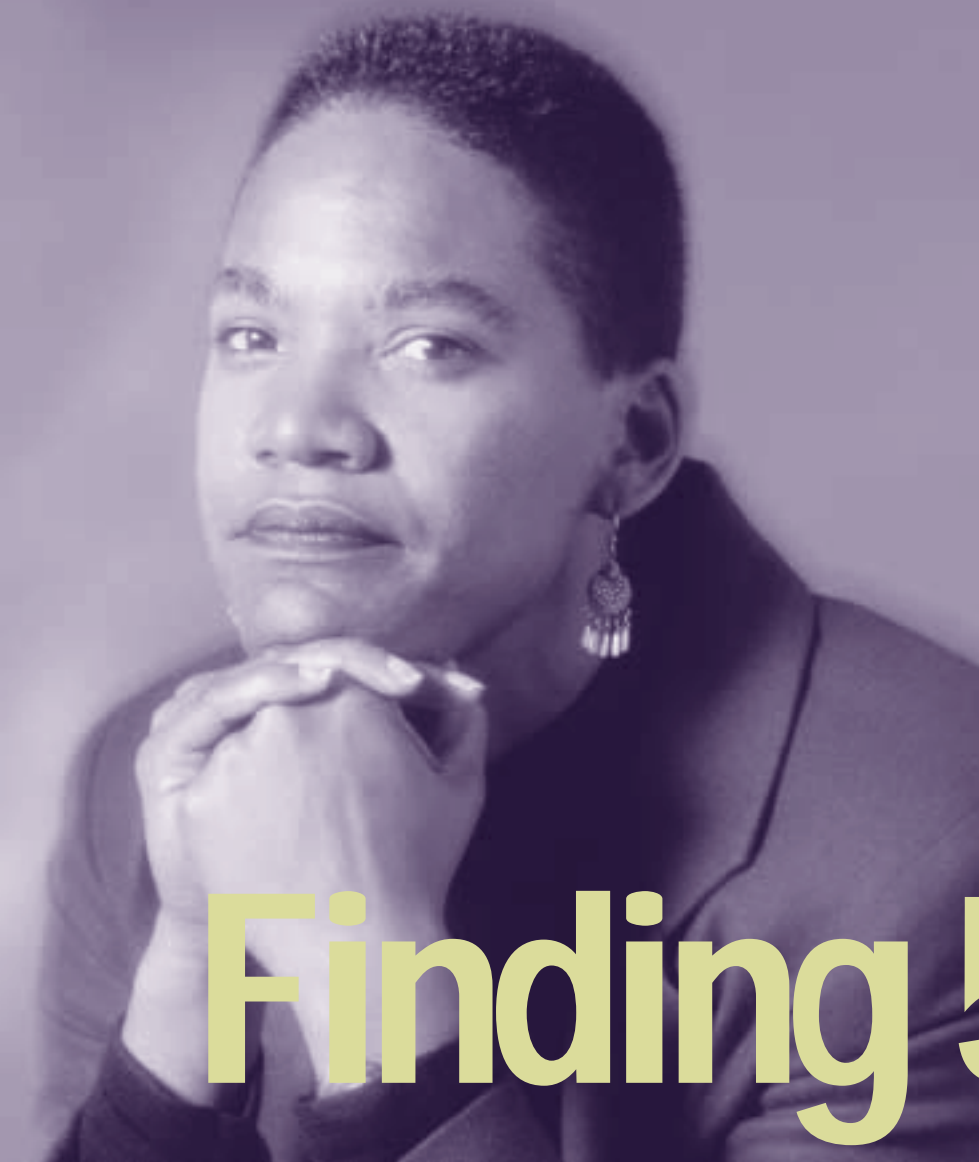
- *More people get involved at all levels—on their street or block, in the community, and in coalitions and service organizations;*
- *New leaders have access to support and can learn from peers and see what is possible;*
- *A pipeline of new leaders is developed representing ethnic groups or constituencies previously not part of community decision making;*
- *Long-time leaders continue to grow, are renewed, and often serve longer and better without burn-out or isolation from their constituency;*
- *New talent is developed for mainstream leadership positions and more of a grassroots perspective is present in business, nonprofit, and government management.*

The support provided to Joan Robinett in her work in eastern Kentucky would not have existed without a conscious decision by a group of local leaders. Intentional in this case meant “just do it!” Tired of the politics of exclusion and control by a few, and seeing the impact the existing style of government was having on communities and their vital services, a group of leaders formed an organization to challenge corruption and the lack of open government process in eastern Kentucky. The Democracy Resource Center,

with the support of regional and national funders, assisted Joan on her initial issue of toxic dumping and then worked with her as she broadened her interests and became a developer of other leaders and organizations in her region.

There are many ways to be deliberate about grassroots leadership. Establishing a support system that is multi-faceted and responsive to local needs is a proactive approach. As a strategy, leadership development has explicit goals, proven methods, replicable and measurable results—and powerful impact. Being proactive often involves the formation of organizations dedicated specifically to developing grassroots leadership, in the hope that such leadership will flourish across a broad range of community-based organizations.

Consistency—of focus and in the commitment of time, energy, and money—is required for this proactive approach to work. The Campbell study reminds funders that grassroots leaders have different needs than other types of leaders. Supporting the development of grassroots leaders takes more time and effort than running a program for positional or mainstream leaders. The journey is often a long one. Building and strengthening community well-being is an ongoing need not served well by periodic and inconsistent attention. There are certainly benefits to one-time and short-term programs or funding. However, the complexity of the issues, and the competing demands for time and energy of volunteer citizens, support organization staff, and funders reinforce the importance of consistent involvement over the long term.



How to more fully involve funders in supporting grassroots leadership development.

Finding 5)

Grassroots leaders encourage funders and support organizations to take actions that support the efforts of grassroots leadership.

How support organizations can be most helpful and what leaders might expect and ask from them.

The days of the “super hero” leader going it alone are over. Many would argue such singular leaders never truly existed to begin with. In modern society we need each other more than ever. Our issues are more complex. Our leaders and followers come from many backgrounds and cultures. Building a community means reaching and involving a wide variety of citizens at the local level. This is messy work, not done through a neat formula. It requires courage, compassion, and openness to change.

For grassroots leadership development to grow as a deliberate strategy, commitment from support organizations and funders is essential. The Campbell report developed a set of recommendations for funders which

demonstrates how the time and dollars invested in grassroots leadership development can be maximized. The report also concluded that access to effective support organizations is a key ingredient to a successful grassroots leadership strategy.

An obvious finding? Perhaps, but think about grassroots leaders and organizations you know. What access do they have to a support organization? To flexible funding that meets their needs? We can, and should, ask how support organizations can be helpful and what kind of funding is most needed. Let's take a look at what the study found about characteristics of effective support organizations and funders working with grassroots organizations.

How to plan a strategy that is deliberate because it is intentional, proactive, and consistently used.

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

The Campbell study found conclusively that support organizations of all kinds play an important role with grassroots leaders and their organizations. Because of the often unique backgrounds of grassroots leaders and their distinct needs, such individuals (and their organizations) work in isolation and face challenging issues without access to support. The 23 organizations studied (and others like them) represent a range of approaches to supporting grassroots leadership. Some provide training in a university or community college setting. Others provide training, networking, and on-site technical assistance for leaders working on certain types of issues or from a particular philosophy or point of view. Some support organizations are referred to as intermediaries because they play a “go-between” role related to the transfer of services and/or money between funders and national networks, and local organizations. For our purposes, intermediaries are included as one type of support organization. These organizations represent the early development of a much-needed “system” of support for grassroots leaders and organizations.

Some of the most easily identifiable and broadly known types of support organization include:

- Local or regional community-based organizations offering training and /or technical assistance to grassroots leaders and organizations
- Local or regional service organizations that offer leadership development opportunities
- Local educational institutions offering courses or programs for grassroots leaders and organizations
- Regional or national organizations committed to social action (often involving community organizing and leadership development)
- Regional or national organizations focused on service, education, and/or community building.

How to reach new allies and broaden your network and resources.

The number of support organizations is growing because of the increasing needs of grassroots leaders, their organizations, and funders. Given the limited resources available to grassroots leaders and their organizations and their frequent disconnect to mainstream institutions or resources, it comes as no surprise that support organizations help fill a large hole in the educational infrastructure of most communities. These organizations provide a wide range of services and training opportunities, which include networking with other leaders, skill training, organizational capacity building, issue research and strategy development.

The following are the important characteristics of an effective support organization or intermediary as seen by grassroots leaders and organizations:

- The support organization's mission and reputation reflects the grassroots orientation and commitment to the community. The organization shares the general philosophy of the grassroots leaders' organizations, and is of a size and structure that relates well to local leaders and their communities.
- The organization's programs are reliable sources of leadership resources and support, and have inclusive, diverse operations that inspire trust in members of the local community. Credibility and a track record of following through with the community in which it works is key to the organization succeeding with leaders on difficult, often divisive issues.
- Leadership development projects within the organization have the capacity to focus simultaneously on individual change and on group support and development.
- The organization offers a mix of leadership training, organizational capacity building, peer-to-peer networking and support, and on-site technical assistance.

Effective support organizations are able to recognize and work with leaders and groups at major institutional change points, which provide critical, often “do-or-die” opportunities to expand leadership and strengthen the target organization. Such change points include:

- *the creation or start-up of an organization;*
- *major leadership transitions;*
- *major growth or down-sizing; and*
- *times of crisis.*

FUNDERS

Funders, like support organizations, directly and significantly impact grassroots leaders and organizations through their policies and practices. The Campbell study looked at the role of funders and their behavior to identify what helps and what gets in the way of supporting grassroots leadership development as a strategy.

Those familiar with grassroots leadership initiatives recognize the episodic, almost fad-like coming and going of funding support for grassroots leadership. Often, a community or a foundation has within it a champion for the cause of local issues. When such a proponent leaves, funding from the organization often diminishes. The Campbell study noted that some of the weaknesses of the grassroots leadership development efforts are inherent to the history and mission of such efforts; others result directly from the episodic and limited funding available. Actions which might reverse these weaknesses include:

- Increasing attention to organizational development and planning about outcomes and community indicators by leadership development organizations;
- Investing in support organizations at a scale appropriate to grassroots organizations (i.e., neither too small or too large) and avoiding difficulties in relating to leaders (too large) or in growing too slowly to keep pace with needs (too small);
- Moving beyond a focus on isolated community projects to linking issues and levels of change in a community;
- Making more time and resources available for organizational renewal and for development of support staff; and
- Clarifying the role(s) of foundations and other funders in grassroots leadership development efforts.

How and with whom funders choose to get involved in grassroots leadership development makes a big difference in outcomes and sustainability. The study also identified some areas that might assist funders in thinking about their long-term approach to grassroots leadership development.

Like grassroots leaders, each funder has motivation and interests. The Campbell findings suggest that funders of all stripes shape their giving programs to make the greatest impact as part of a specific leadership development strategy. As support for grassroots leadership development continues to expand, the way in which grassroots organizations, support organizations and funders collaborate will continue to change. As this study indicates, the individual and collective effectiveness of all involved parties is interconnected. Experience shows the great potential to be realized when funders work with grassroots leaders and support organizations. Additional observation and reflection will continue to shape the practice. The Neighborhood Funders Group, an affinity organization of foundations and other funders involved with community-based change efforts, is publishing a Community Organizing Tool Kit with useful materials that further advance this work.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

Involvement with grassroots leaders and their issues changes most people and their organizations. It's nearly impossible to be around the infectious energy and "can do" confidence of local leaders and not be motivated. Profound personal and community change occurs every day all across America because of the courage and tenacity of grassroots leaders. There will always be an element of struggle and challenge in grassroots efforts. The Foundation's field study gives anyone interested a powerful guide to reduce the struggle for support and funding. These findings offer an opportunity for each of us—leaders, trainers, funders, and other stakeholders—to examine how we think about and practice grassroots leadership development. Our belief is that attention to these lessons will broaden the beneficial effects of current efforts and expand the lives and communities touched by a deliberate use of grassroots leadership development as a strategy.

