

Building Alliances

**Collaboration Between
CAUSA and the Rural Organizing Project (ROP) in Oregon**

A Leadership for a Changing World Collaborative Ethnography

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PREFACE

Just by picking up this report, you have already indicated an interest in thinking about ideas around racial justice and solidarity across race, culture, and class lines. These are all tough issues that often trip up progressive grassroots movements. Our writing here covers more than a decade of success—complete with many hard learnings—in creating a more multiracial movement.

We do not share our learnings in the belief that ours is the only way. But we are proud of creating a model that has flourished under the test of time and that has allowed two very different communities (low-income, Latino, immigrant farm workers and rural, downwardly mobile, middle-class white people) that care about justice to work together and to evolve together.

We hope that our model and experience will help you consider assessing your own work for:

- The relative number of genuine cross-race, cross-class, and cross-culture relationships you maintain with leaders and members in groups outside of your own, and how these relationships could amplify your own group's power;
- The ways in which power is exercised and shared (or not) in your organization, your organizing, and in your community, and how that might build collective grassroots power;
- The frequency with which your group holds up and advances a transformational vision of what you are truly working for, which includes solidarity and racial and economic justice; and
- Your group's ability and commitment to work across race, class, and culture and to hold a frank conversation about what your group can truly offer as well as gain by this act of strategic generosity.

Here in Oregon, there is still a lot of work to be done. Farm workers continue to struggle against awful work and living conditions. Immigrants face increasingly frequent and virulent attacks as the anti-immigrant movement grows. The ranks of the poor welcome formerly middle-class families daily into their fold. Communities around the state struggle to keep schools and hospitals open and house their families and friends. Despite all of this, we are hopeful. Together we are organizing a movement that is growing. The number of people actively engaged in resistance and organizing is increasing with the skills, analysis, relationships, and structure that will create another, more just world. If any of our experiences benefit your work, we are delighted.

Ramón Ramírez
Co-Founder of CAUSA

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Overcoming Challenges, Building Collaborations

This ethnographic inquiry focuses on a successful collaboration between two important, progressive state-wide organizations in Oregon—the Rural Organizing Project (ROP) and CAUSA. ROP serves as a progressive voice in the state of Oregon, both to counter initiatives promulgated by groups such as the Oregon Citizen’s Alliance (which has sponsored local and state-wide anti-gay initiatives, as well as regressive legislation on a range of social issues) and to help rural citizens create an alternative vision. CAUSA is a state-wide coalition of immigrant-rights and Latino organizations dedicated to serving as a political voice for Latinos, immigrants, and workers.

ROP and CAUSA have functioned as allies since the mid-1990s. Together these two organizations have successfully stopped national, state, and local efforts to limit the rights of Latino immigrants and gay and lesbian citizens. As a result of their social, cultural, and economic differences and the way they frame and conceptualize each other’s struggles, the two organizations have faced significant challenges in their collaborations. But shared underlying social values and political strategies have been crucial elements in how and why ROP and CAUSA have been able to be effective allies for one another.

We hope that other organizations and individuals can examine the partnership between ROP and CAUSA—the victories they have celebrated and the challenges they have faced—and use those experiences as models for successful collaboration. To illustrate how this ROP/CAUSA relationship has worked, we look in depth here at two specific cases of successful collaboration between the groups.

A full text version of the ethnography from which this report was created is available online at: <http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/products.html>.

SOCIAL DIFFERENCES AND COLLABORATION

As evidenced by the partnership between ROP and CAUSA, successful collaboration between two organizations with markedly different memberships and concerns can be built on open communication, articulation of common interests, a clear strategy for how each organization can best contribute based on its strengths and knowledge, mutual education about the issues of the other organization, and a respect for difference of opinions and understandings of the issues at hand. Following are brief descriptions of our two organizations.

The Rural Organizing Project

The Rural Organizing Project (ROP) is a network of rural, volunteer-based human dignity groups. Its constituency is primarily white, middle-class and working class, over 35, and often college educated. Some Latino members and people of color also compose its board. While many members are native to Oregon, some have lived elsewhere in the U.S. or abroad. The membership also includes a significant number of “out” gay men and lesbians and their loved ones. ROP has been at the core of local human dignity groups that have countered several anti-gay state measures since the early 1990s. In 2004, ROP had more than 60 affiliated local human dignity groups scattered around Oregon, including locations in some of the most isolated counties in the east.

The self-identified political orientation of ROP members is “progressive,” with many dedicated to “social justice,” “human dignity,” “democratic practices,” and “fighting discrimination.” Sources of political experience that run through ROP at both the staff and local level include the battered women’s and human rights movements in Oregon.

CAUSA

CAUSA is a coalition of local Latino and immigrants’ rights organizations, primarily based in the larger urban areas of Oregon. Its constituency is largely Latino, from descendents of pioneers who settled in the area several generations ago to recent undocumented immigrants, primarily from Mexico. Many CAUSA groups serve the neediest parts of the Latino immigrant population in Oregon, and the bulk of their constituency tends to be poor and working class, with a few middle-class families. CAUSA and its participating agencies and organizations focus on a wide range of social and survival issues, including lack of education, illiteracy, and unemployment.

Participants in CAUSA articulate “immigrants’ rights,” “fighting racism,” “ending discrimination,” and “worker/labor rights” as some of their key points of struggle. Some of these social values overlap significantly with ROP’s.

INITIAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN CAUSA AND ROP

One key factor in the initial collaboration between CAUSA and ROP can be traced to the common social values, political education, and creative interest in alliance between several leaders, particularly Ramón Ramírez of CAUSA, and Kelley Weigel and Marcy Westerling of ROP.

The initial point of contact for both organizations involved these three people and their mutual abilities to understand the importance of uniting with other communities to effectively take on the political Right. All three leaders shared a common goal: to defend the rights of Latinos, immigrants, gays and lesbians, the poor, workers, and others who faced discrimination, both political and otherwise.

Additionally, in interviews with Ramón, Marcy, and Kelley, several “experiences of understanding” stood out in their personal political histories.

Ramón Ramírez: A trusted bridge builder

For Ramón Ramírez, one of these experiences of understanding happened in 1992, during a lesbian and gay march that went from Eugene to Portland in opposition to an anti-gay ballot measure (Measure 9). The march stopped in Woodburn and stayed overnight at PCUN’s union hall. PCUN, which stands for Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste or Northwest Treeplanters and Farm Workers United, is a key member organization of CAUSA. It was the first time PCUN’s membership and leadership had a public dialogue with gay rights leaders. Ramón described this dialogue:

“One of the things that stood out the most was that they (the gay and lesbian community) were marching throughout the valley, and we were one of the only groups to welcome them. They told us the story that they were allowed to stay in a church. I’m not sure where, maybe in Junction City. The pastor just gave them the key and said, ‘Make sure it’s cleaned up.’ Then he left—like not wanting to have anything to do with them. In that context, our community was pretty much homophobic, because of the church influence, the Catholic Church influence, among other things. We decided we needed to support the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual] community, and we needed to defeat Measure 9 because Measure 9 was clearly an attack on the gay community.”



Youths lead on day four of the 200 Walk for Truth, Justice, and Community in Woodburn, Oregon.

Shortly after this experience, Ramón and other Latino leaders began to put together the state-wide coalition that became known as CAUSA. They called on ROP and other groups that had won the fight against the anti-gay Measure 9 ballot initiative in 1992 to learn how to put together a successful state-wide campaign. They wanted to create a broad front to defeat the political Right in the state. Their growing understanding of—and acquaintance with—leaders in the gay and lesbian rights movement helped make them effective communicators and trusted bridge builders.

Leading Learning #1

Even organizations that seem to have little in common can collaborate successfully with:

- Open communication;
- Articulation of common interests;
- A clear strategy for how each organization can best contribute based on its strengths and knowledge;
- Mutual education about the issues of the other organization; and
- A respect for difference of opinions and understandings of the issues.

Marcy Westerling: Committed to social justice work

For Marcy Westerling, a series of circumstantial events were important in developing her perspective, including having an immigrant father, working on environmental and campus organizing, and coming to realize the importance of anti-racism work. She experienced two distinct moments of understanding: The first stemmed from a traumatic rape and subsequent organizing experience she had while she was a student at Smith College studying abroad in a small town in Italy.