In our next essay, Regina McGraw of the Wieboldt Foundation offers a compelling demonstration of just how grassroots leadership development is a crosscutting issue for funders. Most funders make grants in specific issue or focus areas. Grassroots leadership development has vital application across all issues and has a place in most foundations' grantmaking as one of the essential strategies for affecting issues and community change.

Additionally, given the mounting demands on philanthropy, most funders are aggressively looking for synergy and leverage for their investments. The issues that we are concerned about—health care, homelessness, youth development, safe neighborhoods, quality schools, elimination of hate crime and discrimination, among a host of others—are unavoidably linked to grassroots leadership. Regina shares her experience and that of a number of funders who have stepped up their investment in grassroots leadership development as a way to increase the crosscutting benefits from their grant making.

The Crosscutting of the Grassroots Leadership Strategy

By Regina McGraw

As a funder, I am blessed with access to knowledge—I read the New York Times every day, and receive enough public policy reports to outfit a small but impressive library. As a funder of community organizing, I am blessed with access to people who want to make a difference in their communities. They are lively, smart, courageous, and insightful—the kinds of people that give living rebuttal to all of the stereotypes of class and race that play out daily on our television news and talk shows.

I also want the communities of Chicago that are home to low- and moderate-income residents to have the same access to power and decision making as their wealthier fellow residents. I want to support strategies that work to build a more healthy community—strategies that will stand the test of time and continue long after the “flavor of the month” description and prescription for a social issue have moved on to make room for others.

The Wieboldt Foundation's funding of community organizing meets this need. As community leaders decide what issues are important to them, and develop plans to solve them, they bring to the issue a perspective that is often missing in the most hallowed halls of our major universities and think tanks. You may know this from your own funding. Or you may be interested in solutions to specific challenges—health, community safety, youth development, school reform, poverty alleviation—whatever your foundation's guidelines suggest are the critical community problems your foundation was founded to address. Why should you fund community leadership?

I can give several examples of why I think the funding of this strategy will work for you—but two important points. One is that community leadership does not happen in a vacuum—it must be developed and nurtured through the work of community organizing through commu-

nity organizations. Also, development of community leadership must be in the context of building healthier communities—it is personal leadership exercised for the good of the community rather than just the individual.

As a funder, I want to know that my investment will pay off in the long term—that changes made can be sustained and enhanced. School reform in Chicago came as a result of community leaders enlisting the support of business leaders, public policy groups, and politicians and pressing for policy changes that opened the schoolhouse doors to parents and community members through the formation of Local School Council eleven years ago. By pressing for this change, community leaders agreed to work with school personnel to improve education for every child in the city. As a result of increased community leadership in the schools, test scores have improved, curriculum has been updated, schools have

been made safer, and some schools now serve as community centers where after-school programs include literacy and career training for adults.

What about other areas of public policy? After requirements are made of business or government, who will make sure they are enforced? Community leaders will. Community leaders have challenged banks to follow the community reinvestment act and provide adequate funds to low-income communities and started co-ops and mortgage-lending programs that work because the residents are invested in their success. Leaders in public housing have also challenged the notion of demolition without displacement, and given young people who live in these islands of poverty role models of adults who can stand up to the rich and powerful who want to gentrify their communities.

Strong community organizations can spend much time building community leadership, and then take on large-scale projects for meeting the needs of their communities. After years of recruiting and training leaders, a Chicago organization has turned to the broad needs of their community and built 114 affordable homes, and constructed a community center which houses child care and health programs, and serves as a place for community events.

Community leaders with years of experience in organizations can also use their organizational strength to push for change that is more far-reaching and makes more of an impact than neighbor-

hood-specific work. This has been seen in a new strategy for poverty alleviation—the successful living-wage campaigns that have united community and union leaders in fighting for better incomes in Chicago and other cities across the country.

Sometimes community leaders can surprise you with their attention to the things that matter in their communities. One community organization has begun working with members of their communities to encourage community residents to become foster parents to the abused or neglected children of their communities. After the residents become parents, they are given ongoing support. Another group, which works in a diverse community of immigrants, refugees, and moderate- and low-income residents, is working with members of the American Federation of State and Municipal Employees who work in local public assistance offices to improve services and streamline bureaucracy. These are innovative approaches, and can only come from folks who know first-hand the depth and breadth of a problem.

As I suspect you may have seen in the news, Chicago's city council passed an ordinance which allowed the police to arrest any young people who were "hanging around" a street corner or house when one member of the group was a known member of a gang. Although this law did not pass muster with the U.S. Supreme Court, a revised version recently passed the council.

Community leaders know that youth are not the enemy—they are the sons and

daughters of community residents. One community organization has set up a police-youth board that grapples with incidences of youth harassment in their community—another group has set up a series of meetings between young people and the police district superintendent. Each of these efforts recognizes the talents and skills of young people, and enables them to work with adults to address community safety.

As new issues arise, or new opportunities for change occur, who will be on the ground to spot and respond to them? Community leaders will. For the past 25 years our foundation has learned that, although community organizations may go through hard times, and staff may come and go, a core of community leadership will allow the organization to survive most hardships.

Community organizations give leaders their best chance to develop and grow. The organizations that we fund organize by enlisting and nurturing the participation of a large number of neighborhood residents, organizations and institutions, recruit and formally train local leadership; and enable local residents to develop an agenda, to devise strategies, and to carry out actions effectively to address issues. They also demonstrate innovative strategies or create new local institutions that strengthen the local community capacity; broaden their impact by working with other groups, whenever possible; are led by a board of directors that is representative of and accountable to community members; and show evidence of significant local fundraising.

These types of organizations have a core of community independence that will make them immune to following the latest trend in foundation funding, or fall prey to utilizing a strategy that worked extremely well in another community or city but does not fit their situation. I have learned this the hard way—when I suggest a strategy that I think has great potential, due to another group’s experience, the leaders always listen politely, and then fit the strategy to their situation or explain why they are trying something else. Community leaders keep funders humble.

This talk of community leadership does not get at one simple fact that I also think is important. Due to the challenges of race and class, residents of low-income communities do not have the opportunities for leadership in their jobs or political life that are taken for granted in middle- or upper-income communities. The formation of such leadership is in and of itself a societal good that is important, but a funder can make a much larger difference if this leadership is tied to community goals.

There is a story that shows this point. An official from the Department of Housing came to a housing development to hear about the dilapidated condition of the development’s apartments. One female community leader spoke eloquently in front of hundreds of people about the horrors of her apartment—no hot water or heat, roaches and rats frequently found, and paint that was peeling off the ceilings and walls. The official looked at her and said, “Let me get the number of your apartment and we’ll see what we can do.” The woman looked the official right in the eye and said, “If you do something about this development, you will be doing something about my apartment.” The personal and the political came together—the woman knew that she was accountable to her community, and valued the plight of her community as much as her own hardships. The organization that she belonged to had given her the forum for her leadership, and supported her efforts. This is community leadership at its best and most effective—and makes me proud of being a part of her, and other community residents’, leadership.

Regina McGraw *is the executive director of the Wieboldt Foundation in Chicago and a board member of the Neighborhood Funders Group.*



THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

*The Western States Center provided training to a frustrated welfare mother from Wyoming. Some years later, through her ongoing involvement with the center and its programs, **Wende Barker** had helped change how welfare works in Wyoming and had become a state legislator.*

***Pat Wilkerson** saw many problems in the neighborhood where she bought a home. However, as a single mom it was all she could afford. She felt powerless until she and two neighbors attended a Community Leadership Institute workshop sponsored by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. Things in her neighborhood began to change.*

***Jill Carson** wondered why her neighbors in a rural area of Virginia seemed disconnected and out of touch with their proud past. The Highlander Center and its Southern Appalachian Leadership Training gave her the tools to recognize her own talents and to create an African-American cultural center in her community.*

***Joan Robinett** knew there was a lot of illegal dumping all over Harlan County. The county government denied it was a problem until Joan and her neighbors worked with the Democracy Resource Center to document 230 illegal dumps and demand something be done about them.*

*Leaders of the **Latino Civil Rights Task Force** in Washington, DC, knew that the local government wasn't dealing with problems facing their neighborhoods and Latino immigrants. Working with the National Council of LaRaza and the Council of Latino Agencies and others, these local leaders changed that.*

*In many communities, Asians, Latinos, African-Americans and whites don't always cooperate. In Oakland, CA., however, **The Center for Third World Organizing and People United for a Better Oakland** worked together to improve health and youth services for the whole community.*

***Robert Greenleaf** had a notion that service was at the core of leadership. The Center for Servant Leadership now annually trains thousands of grassroots and mainstream leaders in how to be an effective servant leader—in families, at the workplace, and in the community.*

***Cherie Brown** grew up concerned about fairness. Her faith led her to work for social justice. Fifteen years ago, she helped found the National Coalition Building Institute which has provided an intensive anti-racism and prejudice reduction training workshop for over 30,000 people on college campuses and communities across the United States and in other countries.*

***The Southern Empowerment Project** was founded to encourage grassroots organizing in the South. Today, leaders and organizers of 14 organizations work together to learn how to build stronger and healthier communities through grassroots organizing and fundraising.*

These organizations are not unique. They are a small sample of a growing network of people and organizations which provide support to grassroots leaders and organizations. Some have long and rich traditions like the Highlander Center with its pioneering work in popular education that organized and brought together civil rights workers and labor organizers beginning in the 1920s. Others are more recent, including the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, the Center for Community Change, and an entirely new generation of support groups which came into existence beginning in the late 60s and early 70s. During the past two decades, many more organizations with different approaches have joined the field, including the Western States Center, Democracy Resource Center, and the National Coalition Building Institute, to name a few.

Some organizations are dedicated to working full time to develop grassroots leaders and organizations. Others devote a part of their mission to grassroots support efforts. Examples include leadership or community building programs offered by community colleges or human service agencies.

We want to highlight this growing field and to share experiences and lessons with those who are involved. We've intentionally used a broad net in an effort to capture the range of experience and contributions that Dr. Campbell documented in her report to the Kellogg Foundation. Because support in one form or another is the common element provided through these programs, we've chosen to use the term "support organizations" to refer to entities engaged in providing leadership programs, other training, technical assistance and networking to grassroots leaders and organizations.

Some organizations are better known as intermediaries. Others prefer to be identified as leadership programs or centers. Regardless of their labels, Dr. Campbell summarized the critical role such organizations play in helping realize the full potential of grassroots leadership development as a strategy: "To reach grassroots community participants and to provide support and technical assistance to

groups and organizations attempting to sustain community-wide initiatives (systems change), ...fund well-defined, grassroots intermediary programs to run grassroots leadership programs.... We have defined intermediary to mean organizations that are credible, trusted, and capable of reaching small, often isolated grassroots groups and individuals."

Think for a minute about the changes which occurred in the communities described in this guide. Add to that list a few examples from your own experience of how support organizations have empowered people and organizations to make their communities better places. If this system of support didn't exist, there would undoubtedly be more communities in decline, more discrimination, and more polarization of America's citizens. In short, our democratic values and our belief in a free and open society are advanced daily by the work of support organizations like these.