“I spent my junior year at the University of Florence and actually ended up on my third day there, before I was situated or anything, being kidnapped and raped.... Italian women know you never say anything, and so there weren’t any consequences. But I was an American woman in 1979 where you couldn’t turn on the TV and see the movie of the week without seeing a message on how to get medical and legal help if you are raped. So I went to the hospital, tried to get medical care, and wasn’t able to get any of that because “it couldn’t have happened.” In the end, I was arrested, my passport was confiscated, and it was a huge mess that led to the entire year being about this trial—they did end up catching some of the folks and putting them on trial.... They slowly, because I wouldn’t recant, shifted. I got an incredible education on the intersections of gender, class, and race, because they all intersected incredibly well. I never really looked back.... I made a commitment at that moment to doing social justice work and pretty much around those intersections—understanding that as long as you could rank one oppression over the other, it was ridiculous.”



Ramón and Marcy at 2004 Rural Caucus and Strategy Session in Oregon City, Oregon.

Developing anti-racist education and moving immigrant rights issues onto the agenda were important focuses for Marcy in the early days of ROP. A second “moment of understanding” occurred when she and others began to do anti-racist education with initial ROP human dignity groups.

“...In the process of going around and doing these unlearning racism trainings, the most vivid image I walked away with was at Klamath Falls. There was this one older woman who, you know, talked about how important it was to talk to your neighbors and you know, it was a very honest, superficial kind of ‘we’re pro-human dignity and don’t we all need to talk the same language (i.e., English)?’ It was very sweet. It wasn’t like a racist thing. Here we were doing this unlearning racism thing, and we are totally surfacing

not only racism, but also how easy it would be for us to be the leads on it (through people like the woman who was ready to work for the English-only initiative).”

This occurrence, said Marcy, surfaced the need to look at specific forms of racism and how they affected Latino immigrants and farm workers.

Kelley Weigel: A crucial link between the organizations

Kelley Weigel was a third critical person in the CAUSA/ROP collaboration. Kelley had only recently graduated from the University of Oregon when she began working as an office manager for the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC), a social justice organization in Eugene. As a part of her work for CALC, she participated in the same gay and lesbian march that was hosted in the PCUN Union Hall. Kelley recalled the power of the 1992 conversation in the union hall and the importance of her experience in CALC for her later work with CAUSA:

“Working at CALC, we talked a lot about racism. But to have those kinds of conversations come up out of people just kind of hanging out together for the night, no. The work that CALC did was always more constructed than that. Those types of conversations would happen in the context of an anti-racism workshop and people would compare their relative levels of oppression and that kind of stuff would come up. That conversation (in the union hall) felt different, too, in the sense that people seemed so...it wasn’t like comparing oppressions. It was ‘we have to figure out how to work together.’”

The 1992 conversation that took place between PCUN activists and the gay and lesbian activists in the union hall—particularly the recognition of their mutual interests, understanding, and desire to figure out how to work together—has been at the core of the collaboration between ROP and CAUSA ever since.

MECHANISMS OF COLLABORATION: STRUCTURAL/PERSONAL/CULTURAL

ROP and CAUSA began working together in the mid-1990s. Their continued collaboration has not only been contingent upon interpersonal interactions, but also upon important structural connections. The first formal connection between the two organizations occurred in February 1996, when the executive committee of CAUSA '96 asked that a ROP representative be on the board of directors of CAUSA '96. Kelley Weigel became this representative and a crucial link between the two organizations.

A cultural celebration

Another important link between CAUSA and ROP was a series of visits CAUSA members made to different parts of Oregon to network with and educate Latino and non-Latino organizations about anti-immigrant legislation and the Oregon Latino Voter Registration Drive. In 1995, Marianne Gonzales, who had worked in the battered women's movement, made a contract with ROP. ROP had written a grant to start a new organization/project called Latinos and Others United in Response (LOUR). ROP supported and encouraged Marianne in her local Latino rights advocacy, and eventually applied for a grant that gave Marianne a part-time staff position at LOUR for 18 months. Marianne recalled the importance of founding LOUR:

"...I met a couple of women. I think they were of Mexican descent, Mexican American, and we thought, wouldn't it be fun to do something in the community to celebrate our culture? So we thought we would have a Cinco de Mayo celebration at the fairgrounds...it was incredibly successful and so much fun. We had a woman there that knew the old dances. She taught us. We got together, and we made tortillas and beans. We charged for dinner and then the dancing. It was a great day, a lot of fun and people turned up...we actually ended up making money. We gave scholarships, so that was exciting. So I got to thinking, wouldn't it be neat to see how that could work in other communities? Bring people together around a celebration, only doing more than that. So then this grant became available..."

ROP's efforts to support and grow LOUR were short-lived in a formal organizational sense. When the 18-month grant from the McKenzie River Foundation that supported Marianne as LOUR's part-time staff person was finished, the organization fell apart. Some member organizations continued to function, however, and the failure of LOUR further motivated ROP leaders to support their collaborative work with CAUSA.

Leading Learning #2

Successful long-term collaboration depends not only upon interpersonal interactions among the members of collaborating groups, but also upon important structural connections. Here, for example, the first formal structural connection between ROP and CAUSA occurred when CAUSA's executive committee asked that a ROP representative be on CAUSA's board of directors.

Building the foundation of collaboration

During 1996, CAUSA worked with LOUR and ROP to organize visits to Ontario, Klamath Falls, and the tri-county area of Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson to train local activists on how to combat proposed anti-immigrant legislation sponsored by a group called Oregonians for Immigration Reform (OIR), modeled on proposition 187 in California. (See their Web site at <http://www.oregonir.org>.) That same year, ROP endorsed PCUN's boycott of NORPAC, the largest processor of fruits and vegetables in the west, owned by 250 growers in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

These structural links created between ROP and CAUSA—their collaboration on CAUSA tours, and actions such as the ROP board endorsement of the NORPAC boycott—were to serve as important steps for building the foundation of a collaborative relationship.

In the process of creating personal and structural connections, one challenge that emerged in the developing ROP/CAUSA collaboration was the difference in how members of each group perceived the issues, intentions, and goals of the other.

Respecting differences in class and culture

Class and cultural differences appeared in the way the white, middle-class ROP members approached engaging in solidarity with farm workers, whose lives were very different from their own. In 1997, PCUN was organizing a series of delegations to labor camps on farms where the union was trying to pressure growers to increase wages. ROP members took part in some of these trips. Former CAUSA staff person Jon Brier recalled some of the realizations and changes that white delegates went through on the trips, including some from ROP:

“For starters, the key dynamic is white supporters showing up to support Latinos and farm workers of color—the organizing team being primarily Latino and white. I think largely the (accompaniment) team I was working with was white...there was a whole world of questions... ‘What is a labor camp?’ ‘People actually working...15 hours a day?’ ‘People don’t have protective equipment?’ On one hand, you have people who are flat out degrading in violently racist ways. The flip side is the alternative, often romantic, side saying, ‘Those poor noble people working the fields’—kind of big brother on the white horse.... So changing this is about being able to remove the more offensive part of charity—the part that says ‘People are helpless. No one has the skill, the analysis, or the strength, or the courage to take action to organize themselves or to fight for dignity. It’s going to be because there are white experts who are doing the job for them.’”

While some white accompaniers were initially paternalistic in their approach to farm workers, others came to view the situation differently. Their change in attitude was due to persistence in their participation and ROP’s ongoing efforts to educate their members on racism and its connections not only to the conditions farm workers work under, but also on how white allies can approach their solidarity work with farm workers.

CAUSA consistently raised the importance of confronting racism. Conversely, ROP focused on dealing with homophobia. Jon Brier recalled this aspect of the ROP/CAUSA collaboration:

“One of the strengths of the relationship was that CAUSA was explicit that ROP needed to call its members on racism issues, and I think ROP was explicit with CAUSA that CAUSA needed to call its membership on homophobia issues. Both sides of the community were going to be explicit about calling each other on the issues they had to work on.”

These structural links created between ROP and CAUSA—their collaboration on CAUSA tours, and actions such as the ROP board endorsement of the NORPAC boycott—were to serve as important steps for building the foundation of a collaborative relationship.