Identities for groups emerge from practice. A growing number of architects, gardeners, draftsmen, and agriculturalists were involved in planning for green spaces and public gardens in the early 20th century. It wasn't until Frederick Law Olmstead and a few others began calling themselves landscape architects that that field got an identity, however. It's not uncommon for people and organizations doing similar work to lack a means to easily connect.

Grassroots leadership development support is a broad and growing field of practice. Even with its great diversity, this discipline would surely benefit from a shared identity. If, as a community and nation, we want to be more deliberate about our investment in grassroots leaders and organizations as the Campbell study suggests, then we're challenged to broadly define our peers and to actively share lessons learned. In an article that follows, Seth Borgos reminds us that narrow definitions of support organizations only hinders our work.

There are many people and organizations involved in providing support to grassroots leaders and organizations. There are also

major differences in philosophy, values, and methods among the support providers. The term "grassroots" implies that the work is outside of the mainstream. Given the often fierce independence of grassroots leaders, it's not surprising that many of the organizations working with them mirror that independence and are resistant to categorization.

Borgos suggests that among the many different kinds of intermediaries that support grassroots leadership development, no single typology can capture the diverse characteristics of these institutions. "Intermediaries" (and support organizations), as he sees it, "may be classified by their geographical scope (e.g., statewide, regional, national, global), by the kinds of organizations and communities they serve (e.g., faith-based, low-income, rural, immigrant), by their issue focus (e.g., housing, health care, civil rights, environmental justice), or by the primary services they provide (e.g., leadership training, research, policy analysis, staff development, technology)."

There are obvious overlaps among these categories. The three previously mentioned distinct motivations (service, social action, and faith) and the triple-focus approach suggested by the Campbell study add further explanation to why such a wide variety of approaches is needed to promote the personal development, organizational development, and community and issue building goals of grassroots constituencies.

Most programs or initiatives aimed at providing support for grassroots leaders involve some combination of networking opportunities, training, or technical assistance. There are also many different ways to offer learning opportunities and services. Borgos suggests that a useful way to summarize the field of practice is by looking at the relationship of support organizations to grassroots organizations. He suggests three primary types of structures and relationships: "Networks typically have a membership structure or a comparable mechanism that defines a discrete set of organizations to be served. In many cases, the network is the primary source of organizational support for its members and

the level of structural accountability is fairly high. Multi-purpose support centers serve a wider and less clearly delineated universe of organizations than networks, and the bonds between intermediary and constituent tend to be weaker, or at least more variable. Specialized intermediaries provide a narrower set of services, generally defined by issue or function. They sometimes have a membership structure but more often follow the support center model.”

If this is taken as a beginning definition of support organizations and other important support providers are added, we begin to have a sizeable field of practice. Borgos intentionally focuses narrowly on organizations directly involved with grassroots leadership development and community or issue organizing. But we can look at this more broadly. Those involved with community development, for example, see leadership development as a key role for success. There is distinct support and an intermediary system for community development organizations. The same is true for the environment and other issue areas. Many organizations in these areas are providing support for grassroots leadership development.

Money is an important ingredient for grassroots leaders and support organizations. At times, it causes strains between local leaders and “intermediaries.” In addition to other activities described above, some support organizations are involved in providing financial support. For some this is a small adjunct role; for others, it is a primary role. Funders have created collaborative funds, which often have some support or intermediary functions. This also adds to the field of practice.

Other major supporters of grassroots leaders come from service agencies and educational institutions in local communities. Much of the work of the Girl Scouts and similar organizations involves leadership development. Many human services and welfare-to-work programs have a component focused on building self-esteem and being involved in community. Churches and congregations have their own approaches to leadership development, which sometimes reaches grassroots citizens.

Training & Networking

Training occurs in a variety of settings and from different perspectives. The participant's point of view influences the content of the training. Some programs teach basic skills of leadership; others put those skills in the context of community building or issue organizing, which adds analysis and strategy development as key content areas. Some offer stand-alone workshops; others promote weekend networking and topical training; and still others present a structured leadership development program over an extended period of time.

Networking is a key component of most training for grassroots leaders. Many programs emphasize the value of learning from peers and experiential education. Some of the organizations involved in leadership development encourage networking by hosting annual or semi-annual gatherings of “graduates” of leadership or mentoring programs or of people working on common concerns or issues.

Some of the ways that training is delivered include:

Leadership Programs - Big category! It ranges from activist-oriented programs offered by organizations like the Center for Third World Organizing or the Highlander Center to efforts of organizations that serve both mainstream and grassroots leaders (e.g., the Greenleaf Servant Leadership School and some of the corporate-sponsored community leadership programs such as Leadership Fort Wayne or Leadership Kentucky). In between are programs offered by universities or community colleges or citywide organizations like the Citizens Planning and Housing Association in Baltimore or the Kansas City Neighborhood Alliance.

Training Workshops - A host of organizations provide workshops or learning opportunities for grassroots leaders. Many of these offer more formal leadership programs as well as topical trainings. In addition, coalitions, associations, community organizations and community development corporations, national and regional organizations, the United Way and other human services agencies provide training that fosters grassroots leadership development. There are also training programs available for community organizers and executive directors of grassroots organizations. (See Curriculum Ideas for more details).

Networking - For some, networking is a collateral benefit of attending a workshop or program and isn't structured. For others, networking is the primary purpose and the focal point of such events. For nearly everyone, however, providing networking opportunities for leaders is a key part of their training.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is also a broad field. It includes organizations like the Western States Center and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, which provide a range of organizational development assistance to grassroots leaders and organizations. Support includes start-up of organizations, board development, fundraising, strategic planning, and financial management. The Western States Center and other issue-focused organizations provide assistance in researching issues and analyzing policy questions that impact grassroots communities. There are also support organizations that provide technical assistance to leaders from distinct ethnic populations and around issues of discrimination and access to services, local decision making, and resource allocation. The National Council of LaRaza and the Center for Third World Organizing are examples of this type of support.

Besides formal programs or technical assistance, many organizations and individuals provide informal mentoring or coaching for emerging and experienced leaders. Experiential learning is the preferred approach for many support providers.

Seth Borges offers a succinct and helpful introduction to this complex and at times controversial topic. The Campbell research found unequivocally that effective support and intermediary organizations are essential for the growth of grassroots leadership development as a strategy for community change. The need comes from two directions. First and foremost, grassroots leaders and organizations by definition have fewer resources and more challenges in getting things done. It's inefficient and doesn't work to design training and support for each organization and leader. Grassroots leaders need a system of support that relates well to them and adds real value to their work.

The second need fueling the growth of support and intermediary organizations comes from us as funders. We can't respond or relate to each small organization. We recognize the need to invest in people and organizations and can't very well do that directly ourselves either. Seth's article offers fresh insights on ways these organizations work and some of the questions we as funders face in deciding our goals and where and with whom to invest.

No One Goes it Alone: Types and Roles of Intermediary and Support Organizations

By Seth Borges

Among funders concerned with grassroots leadership development, the status and role of support or intermediary institutions has always been a bone of contention. Intermediaries, by definition, are situated at a certain distance from local communities, which creates the potential for cultural conflict and resource competition. Furthermore, intermediaries have often been imposed on grassroots organizations to serve extrinsic interests—notably the interests of funders. To avoid these pitfalls, some foundations have chosen to restrict their support to community-based organizations, assuming that if these groups are adequately funded they can buy any

assistance they need on the open market. This strategy is often reinforced by a political orientation that deems local, indigenous institutions to be more authentically democratic than intermediary formations.

Such categorical judgments have tended to obscure rather than illuminate the actual role of intermediaries—the ways in which they amplify the strengths of grassroots organizations and compensate for their limitations. While intermediaries perform a host of services, their most critical functions can be grouped into four broad categories:

Developing and housing technical resources. *Few grassroots organizations can afford to maintain skilled staff or consultants in all the areas they need (e.g., research, fundraising, media work, policy analysis, popular education). By housing these capacities and allocating them on the basis of opportunity and need, intermediaries allow the field to take advantage of economies of scale and deploy limited resources efficiently.*

Promoting and diffusing innovation. *Innovations in community organizing and leadership development tend to germinate at the local level— often simultaneously in different communities— and are gradually adopted by peer organizations. Intermediaries accelerate this diffusion process by providing a marketplace for new ideas and by targeting the most promising innovations for assessment and dissemination. They also serve as a conduit for ideas drawn from academia, policy institutes, advocacy groups, and other sources outside the immediate circle of grassroots organizations.*

Broadening the scope and sophistication of leadership development. *The great strength of grassroots organizations— their rootedness in specific, local communities— may also constrict the range of experiences and influences to which leaders are exposed. Intermediaries that are committed to leadership development provide a “safe space” for leaders to encounter people from diverse communities, to see the world through different lenses, and to engage new and sometimes challenging ideas.*

Attracting new resources to grassroots organizing. *Effective intermediaries speak two languages— the language of the local communities that comprise their constituency, and the language of funders, intellectuals, and policymakers. As a consequence, they are able to communicate the “case” for grassroots leadership development and the resource needs of grassroots organizations in a form that is comprehensible to foundations and other donors. They can also translate the highly coded expectations of funders into terms that are more transparent to community leaders.*

There are many different kinds of intermediaries that support grassroots leadership development, and no single typology can capture the diverse characteristics of these institutions. Intermediaries may be classified by their geographical scope (e.g., statewide, regional, national, global) the kinds of organizations and communities they serve (e.g., faith-based, low-income, rural, immigrant), their issue focus (e.g., housing, health care, civil rights, environmental justice) or the primary services they provide (e.g., leadership training, research, policy analysis, staff development, technology).

For funders, however, perhaps the most important consideration in assessing an intermediary is its functional and structural relationship to its constituency. Networks typically have a membership structure or a comparable mechanism that defines a discrete set of organizations to be served. In many cases, the network is the primary source of organizational support for its members and the level of structural accountability is fairly high. Multi-purpose support centers serve a wider and less clearly delineated universe of organizations than networks, and the bonds between intermediary and constituent tend to be weaker, or at least more variable. Specialized intermediaries provide a narrower set of services, generally defined by issue or function. They sometimes have a membership structure but more often follow the support center model. For purposes of illustration, the attached chart provides a sample of national and regional organizations in each category.

In addition to the generic criteria one applies to all organizations—mission, capacity, and effectiveness—here are some distinctive considerations that funders should keep in mind in evaluating an intermediary institution:

Is there a relationship of trust and mutual accountability between the intermediary and its constituent groups? (This relationship may be formal and structural, as is the case in many networks, or it may be informal and “cultural,” as is often the case with support centers.)

Do the agenda and priorities of the intermediary reflect the primary needs of its constituency? When the intermediary communicates with the foundation world on behalf of grassroots organizations, is it conveying an accurate message or reinventing it in ways that serve its own institutional interests?

Does the intermediary provide sufficient value-added to grassroots organizations to justify the resources it absorbs? Does it help its constituents not just to perform certain activities but also to become better organizations?

Is the intermediary primarily concerned with technical support or is it also committed to the development of leaders? Is the leadership development function confined to discrete training activities or is it integral to the mission and program of the organization?

As this list implies, an effective intermediary must strike a balance between serving and leading its constituency. It should be faithful to the immediate interests of grassroots organizations, but it should help them to situate those interests within a broad and inclusive vision of community. It should be deeply respectful of grassroots leaders, but it should also agitate them to grow and change.

Seth Borgos is currently the senior program officer of the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock. He serves as co-chair of the Funders Committee for Social Change.

Networks

National: Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Farmworker Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, Gamaliel Foundation, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), National People's Action, Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO).

Regional: Midwest States Center, Northwest Federation of Community Organizations, Northeast Action, Southern Organizing Cooperative, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, Western Organization of Resource Councils.

Multi-Purpose Support Centers

National: Center for Community Change, Center for Third World Organizing, Midwest Academy, Applied Research Center.