Leading Learning #3

Successful collaboration can occur only when participants openly and persistently confront issues of culture, class, and race. Some white, middle-class ROP members brought a paternalistic attitude to engaging in solidarity with farm workers. Some CAUSA members had to confront their own homophobia. Those attitudes changed as both groups persisted in their participation and maintained ongoing efforts to educate one another.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF ANGLO AND LATINO COLLABORATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

While leaders such as Ramón and Marcy share an underlying political analysis that views a common enemy in the Right, collaborations between ROP activists and Latinos at the local level have sometimes proved difficult.

A call for volunteers

In Medford, Oregon, for example, the group UNETE (a volunteer organization dedicated to helping Latinos) has been so overwhelmed with Latino immigrants' daily survival struggles that it hasn't had much time to spend on collaborations. UNETE organizer Dagoberto Morales, who works in Medford, stated:

“They (other organizations) always say we don’t have time, and I am going to tell you why we don’t have time. We need a paid staff. People run into a lot of problems here in November and December because they can’t pay rent or for their electricity. Then the agricultural season starts up again with the roses in March, and we start on labor issues. Then something happens during the summer harvest season. Then we have to prepare the celebration for the Day of the Campesino in August, and then with the harvests of pears, other fruits in August, September, we have other issues with people.”

Dagoberto works very hard to respond to the trainings offered by CAUSA and ROP and to participate in campaigns such as the Latino Voter Education drive and promoting the Dream Act (which will allow academically talented high school seniors who are undocumented to receive residency and pay resident tuition in higher education institutions).

What Dagoberto's comments underline is the varying reality of different kinds of Latino populations in Oregon, and the stressful, daily life circumstances of undocumented farm workers and others—illiteracy, joblessness, poor pay, not being able to afford rent, utilities, food, and school supplies. Dagoberto must respond to crises first, which limits the amount of time and attention he and his co-workers have to participate in local collaborations. If UNETE had more volunteers or allies at critical times of the year, then perhaps UNETE participants would have more time to engage in collaborative projects.

Also, what constitutes a “Latino” or “immigrant rights” issue for many of the local Latino populations where ROP and CAUSA work is often an issue first, of economic survival, and second, of racism. Many small towns are home to several generations of Latino immigrants with significant differences among them. Many undocumented workers and their families find events such as local political campaigns for elected office—mayor, city counselor, and school board, for example—uninteresting and uninviting. They may not see such campaigns immediately as “their” issues.

Leading Learning #4

Normally unremarkable behaviors or choices, such as where to hold a meeting, may need to be reconsidered in the context of a new collaboration. These actions may send powerful messages about who is welcome and who is not. They may “speak” to what you and your group stand for and how far you are willing to go to meet your collaborating partner in the middle.

In Forest Grove, Oregon, where ROP has a small human dignity group, the school board is predominantly white, and its meetings take place in an official local government building. Many Latinos, however, do not perceive these meetings as welcoming or safe spaces. For those who are undocumented, any building or governing body associated with “the government” is sure to discourage attendance.

In contrast, Centro Cultural (a Latino social service and advocacy organization in nearby Cornelius) is viewed as a safe space by local Latinos. There, “standing room only” crowds, including both documented and undocumented residents, will attend meetings on legalization and freely express their opinions. Mike Edera, who works with the ROP group in Forest Grove, reflected on the challenge of trying to work with local Latinos as allies. Differences in legal status, in particular, can make some venues feel safe for legal residents and citizens and unsafe for those who are undocumented. As he said:

“...In the Latino community, many people are not ready to go to school board meetings.... There will be some, but they are not banging on the door the way that they would if they were natural-born U.S. citizens and they were getting the kind of treatment they are getting. There is not yet a strong political movement in the Latino community in Forest Grove...(But) when there is a meeting at Centro (Latino community organization in nearby Cornelius, Oregon) around legalization or amnesty, there are people there that you’ve never seen before. There is standing room only and then people are saying the most radical shit. But then they are gone.”



Marcy reviews ROP/PCUN/CAUSA solidarity history at a 2006 Rural Caucus and Strategy Session at PCUN Union Hall, with an emphasis on keeping the strategic history current in the minds of members.