Regional: Western States Center, Democracy South, Highlander Center, Grassroots Leadership.

Specialized Intermediaries

Community Catalyst, Data Center, Grassroots Policy Project, Environment and Economic Justice Project, Environmental Support Center, Progressive Technology Project, Southern Empowerment Project, We Interrupt this Message, YouthAction.

In our next essay, George Knight gets into the details of working with real life organizations and leaders. Based on his 25 years of experience in managing capacity-building services to grassroots leaders and their organizations, he lays out four areas of priority for capacity building. Knight shows the importance of the organizational considerations in designing and delivering a triple-focus approach. The improvements in leadership tenure and organizational effectiveness for Neighborhood Reinvestment's network of organizations achieved through this approach are impressive and noteworthy.

Creative Capacity Building: Developing and Supporting Effective Grassroots Organizations

By George Knight

Would you continue to fund an organization that had hired and lost four executive directors in five years? This painful example in a Southwest community-based organization was part of a larger leadership crisis Neighborhood Reinvestment faced some years ago. In the early 1990's, the NeighborWorks® network of over 200 community-based organizations we work with was hemorrhaging executive directors. For 40 percent of these organizations, the executive director was in that position for two years

or less. The costs of this painfully high leadership turnover were extraordinary. Talented, committed board leaders gave up and slipped away, sometimes abruptly, sometimes through an extended period of absences. Remaining community leaders became more and more frustrated at their organization's inability to deliver on the simplest of goals.

Funders lost confidence and pulled back. Major cities—Charlotte, Atlanta, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Los Angeles—

and smaller cities and rural areas—Cattaraugus County, NY, Midland, TX, Santa Fe, NM, Clearwater, FL, North Las Vegas, NV—had little or no capacity to revitalize troubled neighborhoods because of this leadership crisis.

This troubling experience forced the organization I lead to confront this reality. We decided to increase our investment in capacity building and have become deep believers in its power. The results speak for themselves and have

demonstrated to us the positive benefits such an investment can have. The median tenure of executives has increased from 3.0 years in 1991 to 5.2 years in 1998. And importantly, since long tenure by itself doesn't translate to more results, we've quintupled our activity in neighborhoods—new homeowners, homes repaired, increased units of affordable housing.

Experienced funders know the strengths and realities of most grassroots nonprofits. They've seen organizations struggle through many organizational life-cycle stages: start-up, explosive growth, crises, losing or saying good-bye to founders and important volunteer leaders, and drastic loss of funding. All nonprofits struggle with one or more of these issues. For grassroots organizations, there are typically fewer available resources in the organization and community. Additionally, there is always the complexity of local circumstances, history and people. This essay looks at some of the lessons from Neighborhood Reinvestment's over 20 year experience with community-based nonprofits and a joint leadership transition project funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). It will share lessons learned around the following areas we believe key to any capacity building strategy: 1) organizational structure (mission, goals, roles); 2) leadership, leadership fit and leadership transitions; 3) organizational life cycle and managing growth; and 4) systems and technology. While our focus is primarily organizations with small staffs and modest budgets (\$250,000-\$5 million), many of the lessons have broader application.

While capacity building has become one of those "umbrella" terms whose meaning is often in the eye of the speaker/writer, this writer is going to use it as a descriptor of activities that assist an organization enhance its long-term institutional ability to achieve its mission with grace and élan. In reflecting on Neighborhood Reinvestment's experience, especially based on the WKKF's multi-year investment in capacity building, I would divide capacity building into two parts: organizational and individual. Both are important and very much intertwined



with each other. However, they can and should be separated for analytical and intervention planning purposes.

When our Pueblo, CO, affiliate executive director and board chair attended a weekend workshop on board leadership and organizational effectiveness, new skills and knowledge were applied immediately. Inactive board members were visited and asked to renew their commitment or retire from the board. As a result, the organization got stronger and went through a period of planned growth that increased the benefits to the neighborhoods they served. Likewise when an organization

Individuals bring a bundle of skills, experiences and personal attributes to any leadership position, staff or volunteer. Any approach to building individual capacity needs to start with self-assessment of the fit between skills, experiences, and personal attributes with the mission at hand. Naturally, part of self-assessment is careful listening to others who can observe you and provide feedback. Skills and experience both count and can be expanded when nurtured through access to training, mentoring, reading, and the reflection that occurs from networking with peers and more experienced leaders. Like any educational experience, the

Likewise when an organization is struggling with high executive turnover or other signs of organizational distress, we look first to the leadership to see how well it's coping with the situation and its capacity to handle the situation.

is struggling with high executive turnover or other signs of organizational distress, we look first to the leadership to see how well it's coping with the situation and its capacity to handle the situation. The dynamic interplay between individual leaders and the health of their organization is obvious and a key ingredient to any capacity building approach.

individual's readiness to learn and the ability of the organization structuring the learning opportunity to meet current important needs are keys to success.

Addressing what is threatening the organization's ability to do its mission and refocusing on how to best build on its strengths is among the most useful forms of capacity building

Supporting an organization in building an effective leadership team often means strengthening or creating a sense of partnership—where colleagues working together can feel that each individual is genuinely contributing to the whole. No one leader or organization can go it alone. Grassroots organizations need relationships with many other institutions and individuals to enhance their capability to achieve their goals. Board leaders, funders, interested parties can all help in the partnership building aspects. Brokering effective partnerships is exciting when the two organizations discover common ground. If that leads to a willingness for mutually beneficial action, both organizations succeed and enhance their capacity to achieve their individual set of goals.

The final piece of a capacity-building strategy—and some might say mundane until it leaps up and bites you—is the area of systems (business processes) and technology. Here most of us shy away from the nitty gritty often involved in enhancing an organization's capacity to “process the paper” or today “process the electrons,” account for the money, etc. As organizations grow, their systems (accounting, communication and information methods, office and facilities management, personnel and staff development, etc.) become unsuited to current needs. Refitting them to the current/near future will increase capacity and probably release resources for other activities, as well as increase organizational efficiency. Often this requires assistance

from outsiders who have greater experience and familiarity with the options for improvement. Frankly, a funder's willingness to pay the bill is often the difference between analysis paralysis and getting on with the task. In today's world this often means increasing both computing power and restructuring the organization's processes to take advantage of the awesome power provided by the computer. It's not easy. Systems and technology offer real power that most grassroots organizations will need to grow and succeed. Moving through the 21st century means relooking at our systems, processes and application of technology to achieve our goals. Failure to do so is risky and costly for everyone involved.

Several years ago, I was concerned that I was having trouble reading at night. After worrying about eye cancer, brain tumors and similar catastrophes, I visited an eye doctor who indicated that it happens about my age with practically all human beings. Leaving the doctor's office, I sorted through my emotions of feeling relieved about being told I was older. And that's probably the first, and in many ways, most significant point in building organizational capacity—some of the change that needs to occur is “normal” as the organization grows older, environments change, and technology marches on. And successful outcomes are both about what's changing (new eyeglasses were easy) and how we go about making the change useful (brighter reading light, AARP membership) as a platform for the next stage of development.

Grassroots leaders make a tremendous commitment to their community and cause. They overcome some incredible odds. Getting the most from this gift of time and energy is important to everyone—present and future leaders, their organizations and the communities and issues they are working to better. Change for people and an organization is inevitable. Capacity building is the service and gift we as funders and support organizations can offer grassroots leaders. It is in no way just compensation for what they contribute to our communities every day. In committing to capacity building, we'll contribute to increasing the justice quotient and access to critically needed services in our communities. Capacity building for grassroots organizations is a serious business and deserves serious attention.

George Knight is the executive director of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, a publicly funded support organization for a network of community-based neighborhood and housing development organizations. Prior to becoming executive director, he managed and delivered support and technical assistance to community-based organizations.



Why Support Organizations are Growing.

Think back twenty years or so. The term “intermediary organization” was rarely, if ever, used and in any case, it didn’t refer to today’s support landscape. The practice of supporting grassroots leadership development has grown enormously over the past twenty years.

The Campbell study offers an important clue as to what has fueled this growth. Grassroots organizations are typically small, initially issue- or geography-specific, and led by people who often have little formal training or experience as leaders. While self-reliance can be a virtue, experience shows that grassroots efforts are more effective when they aren’t isolated and if they are connected to peers with opportunities for learning.

Expectations of grassroots leaders and organizations have changed as well. Operating the Little League or providing opportunities for neighbors to socialize requires a certain skill. But communities ask and expect much more from grassroots leaders today. Think about major opportunities or needs in your community. How are failing schools revived? **By increasing parent involvement and, in the case of charter schools, by direct parental control.**

How are laws or practices that discriminate against the disabled, immigrants, or gays changed? **People organize and take action.**

How do communities facing disinvestment and decline turn around? **Neighbors get involved and form working relationships with banks, government, and foundations to**

rebuild a healthy community. Neighbors start nonprofit businesses that renovate abandoned homes or build new ones, redevelop business districts, or start new companies to create jobs.

Grassroots leaders and organizations are facing a set of challenges unique in the history of our nation. Increasing racial and ethnic diversity and growing gaps in income and economic well-being give grassroots leadership in this century a different role and increased importance. Our field of practice is growing because no one has simple answers to the challenges of the 21st century and most leaders need to be connected to and supported by something more than themselves and their organization.

Funders need support organizations and intermediaries. Many national funders are too large to relate to individual grassroots organizations. The staff required and administrative costs of building relationships and making grants to hundreds—and in some cases potentially thousands—of organizations is daunting. Additionally, congressional oversight and public scrutiny limit how much of their money funders can invest in overhead and administration. They need support organizations and intermediaries to carry out their mission in a responsible way.

Some funders recognize both the importance of investing in grassroots leadership and the key role support organizations play in meeting the distinct learning needs of grassroots leaders. Timothy D. Armbruster, president of a

\$110 million local foundation in Baltimore, explains his decision to invest in creating and supporting the Resource Center for Neighborhoods in Baltimore: “Our foundation has made neighborhoods and neighborhood development a priority since our inception over 25 years ago. We believe strongly in the power of ordinary citizens to provide the leadership to keep neighborhoods strong and to partner with business and government on strategies to overcome some of the difficult issues older urban areas confront. Developing a resource center that serves the neighborhoods and their leaders is one of the soundest investments we’ve ever made. The leverage is incredible. How do you quantify the contribution of new leaders who get nurtured and developed and the pride that comes with neighborhood successes and problems solved? The impact is staggering. If Baltimore didn’t have a resource like this, we’d sure want to create it. From a funder’s vantage point, it’s an investment whose return keeps growing.”

Besides providing training and technical assistance, making grants is another key function of some intermediary organizations. Some foundations are created specifically for the purpose of providing funding to grassroots causes; their principals are often people who want to help but who don’t want to make all of the decisions on whom to fund and how.

This is a field of practice that is needed and growing. Recognizing the realities of support organizations for grassroots leaders and organizations and proactively managing their effective growth is our responsibility and a great challenge.

Terri Langston of the Public Welfare Foundation offers a number of concrete suggestions for funding grassroots leadership efforts. In this essay, she addresses both the art and the mechanics of grassroots funding. She argues that both are important and warrant attention from funders looking to be savvy investors in this area of grantmaking. Terri offers suggestions on how funders can build mutually respectful relationships with grassroots organizations and provides texture to the Campbell finding about what's unique about grassroots leaders and supporting their development.

Diamonds in the Rough: Funding Grassroots Work

by Terri Langston

Two broad categories govern the process of funding: first, the art of grantmaking that addresses issues and deals with people and organizations; second, the mechanisms a funder sets up to process the applications and get the money to grantees. To become skillful in funding grassroots work, staff members need to be open, innovative, and flexible within both categories.

Grassroots work challenges traditional habits of grant makers. It is important to get beyond the presentation of the application and to distinguish between packaging and substance. Many grassroots groups don't have the staff, technological capacity, or time to develop a well-wrought proposal. While you won't always see a sophisticated, polished description of the work and articulation of the issues, people at the grass roots can give you a truer reflection of the problems than you could get anywhere.

The presentation may also reflect the lack of formal organizational structures in certain grassroots groups. The program officer encounters a handful of committed people, in some cases organizations, operating out of someone's home, with low to no technology, and no other fund-

ing to speak of. That can be true when funding the early stages of movement building, as opposed to established institutions. One needn't be shy about funding movement building. Often that's exactly what grassroots groups are about.

The art of grantmaking will, however, get a measure of the passion of the leadership: the intensity of their feelings about the issue, the depth of their knowledge, the use of "we" instead of "I", the perception of their own strengths and weaknesses, and a reasonable assessment of what they can do about the issue. Assessing these features requires intense listening and mature judgment on the part of the program staff. Site visits, an essential part of good grantmaking, need to be made by someone who has a sense of the range of possibilities for working with grassroots groups and can see their potential. Do the groups have a strategy, can they make a difference, who are they connected to in their community? To get at these questions, put people at ease and let them describe what's going on. Straightforward talk and getting to know several members of the staff and board will yield the information to form a solid opinion.

The leadership of grassroots organizations and movements is crucial. Though their presentation may not be slick, pay attention to where they are, who they represent, and their connection to the issues. Never think that an awkward presentation or apparent lack of sophistication can be equated with the lack of ability to perform the work well. The more one does site visits, the more one sees just how sophisticated grassroots organizations are.

Some foundations' budgets for site visits are limited, especially if they fund in a broad geographical area. That's where cooperation among funders can make a real difference. Checking in with local or national funders doing work similar to yours, exchanging impressions and information, and even asking them to visit a group for you are ways that can maximize funders' capacity.

How friendly a foundation can make the mechanisms of grantmaking to grassroots groups will determine a large part of its success. While we don't like to think of ourselves as bureaucratic, we inevitably veer that way. It is a lack of time and resources, not a lack of accountability, that makes a complicated proposal

process a barrier to grassroots groups. It is important to remember that grassroots groups tend to be extremely accountable. They must be very sensitive to the misuse of funds, because in small communities such misuse rightfully resounds and makes reputations. Their sometimes over-zealous reporting and questions suggest a possible lack of confidence with regard to financial presentations, reporting, or relationships with funders. A foundation helps by being accessible and by being clear: use forms that demonstrate what information is needed and how to present it. The National Network of Grantmakers' forms, both for narrative and financial presentation, are excellent examples. Such standardized forms save the group much time and anxiety. Another helpful move is to give them extra money to get their books in order, to purchase a computerized financial tracking system, or to get an external review of their finances, which funders should accept in lieu of audits. Another option is to encourage them to ask local auditors for a pro bono audit. Of course, a group can realize any or all of these improvements if it is given general support grants, those too rare but crucial grants that build the capacity of the organization.

A funder should be willing to work with an organization that has no IRS 501c(3) status or is in the advance ruling period. Foundations must work with their own counsel to be sure all they do is within the law; that said, the space within the law provides several options. A foundation may make sponsored grants or may exercise expenditure responsibility. Most of what is required with expenditure responsibility mirrors practices that are already in place in many foundations. Foundations tend not to use expenditure responsibility as much for domestic as for foreign grants, yet it is a clear and effective way to make grants to any charitable project lacking the usual nonprofit tax status. A union, for example, or another 501c(6) membership organization, doing a charitable project, may receive a grant in this way. It is important for foundation

staff members to be knowledgeable and willing to offer technical assistance to advise groups about the law.

A foundation should provide such information in a clear and accessible way. Its web site is a natural place for this information, but it should be printed and sent upon request to any callers as well. Therefore, a foundation must encourage an understanding of the needs of grassroots groups within its administrative staff in the interest of the grantees.

Finally, the process of a grant maker giving a group its first grant can have a tremendous impact on a movement or an organization through its own technical assistance and by providing access to good support centers. In these ways, grassroots groups can learn to present themselves more effectively to other foundations, those who may consider only well-wrought proposals. Foundations themselves are effective when they provide proposal-writing workshops for grassroots groups. Or they may put groups in contact with centers whose credentials and reputation merit recommendation. On the other hand, foundation staff should warn against the expense and waste of time that can be brought on by fundraisers whose credentials and experience are unproven.

Time may be required to develop the internal skills and mechanisms to recognize and accept grassroots proposals. For some, however, it will require only a shift in perspective. The effort is well rewarded, as funders become partners in strengthening and supporting local capacity to address community needs.

Terri Langston has served as the program officer for Health and the Disadvantaged Elderly Initiative for the Public Welfare Foundation for 13 years. She serves on the board of Grantmakers for Health.



Rinku Sen offers two concrete examples of how grassroots organizations crossed challenging racial divides to create and sustain multi-racial coalitions. The compelling case studies from Oakland and Los Angeles offer noteworthy insights for any leader of our society interested in how we find our shared common purpose and goals, while honoring and building on our rich and diverse cultures and traditions. As the Campbell report emphasized, getting beyond problem-solving to larger systemic issues is key to long-term community change. Understanding and working across racial lines is a key to achieving the increased community well-being she describes. Her essay offers a set of principles for developing effective leadership development programs for grassroots leaders. These principles are consistent with the five Kellogg Foundation findings and offer practical and proven counsel for funders and trainers.

Appreciating Diversity and Building Effective Bridges: The Grassroots Leader's Challenge

By Rinku Sen



Language and cultural barriers keep many U.S. residents from their full potential for civic engagement. Most individuals have little or no interaction with the public or private institutions that govern their lives, and the vast majority of public and private institutions cling to an ancient concept of American identity.

In communities of color—Asian, African, Latino, Middle Eastern, or indigenous, both U.S.-born and immigrant—community organizations and their leaders build the last buffer between the regular struggling person and crushing poverty and violence. These are the agents of today's most important institutional transformations, as well as the no less important creation of common identities out of diverse constituencies. The best of these organizations are very explicit about their racial politics and questions, and they devote attention to the needs of each distinct constituency within the organization. Leaders negotiate cultural terrain and build lasting relationships through a process of consensus and conflict, until a new identity emerges for the group as a whole. Organizations like People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) and the Korean Immigrant Workers Association

(KIWA) have won major victories in their cities and states by creating lively, sophisticated public policy campaigns that deal directly with the implications of racially biased policy and institutional practice.

In the late 80's, PUEBLO was created out of a Campaign for Accessible Health Care led by 15 immigrant and American-born leaders, who won 30,000 free immunizations and set up a new county program. In the 90's, PUEBLO's Latino, Anglo, Asian and African-American members won the first lead prevention and treatment program west of the Mississippi. PUEBLO eventually made the leap to more controversial issues, building a multiracial campaign committee to fight for police accountability in Oakland, going far beyond case-by-case disciplinary action to win new powers for the Community Police Review Board and forcing the Oakland PD to pay misconduct lawsuits out of its own budget. Recently, PUEBLO's youth group, Youth of Oakland United, hooked up with four monoracial youth organizations to form the Kids First! Coalition. This Coalition ran a successful ballot campaign establishing a new \$90 million public fund for youth services.

Korean Immigrant Workers Association started in Los Angeles during the aftermath of the Rodney King riots. KIWA has successfully consolidated a working class identity among Korean immigrants, and developed the Korean community's ability to act in alliance with surrounding communities. KIWA started out giving voice to Korean workers, who constitute 75 percent of the entire Korean population, to fight for fair treatment and pay in Korean restaurants. Since one-third of such restaurant workers are actually Latinos, KIWA's membership expanded to include those workers early in the organization's development. KIWA employs a sophisticated media strategy along with direct action and negotiation to educate Koreans and others about the real conditions facing Korean immigrants, and their interest in larger public policy issues. KIWA's education campaign on Proposition 209 (the anti-affirmative action proposition) is credited with transforming the 75 percent Korean support for 209 polled several months before the election, to 75 percent opposition reflected in the final vote!

issues. KIWA's education campaign on Proposition 209 (the anti-affirmative action proposition) is credited with transforming the 75 percent Korean support for 209 polled several months before the election, to 75 percent opposition reflected in the final vote!

Leaders in these organizations understand the dynamic issues and traditions of their own communities, even as they act as the threads that weave constituencies together. That function has never been more important in the United States than today, when institutions are stretching themselves to address a huge variety of racial/ethnic and generational differences. What are the factors that enable effective work in today's diverse community? First, even while they attend to the practical needs of multiple constituencies, like translation or emergency advocacy, these organizations also integrate cultural and political education with their issue campaigns and other programs. That education enables the organizations to examine racism, cultural domination, and immigration policy up front, building the capacity of their members to deal with high levels of unresolved conflict and the root causes of that conflict. They use a varied pedagogy in formal and informal settings to advance such education, important for groups with uneven literacy or multiple languages needs.

Second, effective organizations design their policy proposals and plans to support diverse communities for the long haul. They begin to standardize common elements to their policy proposals, for example, with consistent demands simplifying certification requirements for public services, or by applying racial equity criteria to guide policy choices. Each individual or organization's prolonged exposure to another constituency's challenges and strengths contributes to a seamless collective consciousness that takes diverse approaches into account without disrupting the organizational capacity to move institutions.

Third, organizations that operate from a multiracial and multicultural framework understand and accommodate the need for each constituency to have space and time alone, to address some of its specific issues through monoracial formations. As we see in KIWA's case, even single-constituency organizations, if they are built consciously as part of multiracial movement, greatly enhance the potential for cooperation across identity lines. Leaders of multiracial alliances or organizations are often also leaders of monoracial organizations in the same town or city, creating a bridge between their constituency and the rest of the community, often arguing for multiracial alliances among their own people. Even monoracial organizations are usually multicultural, and still required to build a common identity, for example at the

Leaders of multiracial alliances or organizations are often also leaders of monoracial organizations in the same town or city, creating a bridge between their constituency and the rest of the community...

Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence in New York, organizing Chinese, Vietnamese and Koreans on policing, immigration and welfare-to-work issues.

A most unusual combination of maturity and innovation are required by organizations that wish not only to keep up with changing demographics, but also to maximize the tremendous potential for power that emerges from effective multiracial alliances. The symbiotic relationship between an organization, its leaders, its membership (from which new leaders emerge), and its allies allows an organization to apply lessons from its past. Without the organization, a leader has no base from which to operate. Without the leader, the organization has insufficient human time, memory, and talent with which to make change. These organizations charge themselves with understanding layer after layer of a complicated society, and then to interpret each layer for its policy and community life implications. They force institutions to deal with the people affected. They get the people affected to know that they're affected. They build consensus. They write

policy. They fight and advocate. They talk to the media. They educate the larger public. That cannot possibly be a quick process, no quicker, certainly, than the time it took for seemingly sudden demographic changes to take shape in our neighborhoods, which actually resulted from years of immigration, labor, and urban planning decisions. These people have got a lot to do, and they get very little support for doing it. An investment in this arena, filled with people accustomed to doing a lot with a little, would have tremendous impact on evolving communities.

Foundations will have to apply a more hands-on approach to cultivating excellent proposals from grassroots organizations. Many are already short-staffed and under-resourced, and program planners will need significant support to produce fundable proposals. Multi-year funding, with technical assistance and other resources made available, will make a tremendous difference in programmatic longevity, and in producing effective leadership and change. With even a small amount of breathing space created by reducing fundraising requirements, organizations can conduct the documentation, reflection, and evaluation of their work, supporting adaptation and collaboration, so we can repeat those successes all over the country.