LEADERSHIP: THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED SOCIAL VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

The underlying shared social values and commitments of Marcy Westerling, Ramón Ramírez, and Kelley Weigel were crucial underpinnings in the alliance between ROP and CAUSA. Each shared a political analysis of how to defeat the Right and had worked long and hard to combat the shortcomings of their respective communities with regard to issues of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. They were committed to building alliances.

For Latino activists within CAUSA, successful work with ROP was linked to particular people who had the ability to sit back, listen, learn, and follow CAUSA's lead.

A matter of trust

For Latino activists within CAUSA, successful work with ROP was linked to particular people who had the ability to sit back, listen, learn, and follow CAUSA's lead. One such person was Kelley Weigel.

Guadalupe Quinn, CAUSA staff person in Eugene, Oregon, and a long-time Latino activist who has had many experiences working with white activists, stated:

"I think it's a lot harder for white folks who are used to being the people that run stuff and who don't even see that their egos get in the way."

Kelley Weigel, who participated heavily on the CAUSA board for more than two years, did not mirror this stereotype. Key in this dynamic was her confidence in CAUSA to appropriately carry out political work and pave the right path for their campaigns. Ramón said:

"Kelley has been one of those people who not only had an influence on me, but also had an influence on a lot of other members of CAUSA. She showed us how to be patient, through her own example, how to be a strong ally, and how to build trust and use that trust. A lot of what ROP did when we were asking them to do stuff was trusting us. They've always been pretty faithful, and to me that's something that I look for in other areas and in how coalitions are built. For a strong coalition to be healthy, you have to have a lot of trust, and that trust has to be built over the years."

The shared commitment of Kelley, Ramón, and Marcy to social justice, to ending discrimination, and to participatory democracy, as well as their dedication to alliance building and achieving their respective political goals, has given them a common base for leadership. Guadalupe Quinn described her personal interaction with Ramón, who has served as a mentor for her:

"In this community, if Ramón Ramírez wants to come and talk to folks, or something is needed by PCUN, people will make that a priority. This is because he has such a record of work, commitment, and knowledge, and because he knows how to motivate folks. He is a mentor. Ramón is never arrogant. He always makes you feel like you are not only just as important as him, but you have as much ability to do whatever he is doing. I think that makes a huge difference for folks because they always feel very respected."

Leading Learning #5

Leaders can model an effective "collaborative" stance through their own behaviors and provide important signals to their organizations about how to interact with a partner. Humility, a willingness to listen first, and a commitment to put the larger issue above personal or organizational concerns can all help.

Collaborations That Work

What are some of the characteristics of ROP/CAUSA collaborations that have worked? In the next two sections, we highlight two campaigns to explore the specific elements that made them successful. They are not meant to serve as the only examples of collaboration, or even as the best. Rather, we chose these examples because they highlight the most challenging circumstance for each organization to take on: supporting an issue that is outside their life experience, understanding, and comfort zone.



ROP leader Mike Edera leads a workshop at PCUN in 2006.

PART 1: FIGHTING A NEW BRACERO PROGRAM, 1997–1998

In 1997, Oregon’s Senator Ron Wyden co-authored a bill authorizing a federal investigation into the streamlining and revision of the H-2A Guest Worker program. This program allowed the importation of Mexican workers (Braceros) for annual harvests with the stipulation that they were to return to Mexico after their work was finished. Braceros were contract workers who were supposed to have certain guarantees met in terms of housing, transportation, wages, recruitment, healthcare, food, and number of hours they worked. Most growers and the U.S. government ignored the terms of the contracts, however, and the Braceros had no one to turn to. The Bracero program blocked farm worker unionization and has been called “legalized slavery” by some, including the past director of the program.

Senator Wyden’s effort to begin a process to broaden and reinstate the former Bracero program was linked to demands from growers for more ease in contracting farm labor. Immigrant rights and farm worker organizations were also interested in new legislation, but not the kind proposed by Wyden. They were not consulted at the time Wyden began the investigation. PCUN and CAUSA made pressuring Wyden and others on this issue a priority, and they enlisted ROP’s help in early 1997.