Rinku Sen is the former co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing. She has also served on the Allocations Committee of the Vanguard Public Foundation, the Bannerman Fellowship Program, and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.

Spence Limbocker is executive director of the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG). The NFG members are experienced funders of grassroots organization and leadership development efforts. Here, Spence shares concrete examples of decisions by funders and strategies that are working around the country. He concludes with some specific steps that funders interested in initiating or expanding support for grassroots efforts might take. If these findings and the hundreds of stories behind them make sense to you, you won't want to miss this closing call to action.

Making the Case— Supporting Grassroots Leadership Development

By Spence Limbocker

If funders are going to play a role in making our democracy work for everyone and all communities including those most disadvantaged, our investment in grassroots leadership development will need to grow. The lessons from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation study add weight and promising details that demonstrate both why and how we can step up this commitment. The need is clear; the strategy works. It's time for leaders, funders, organizers, trainers and capacity builders to unite in making the case and delivering on expanded leadership and healthier communities across America. Much is happening; much more is needed and within our power. Can we seize the moment and make the case?

The United States is going through one of the longest sustained periods of high economic growth and low inflation ever experienced in this country. While most people in the United States are seeing their incomes and assets grow, the quality of life in many urban and rural com-

munities has continued to decline. The litany of systemic issues is well-known and often recited—poor schools, widespread drug and alcohol addiction and related crime, a mismatch between job requirements and available workers, low wages, unsafe housing and neighborhoods, to name a few. The social fabric of many communities is challenged by tensions and misunderstandings as ethnic and cultural diversity increases. Fewer people have or make the time to be involved in their community or to vote at a time when our society requires bold and committed leadership to face the challenges of a new era driven by technology.

This persistence of poverty and deterioration of community life in the face of growing wealth intensifies the strain in neighborhoods and communities across America. Disparities in income are growing. By any reasonable definition of poverty, some 60 million Americans, or almost 20 percent of our population, don't enjoy the opportunities and benefits of first class citizens.

Foundation giving is at its highest level ever and is predicted to expand to unprecedented levels in the next few years. However, many in the foundation world are frustrated with their institution's inability to effectively address the challenges of strengthening communities and other issues. Some leaders in the funding world have become convinced that these unmet needs can only be dealt with effectively by rebuilding our civil society, expanding democratic participation and developing strong and effective local institutions and grassroots organizations. Their collective experience argues that none of the stubborn, persistent, and life-draining issues our country faces will get resolved without increased attention to and support for grassroots leadership development.

The Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) is a membership association of over 200 grantmaking institutions that support a broad range of community-based organizations and community strategies. Our membership consists of

public foundations, community foundations, family foundations and corporate giving programs. Most NFG members have supported community revitalization activities for a number of years and one of the most important lessons they have learned is the importance of grassroots leadership development and the effective participation of local residents in planning for and implementing community revitalization activities. As indicated in the preceding essays, there are many ways to work intentionally to expand grassroots leadership and strengthen community problem-solving capacity.

One strategy many of the NFG member foundations have found effective for leadership development is through community organizing. In a recent survey of NFG membership, nearly 50 percent stated that they funded community organizing activities. Discussions with our members point to a steady increase in investment in community organizing over the past four years (See sidebar for more on community organizing as a leadership development strategy.)

A few of our members have recently gone through internal planning processes that lead to their focusing a greater percentage of their funding on community organizing as a leadership development strategy. Here are two examples:

- (1) The Hyams Foundation in Boston, after several years of reflection and assessment of their grantmaking, developed a new mission statement and funding priorities in 1998. One of the new priority areas is civic participation that has a specific focus on supporting leadership development and the support of emerging community organizing efforts in the Boston area.
- (2) In September 1999, the Board of Trustees of The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation approved a new funding program "Pathways Out of Poverty." The foundation statement of philosophy reads in part: "Increasingly, we have come to see community action, education, and economic participation as critical to moving low-income Americans

toward greater prosperity." The funding goal is "To enhance the variety, geographic spread, power, and effectiveness of the community organizing field in order to strengthen and sustain the involvement of low-income communities in democratic processes of social engagement."

Both of these foundations have made the decision to focus significant resources on supporting the development and participation of leaders through community organizing.

Other foundations have long-standing track records of supporting grassroots leadership development efforts. Among them are:

- *The David and Lucile Packard Foundation traditionally has placed a strong emphasis on supporting leadership development through their Neighborhoods Program in low-income communities in California.*
- *The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, through its Program for New York Neighborhoods, has provided funding for ACORN to train and develop low-income leaders in the Bronx.*
- *The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation has provided support to a large number of mainly rural community organizations in the South for a several years. It also provides significant organizational development support to these groups.*
- *The McKay Foundation has supported the development of community organizations that are pursuing strategies to create access to economic resources and political power.*
- *The Campaign for Human Development has been one of the major supporters of community organizing in the country. In the past 30 years, it has invested over \$300 million in low-income community organizations.*

Despite the success and growth of investment in grassroots leadership development and community organizing, for many funders the decision to become involved in this type of funding is not easy. Some foundation staff and leadership will dismiss or never fully consider this approach because they are not familiar with the full range of possible ways to get involved. They may have zero or limited experience or a narrow definition of what it is based on media or scary anecdotes.

Some are perhaps personally uncomfortable with some aspect of the strategy. They may, for example, be reluctant to support advocacy and grassroots citizen action, particularly when it involves efforts to enable and support low-income constituencies to participate in the political process. There may be a reluctance to be involved in any grassroots organizing efforts that involves conflict and confrontation.

Grassroots leadership development usually encourages those most affected by the issues to be involved in developing and implementing the solutions to the problem. In many cases this will require mainstream or positional leaders to change and to give up or share their control over the decision-making process. For some, there is a reluctance to become involved in efforts that implicitly or explicitly challenge the status quo.

Despite these quite normal and expected concerns, an increasing number of funders are making new commitments to supporting grassroots leadership development. The good news is that there are many ways to become involved. As the findings from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation reveal, grassroots leaders are driven by a passion that goes beyond self-interest. For these leaders, there is often a distinct motivation and higher purpose that fuels their commitment to involvement. A commitment to service of others, to social justice and social change, and/or actions based on faith or spiritual beliefs are the driving forces for grassroots folks and their organizations.

Given these distinct and different motivations, funders don't have to stretch beyond their comfort zone to find a way to support rebuilding communities and the social fabric of our nation. Foundation leaders from every background and ideology have found a way to support grassroots leadership development. Since it is difficult, if not impossible, to bring about lasting change in our most distressed communities without an investment in grassroots leadership development, and because the values and quality of life of all communities are threatened by this growing gap in wealth and services, funders are encouraged to revisit how they can support grassroots leadership development.

One simple question perhaps offers a framework for funders considering a first-time commitment or for those already involved who are reviewing their commitment with an eye to doing more. That question is: Given our mission, how can we best invest proactively in grassroots leadership development in the communities and areas of community life we are committed to improving?

Sometimes this question comes from a concerned program officer; other times from a board member or senior manager. Here are some suggested steps that might assist you when your organization reflects on this or a similar question:

- (1) Review the organization's current grant priorities. Are there activities that directly or indirectly support developing community leadership, improving community, and/or strengthening democratic participation? If so, what's working or not working? If not working, brainstorm ways you could see your organization supporting its current priorities better by considering an investment in developing community leadership.
- (2) Examine your institution's internal mission statement, value statement, and other core documents. What does the foundation wish to accomplish in its funding? Determine if supporting leadership development and organizing fits into the values and mission of the institution.

- (3) If this self-assessment concludes that support of grassroots leadership development is or could be a valuable and appropriate strategy for the foundation, become more familiar with the many approaches to leadership development and community organizing. Talk with colleagues whose foundations support these activities (NFG can help you identify funders whom you might want to talk with) and meet with grassroots leaders and staff or board members of training or support organizations involved with grassroots leadership development in your community. Take a team of board and staff on site visits to organizations or funders involved in the kinds of activities you'd like to consider. (Stretch your comfort zone a little when deciding which organization(s) to visit if your organization tends to be somewhat risk-averse.) Attend conferences that include workshops on this strategy and read other resources on leadership development and organizing.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Community organizing is one of the oldest and most proven strategies for involving citizens usually left out of the system. It also is a tried and true method for solving some of our most pressing social problems. Reverend Robert Linthicum, of World Vision International, defined this strategy: "Community organization is that process by which the people... organize themselves to take charge of their situation and thus develop a sense of being a community together. It is a particularly effective tool for the poor and powerless as they determine for themselves the actions they will take to deal with the essential forces that are destroying their community and consequently causing them to be powerless."

It is very difficult to categorize and define community organizing. The field is tremendously diverse and is always changing. Community organizing is primarily identified with a number of national or regional networks. The most well known are: The Industrial Areas Foundation, Pacific Institute of Community Organizing, Gamaliel, Direct Action Research and Training, and ACORN.

The major approaches taken by such organizations include:

1. *Direct or individual membership* groups that tend to be small and use geographically based efforts to organize individual people.
2. *Issue-based coalitions* that mobilize public interest groups, unions, and other established blocs to address a common concern.
3. *Institution-based organizing*, which is rooted in and brings together local religious and other institutions to work on behalf of a community.

The key principles of community organizing are:

- *A Participative Culture* - Significant time and resources are devoted to leadership development to enlarge the skills, knowledge, and responsibilities of the members. "Never do for others what they can do for themselves" is known as the iron rule of organizing.
- *Inclusiveness* - Community organizations are committed to the principle of developing membership and leadership from a broad spectrum of the community.
- *Breadth of Mission and Vision* - Every issue that affects the welfare of the community is within the purview of community organizations. Most integrate a diverse range of issues and link them to a larger vision of the common good.
- *Critical Perspective* - Community organizations seek to change failed policies and non-performing institutions. In many cases they are the only force in the community that is promoting institutional accountability and responsiveness.

- (4) Develop an internal strategy for your foundation to begin to discuss and plan for ways to get involved. Every foundation is unique and will require a different set of strategies and approaches. Talk with other colleagues who have developed similar approaches inside of their foundations. They can assist you in developing talking points. You should also look for internal allies in your institution to work with.
- (5) Connect the approach you are recommending directly to outcomes you are seeking as a funder. This can take many different forms and have different starting points. You may conclude that the best way to get started is to support specific issue work that a community organization is doing, or a leadership development program for grassroots leaders in specific neighborhoods. Another entry point would be to support networking and issue research for staff and/or leaders. Be thoughtful about what you call this initiative from the outset. Several foundations that support community organizing, for example, are more comfortable naming it citizen participation or constituency building.

- (6) Other steps for your internal strategy will depend on who is already supportive and the decision-making process in your foundation. There are peers at all levels in the funding and foundation world who have embraced this approach. Reach out for advice or guidance if you need it.
- (7) Once there is a commitment, start at a scale and level of activity that is manageable and with leaders and organizations in which you have confidence. If there is resistance, build support incrementally through solid early decisions.

Making the case for funding grassroots leadership development and community organizing will be different for each foundation. There are resources and colleagues who can help you develop a strategy and the case. Rebuilding our communities and sustaining a democratic and civil society requires leadership from everyone. Investing in grassroots leadership development is an opportunity to exercise leadership with long-term impact at many levels.

The self-confidence and skills leaders develop change lives and the destiny of families and communities. Organizations are created and sustained that strengthen the quality of life, social fabric, and inclusiveness of our communities. Perceived intractable problems are addressed and often resolved.

To us the case is clear. We hope we've convinced you there is a case or given you support for decisions you've already made. A lot is riding on our leadership and decisions. (For more information about the Neighborhood Funders Group, contact NFG at (703) 448-1777 or visit our web site at <www.nfg.org>.)

Spence Limbocker is the executive director of the Neighborhood Funders Group and worked previously for the Campaign for Human Development.

As foundation staff and leaders struggle with questions related to their funding priorities and vent their frustration with past funding efforts, some are looking at supporting community organizing as a key grassroots leadership development strategy.

One of the reasons that some foundations have reevaluated their funding strategies is that they have seen the success of community organizations in contributing to the revitalization of low-income neighborhoods across the country. Community organizing is an effective strategy for empowering ordinary people to bring about positive changes in their environment. Many local communities have also identified community organizing as the most effective strategy for training community leaders. As community organizing groups have grown and prospered, more and more grassroots leaders have turned to community organizing as their primary tool for developing community cohesion and for influencing the future of their communities.

Recently, in almost all issue areas of foundation concern, community organizations have been essential to achieving results at the state and local levels. Community organizing successes include tangible and significant programmatic and policy changes. Community organizing has also resulted in dramatic increases in democratic participation by citizens who previously had not taken leadership roles in their communities.

The field of community organizing is very diverse and encompasses a wide variety of approaches, philosophies, and organizational structures. For a more in-depth discussion of community organizing read the "NFG Community Organizing Toolbox" which will be published in the spring of 2001.

PRACTICES THAT WORK

There is a rich diversity of approaches and settings in which we provide support for grassroots leadership development. Because this is a relatively young field, little is codified or uniform. Without a professional association or a network that unifies the wide variety of philosophies and approaches to grassroots leadership development, there is little cross-fertilization of practice.

For these reasons, it's not entirely possible in a guide like this to capture the richness of how we offer support to grassroots leaders. The following examples are offered as illustrations. We hope they will encourage more discussion and sharing across the various boundaries of the emerging support system.

The Triple Focus in Action

The Campbell study points to the synergy formed and positive benefits produced by connecting training and technical assistance for the individual and the organization, with the community or issue change goals. For some support organizations, that's a standard operating principle. For others, it's an intuitive practice, often unspoken. For still others, it's a new idea that makes sense. For everyone, it's a challenge.

The triple-focus approach is an ideal. It's often achieved after building a relationship through "stand-alone" skill training with an emerging leader or an organization. Here are some examples of how a few support organizations built to the triple focus and some of the obstacles they encountered along the way.

Resource Center for Neighborhoods, Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA), Baltimore, MD

Grassroots leaders in Baltimore get support from CPHA's Resource Center for Neighborhoods (RCN) in a number of ways. CPHA is a nonprofit membership organization committed to the use of citizen action to develop the best quality of life for all the people of Baltimore. The Resource Center for Neighborhoods is composed of three focus areas: training, assistance and information, and neighborhood action. RCN fosters inter-neighborhood collaboration and networking, and serves as a first-stop support center for leaders and neighborhood organizations. RCN offers training, community organizing, leadership development, and additional resources to community activists, nonprofit boards, volunteers, and professional organizers.

Leaders and potential leaders typically connect with CPHA in one of three ways. Some have a CPHA organizer assigned to their neighborhood or hear about CPHA from an involved neighbor. Others attend one of a dozen or more half-day training sessions offered two or three times a year on topics identified by neighborhood leaders. Some need help on a specific neighborhood issue and call CPHA directly.

Once a neighbor makes contact with CPHA, there are a number of learning opportunities from which to choose. In addition to the previously mentioned half-day workshops, CPHA has developed a curriculum around two issue areas—Crime and Drugs, and Neighborhood Marketing. Depending on the needs of the neighborhoods, some leaders or potential leaders sign up as a team from their community and attend four-to-eight session topical programs. Skills and strategies are developed, and a lot of networking occurs with others who have dealt successfully with these issues.

A more intensive learning opportunity is the year-long leadership program called the Leadership and Community Building Fellowship. This program consists of three parts: a three-session self-assessment and strategy clinic to develop learning goals and determine readiness for the program; a six-month series of training on leadership skills and strategies held on one Saturday and one evening per month; and a four-month practicum where skills are applied towards a specific goal and project developed in the preceding classes. Teams of two to four people from eight to 12 neighborhood associations or coalitions attend annually. Besides the in-class learning opportunities, participants have limited access to technical assistance for their organization while in the workshop.

Here are some examples of how this system of learning and support opportunities builds towards a triple focus:

Joyce Smith moved back into the neighborhood where she grew up. She purchased a newly constructed home, however her community had many abandoned homes, and neighbors felt unsafe on the streets. Joyce got involved with the neighborhood group, learned about CPHA and began attending training workshops. When a leadership fellowship was started, she was in the first class. Soon, she began applying the skills she was learning to her neighborhood, and she was offered a position working full time for her neighborhood center. She developed more opportunities to lead and to learn. The next year she again attended the fellowship with a team of three new leaders from her neighborhood. The following year she encouraged others to participate in the program. With the help of her neighbors, she initiated an area-wide planning process to improve the community. In the process, Joyce applied what she had learned about vision-setting and planning. Today, her neighborhood and nearby neighborhoods are working together to implement this plan. Over a five-year period, Joyce moved from attending training workshops to applying new skills in developing additional leaders and creating a plan for her community.

Thomas Cherry is a deacon of a small church in south Baltimore. A developing neighborhood association turned to him for organizing help. He became acquainted with leaders who had never worked in a neighborhood group before, and was asked to be part of their team. He agreed. As a result of their participation in the Leadership and Community Building Program, the minister and the new leaders decided to work together to open a neighborhood center to serve as a site for community youth meetings and activities. This project expanded the skills of the participants, gave their organization a focus and provided a new resource for the community.

Leaders from several neighborhoods in less distressed parts of the city attended a series of workshops on neighborhood planning and marketing. They soon realized that the local government was not investing much public money in their neighborhoods. With the help of CPHA staff, they formed a Healthy Neighborhood Alliance and began to advocate for more state and local resources. This is a textbook example of leaders taking their learning and applying it first in their own neighborhoods and organizations and then moving to bring about city-wide policy change.

Western States Center

The mission of the Western States Center is to “build a progressive movement for social, economic, racial, and environmental justice in eight Western states.” The Center works on three levels to reach this mission: strengthening grassroots organizing and community-based leadership; building broad-based statewide progressive coalitions; and encouraging a new generation of citizen leaders to run for public office and to engage in the public policy process.

The Center works through a number of major programs, several of which intentionally use a triple-focus approach. The Community Leadership Training Program (CLTP) works with established and emerging grassroots leaders and their organizations. It provides training, leadership development, and strategic organizational assistance. CLTP includes an annual four-day training session for more than 400 community leaders, an intensive year-long organizing and leadership development program, and targeted technical assistance to organizations across the region. Similar to the experience of Baltimore’s Citizens Planning and Housing Association, Western States Center has found that the four-day annual training becomes a feeder for leaders and organizers who want to learn more through the year-long intensive program.

Two other programs of the Center also link local leaders and their organizational issues with a broader community change agenda. The Western Progressive Leadership Network supports the development of permanent, multi-issue statewide coalitions through training and organizational development support. Besides using a triple focus, this program intentionally advocates ongoing relationships among organizations with similar goals and values rather than reactive, crisis-driven issue cooperation.

The Center’s Research and Action for Change and Equity (RACE) Program supports research, education, and action on race-related issues at the community level. It includes a “dismantling racism” training program, and a partnership project combining issue education with strategic convening of organizations working towards racial justice. Race also helps to focus organizational development within communities of color.

Here are some examples of how the Center's programs have advanced the development of leaders and organizations:

In Wyoming, **Wende Barker** got involved as a frustrated welfare mother seeking to change the welfare system. After years as a grassroots leader, she was elected to the state legislature. She's now a positional leader with extensive grassroots experience and ties.

In Idaho, **Jen Ray** first got involved as a leader in her community. Over the years, she attended several training sessions with the Western States Center. She eventually became the executive director of the Idaho Women's Network, which works on systemic issues such as disability rights, gays and lesbian rights, and welfare reform.

Jim Hansen was a former legislator with no experience in organizing or running an organization. When he became the director of the United Vision for Idaho coalition, he signed up for the year-long Advanced Leadership/Mentorship Program (now called The Western Institute for Organizing and Leadership Development). Through this program he received organizational development assistance, mentoring and specific training and technical assistance on how to staff an organization and build alliances and coalitions.

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation

The Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation (NRC) is a public nonprofit that provides training, financial resources, and capacity building to a network of more than 200 organizations. Neighborhood Reinvestment has over 25 years of experience in designing and delivering training and technical assistance to grassroots leaders and organizations that work in partnership with business and government.

The approach to training at NRC has evolved over the years, at times emphasizing specialized training based on role (board presidents, executive directors, community organizers, etc.) and at other times working to enhance generic skills applicable to many positions. The current approach that has proven most effective involves training combined with telephone and on-site technical assistance.

National Training Institutes are held over a week and offer more than 50 training sessions of varying lengths (from one day to all week). These Institutes are held four to five times annually in different parts of the country. Approximately 700-1000 participants including grassroots leaders, staff, and other volunteers typically attend. The advantage of the Training Institute approach is that it offers a great menu of choices to leaders of all types, and provides extraordinary networking opportunities. It has also proven more efficient not to try to have stand-alone trainings on all possible topics. The curriculum includes skill building for leaders and staff; organizational management and development topics; and specialized training in community organizing, affordable housing and economic and community development.

NRC has also developed a specialized training program for grassroots leaders called the Community Leadership Institute. This three-day weekend brings together 200-300 grassroots residents. The agenda is a mix of storytelling, workshops, testimonials, action planning, leadership films, field trips, and roundtables. Residents of the host community are actively involved in planning both the event and the interaction with local leaders. Experiences aimed at recognizing and affirming leaders' talents and skills combined with organizational action planning results in a bridge to the triple-focus approach. As one participant commented: "The most important thing I'll bring back is the idea that everyone has an asset to share with the community; everyone is a potential leader."

These training opportunities focus mostly on individual learning. Where possible, however, teams from an organization are encouraged to attend. Through its staff and consultants, Neighborhood Reinvestment provides technical assistance to its member organizations and seeks to connect individual learning with organization and community building through its system of technical assistance and capacity building. Areas of service provided include board development, expanding community leadership, neighborhood strategy, housing and real estate expertise, financial management and resource development.

As with many support organizations, the challenge for Neighborhood Reinvestment is balancing scale and coordination. As more leaders and communities are served, it's easier for the training and technical assistance to become disconnected, somewhat diluting benefits of the triple focus. On the other hand, the opportunity for leaders and organizations to participate in consistently available, high-quality training, and to combine it with technical assistance strengthens the organizations and expands local leadership.

Here are some examples of grassroots leaders who found value in Neighborhood Reinvestment's approach:

Pat Wilkerson says that her attendance at Community Leadership Institutes (CLI) sponsored by Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation was really the "turning point" in her development as a neighborhood leader. She went first by herself and two more times as part of a team of three from her neighborhood. What was special about the CLIs was the variety of workshop topics and the chance to learn what other leaders around the country were doing. "We saw the benefits of being organized and how others were doing things . . . When I went by myself it was interesting, but when we all three went together it was amazingly motivational. It was like coming out of Sunday school. We were all fired up and ready to go." For this team, skill building, setting their organizational priorities and a plan on their issues came out of attending these Institutes.

When **Thomas James** became the board chair of a struggling organization in Richmond, Virginia, he was relieved to learn about the services provided by Neighborhood Reinvestment. He and other new leaders he recruited attended Training Institutes and special workshops for organizations in transition. Additionally Neighborhood Reinvestment had an assigned staff person and a consultant providing organizational development and neighborhood planning assistance. "We needed help on a lot of fronts", Mr. James explained. "The training and other help we got from Neighborhood Reinvestment helped us pull through. We are a healthy effective organization today as a result."

CHALLENGES WE FACE

The Campbell study of a sample of Kellogg Foundation grantees looked at what kinds of support and support delivery were most useful to grassroots leaders and organizations. Conclusions were reached through surveys, focus groups, site visits, and discussions at networking conferences with grantees. The Campbell study concluded that support organizations that work effectively with grassroots organizations have certain defining characteristics. These support organizations:

- Have an orientation and commitment to working with grassroots leaders and organizations;
- Hire staff who inspire trust because they respect people, are open to all, and work well with people from diverse communities and backgrounds;
- Offer a mix of practical leadership development approaches that include networking, training, and technical assistance;
- Use the triple-focus approach and make the connections between the individual's development needs in relation to their organization and community change goals; and
- Are useful resources to leaders and organizations in dealing with major change (organizational start-up, crisis, leadership transition, growth, etc.).

The Campbell study also points out that size is an issue in the effectiveness of support organizations. Organizations that are small and organizationally fragile have difficulty providing consistent and high-quality support. Large organizations risk being too institutional, bureaucratic or fragmented in service delivery to serve grassroots leaders well.

In her essay *Grassroots Leadership: An Essential Strategy for Changing Communities*, former co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing, Rinku Sen, suggests that effective programs for grassroots leaders are forced to innovate because of the tremendous challenges of designing systems that can encourage and sustain grassroots leaders. The most successful programs incorporate five common principles:

1. *They understand the difference between leadership identification and leadership development.* Identification models of program planning seek out people whose authority to take leadership is already established and requires only improvement and promotion. Deep and thorough leadership development requires starting with people very early in their acceptance of responsibilities, and providing consistent support to them over time. Such programs have to be willing to take risks on people, and accept attrition and disappointment as the price that must be paid in search of the real gems.
2. *They use both formal and informal pedagogy, which is participatory and engaging for adult learners with little formal education and for groups with uneven language ability.* In addition to classroom-type training, they also require a consistent process of hands-on work and evaluation through which emerging leaders learn new skills and develop beneficial attitudes.
3. *They offer hands-on learning opportunities in ways that address current community issues as well as developing individual skills and networks.* Many public policies related to health care, education, job discrimination, environmental health, housing, and immigration, have been negotiated while emerging leaders were learning from mentors, working with their communities and reflecting on lessons for their leadership.
4. *Programs that serve diverse constituencies build their crew of staff and teachers to include the language capacity and cultural connections needed to support immigrants and other marginalized groups.* It's impossible to evaluate someone's work if you don't know the context they are coming from, or if you cannot measure their contributions against their peers'. Often diverse leaders move their communities through political changes, changes in ethnic and national identity, and generational conflicts that emerge from assimilation and resistance to assimilation. They need analytical support to understand the challenges facing their communities.
5. *They provide one-on-one evaluation and attention to growth. They measure growth by specific skills, but also in terms of confidence gained, ability to withstand high levels of conflict, productive interventions in community conflicts, accurate and accountable representation of the community, and the level of self-awareness in the leader.* Excellent leadership development programs will take participants through a consistent cycle of assessing strengths, challenges and goals; matching the participant to an assignment; assisting the participant through formal training or one-on-one coaching through that assignment; and returning to assessment and evaluation for the next step.

As the number and type of support organizations continues to grow and the importance of the field is better understood and acknowledged, how these and other challenges are faced will influence the future of support organizations.

Leadership Transition: A Strategic Moment

A lot is on the line when any organization changes its top leader. Grassroots organizations have fewer resources and less ability to bounce back from a poor hiring experience. Leaders of grassroots organizations hiring a new executive face another dilemma—there is a shortage of people prepared to lead community-based organizations and few incentives to attract new talent.

These systemic issues are what caused the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation to invest over \$2 million of its Research & Development funds in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to learn more about assisting grassroots organizations in managing leadership transitions. The lessons learned were both hopeful and sobering. Improvements in tenure and organizational effectiveness are possible by focusing on transition and other capacity building. A number of struggling organizations were improved and some transformed through attention to the executive transition process. The findings affirmed the strategic importance of making assistance available when an organization is fragile and at risk.

Much was learned about what kinds of support are most helpful to grassroots boards as they search for new leadership. As part of this research, NR developed a systematic, three-phase transition process. By assisting the board in seeing the key issues and decisions during three distinct phases—getting ready, recruitment and selection, and post-hiring—the board is empowered and the odds for a successful hire are increased.

Compensation is an obvious key to successful recruitment and retention. Competitive salaries are important; an employer-contributed retirement program is even more important, according to Neighborhood Reinvestment's study. Organizations with employer-contributed retirement had twice the tenure for staff of those without it.

Neighborhood Reinvestment's study had two other findings of note. First, most of the over 100 transitions observed were non-routine and complex. They involved a start-up, a turn-around, a founder departure or entrepreneur departure or other major organizational challenges for a grassroots board. Second, despite considerable investment in outreach and marketing, increasing the number of executives from communities of color did not occur, though a number of boards did successfully recruit a non-white executive.

There is great potential for strengthening staffed grassroots organizations through increased attention to leadership transition. Whether an executive departs or community leaders are stuck in a position too long, funders and others who want to support grassroots leadership development will find the lessons from this work of interest. (For more information, see Neighborhood Reinvestment's website at <www.nw.org>.)

CONCLUSION

Concrete, visible results are occurring across America due to the emerging relationships between support organizations, and grassroots leaders and organizations. Communities are healthier and more vibrant and inclusive. Citizens not part of the conventional systems are becoming involved and have an increasing voice in their communities. The collective power of grassroots organizations and the number of support organizations working with grassroots leaders is significant and growing.

It's an exciting time to be involved with grassroots organizations. Communities abound with new hope at the same time as they face large, complex issues. Our track record and history provide confidence and direction as to how to meet the challenges detailed in this guide. As the Campbell report demonstrates so clearly, much is possible, and much more is at stake. It is not an exaggeration to say that every community in America relies on grassroots leaders and organizations for roles that are central to the vitality of the community. Support organizations of all kinds are providing much needed assistance. The challenge is to build on the strengths evident in this work and to find ways to continue to be more deliberate about grassroots leadership development as the strategy for lasting community change.

For those of you interested in grassroots leaders skill development, please review our companion publication: *Grassroots Leadership Development: Workbook for Aspiring or Current Grassroots Leaders*. This booklet takes the reader on a journey to discover their leadership abilities and aspirations. With a very hands-on approach this workbook is a terrific tool in motivating potential grassroots leaders to take action. This resource will help you fulfill your obligation to mentor leadership within your community.

CLUSTER EVALUATION PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Organization	Location
African and American Friendship, Inc.	Mattapan, MA
ACORN Institute for Social Justice, Inc.	Brooklyn, NY
American Leadership Forum	Portland, OR
Association of American Colleges & Universities	Washington, D.C.
Delta Research and Educational Foundation	Washington, D.C.
Democracy Resource Center	Lexington, KY
Grassroots Leadership	Charlotte, NC
Highland Research and Education Center, Inc.	New Market, TN
Horizons of Mission Enterprises, Inc.	Mission, TX
Interdenominational Theological Center	Atlanta, GA
Mega-Cities	New York, NY
National Association of Neighborhoods	Washington, D.C.
National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise	Washington, D.C.
National Coalition Building Institute	Washington, D.C.
National Council of LaRaza	Washington, D.C.
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation	Washington, D.C.
Robert K. Greenleaf Center	Indianapolis, IN
Southern Empowerment Project	Maryville, TN
Southwestern Michigan Urban League	Battle Creek, MI
State University of NY - Binghamton	Binghamton, NY
Tacoma Urban League	Tacoma, WA
Virginia Polytechnical Inst. and State University	Blacksburg, VA
Western States Center	Portland, OR

Appendix A

Other Training for Support Organizations

The National Coalition Building - Offers a seven-day experiential training using a "train the trainers" model for leadership development that assists a broad range of organizations in creating more inclusive communities. The principles used in workshops on college campuses and in communities and government agencies to build bridges among people of different races and ethnic backgrounds and to eliminate discrimination are detailed in *Healing into Action, A Leadership Guide for Creating Diverse Communities*.

The Highlander Center - Works with leaders at the rustic Center in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee in giving voice to each leader's story and connecting the issues as part of movement building. Current programs have a goal to better connect the training results back to the local organization by involving organizational leaders who are not attending the training in discussions before and after the training.

Neighborhoods Inc. - Has developed a two-part 16-week Community Builders® leadership program for grassroots neighborhood leaders in Battle Creek, MI.

Leadership Fort Wayne - Offers an experiential leadership program for young people called *Youth in Action*. It's based on a skills-based curriculum developed by the Fanning Leadership Center of the University of Georgia, Athens.

Center for Third World Organizing - Has developed a flagship Minority Activist Apprenticeship Program (MAAP) which has produced over 300 organizers of color for activist organizations. MAAP is an intensive seven-week field-based internship, which includes a six-week field placement where interns get hands-on organizing experience. Interns are placed at one of several partner organizations throughout the U.S. and work under close supervision on an organizing campaign at a community organization or labor union. CTWO introduces and prepares people of color for organizing and leadership positions in grassroots activist organizations and assists with transitions from organizing to a management position as that occurs over time.

Southern Empowerment Project - Organizes a conference every two years for grassroots leaders and organizers, which uses the planning and conference facilitation as leadership development practice for participants. Also offers a week-long introductory training for grassroots leaders and organizers on how to weave community organizing and grassroots fundraising together to strengthen membership and leadership control of organizations. In the training, participants learn the why's and how's of raising funds in their own communities and then participate in a learning and technical assistance "cluster" for three years.

The Greenleaf Servant Leader Center - Has developed 10 characteristics of servant leadership and six areas of application and offers workshops in colleges, churches, workplaces, communities, government agencies and businesses on how to apply the servant leadership principles in every area of a leader's life.

Technical Assistance

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation - Has developed an approach to executive transitions in staffed organization with broad applicability to grassroots organizations. This three-phase approach builds on the strengths of the board leadership and provides a structure for managing the challenging and often traumatic times of leadership transition.

Western States Center - Works in one of its programs with issue-based coalitions within a state to form longer-term multi-issue networks and coalitions. Technical assistance involves serving as convener, fund-raising strategy and help, organizational development and start-up mentoring for staff and leaders, and issue strategy assistance.

MegaCities provides technical assistance to organizations and leaders in major cities of the country and the world around their unique set of opportunities and challenges.

The Center for Community Change provides technical assistance to residents of public housing and is planning to repeat a successful training on the impact of changes in the financial industry on low-income and minority communities and to provide follow-up technical assistance to participants in how to expand access to loans and financial services in their community.

Management support organizations and some state associations of nonprofits offer both training and technical assistance useful to grassroots organizations around organizational development issues. In the Baltimore-Washington communities, for example, the **Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations** and the **Support Center of Washington** both provide low-cost training in a range of issues facing grassroots organizations (board development, fundraising, computer and technology uses, communication and marketing, among many others). Both organizations also offer technical assistance as well.

Similarly, in the San Francisco Bay area a leading management support organization, **CompassPoint**, offers training and technical assistance on a wide range of topics relevant to grassroots organizations. Similar management support organizations and/or state associations of nonprofit organizations exist throughout the United States. Their mission is to serve all nonprofits and some of what they offer is relevant and useful to grassroots organizations and to support organizations who work with them. (See Resource Directory for information on how to reach the national organizations for a directory of local resources.)



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