The first action ROP took was to write a letter to Wyden and to discuss the issue at the level of their board, and later, at local meetings and trainings. In May 1997, ROP held its annual caucus in Eugene, and immigrant rights was one of the workshops offered to participants. Discussion of what was emerging as a new guest worker piece of legislation that came to be sponsored by Oregon’s Senators Gordon Smith and Wyden was featured in a 1997 ROP newsletter. One article made a direct parallel between the 1992 anti-gay Measure 9 in Oregon and the proposed guest worker legislation:

“The same issue was at stake with the OCA’s infamous Measure 9: do we create a ‘second class’ status for a group of people—in this case workers—or are people truly equal? The ‘Guest worker’ legislation is complicated by the issue of race, class, national status, but at the core the issue is one of equality and whether workers (foreign or domestic) have protection under the Constitution.” (ROP Report, p. 3, Spring 1997)

In the summer of 1997, ROP board members and others participated in the PCUN accompaniment program noted above, which involved going with organizers on visits to the fields, labor camps, and other worker housing to show direct support for farm workers.

In 1998, CAUSA made it a top priority to defeat new guest worker legislation and pressure Wyden in Oregon. CAUSA planned an all-out campaign to mobilize the Democratic Party, churches, students, labor, social service organizations, and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) community, and cover all parts of the state.

Building strength with numbers

By July 1998, Wyden, along with Senator Gordon Smith, had formally submitted a new piece of legislation that became known among Latino activists as the “New Bracero Bill.” A series of protests, rallies, and meetings was organized throughout the state to let Wyden know his own constituents did not support his proposed guest worker legislation. In August, CAUSA published a press release before a large rally to protest the legislation. It stated, in part:

“Senator Wyden and Senator Smith have now submitted a supposed ‘bipartisan compromise’ bill. While appearing to offer concessions to farm workers, the bill systematically dismantles significant worker protections and will result in the displacement of thousands of U.S. workers.”

Rich Rohde, an organizer for Oregon Action (an allied ROP organization), recalled the effectiveness of the CAUSA/ROP collaboration in mobilizing people to work against the proposed Smith/Wyden guest worker legislation in Medford, Oregon. During the campaigns to pressure Smith and Wyden, Rich watched CAUSA activists come down and mobilize local Latinos and then also get much of the white progressive community out as well:

“They would come down with these big vans of people (PCUN and CAUSA), and they had all sorts of multicolored flags and all of the stuff of community organizing that worked well with the Latino and the farm worker community and in a model that wasn’t seen in southern Oregon. So they just added so much to what people were able to do and were really able to give people some organizing models to look at.... The other side of it, this would go back to the Marcy side of it. Clearly they (ROP) are fighting the bill as a national issue, but the main response was from southern Oregon. We did a big action on Smith’s office on West Main Street. There was a huge action...we had 800 people signing petitions. We stapled them together. We rolled these things out like for a block...and we had television. It was all to get Smith to do it. He eventually lost interest in it and that’s when Wyden came in. Wyden had contacted us and said, ‘I want to meet with farm workers.’ And so Dago [Dagoberto Morales] got a whole bunch of folks down to that meeting, and they had it there, and I even have pictures of it.... [The farm workers] said, ‘This is what we want, this is what is going to happen.’ They gave [Marcy] a whole critique of it. And she said, ‘Oh, that’s good. We will get back to you.’ What they came back with was terrible. That’s when the Wyden bill got put in as a ‘compromise bill,’ which was worse than Smith’s bill. I think that there becomes a point where the fight for guest worker moves way beyond the farm worker community into a state-wide progressive issue. And I think that’s where ROP plays a role, as do the environmental groups, unionized groups, and farm worker groups. They all join together to fight the guest worker bill. That was across the state, but it was particularly strong in Medford.”

CAUSA activists were particularly adamant about supporting collective bargaining efforts, which the proposed legislation would undermine because in Oregon, PCUN had successfully negotiated the first farm worker collective bargaining agreements in the state’s history. By October of 1998, a total of four contracts were signed.

Ramón Ramírez of PCUN and CAUSA recalled the effectiveness of having ROP activists appear to protest Wyden’s support of the bill.

“We researched and got Smith and Wyden’s schedules, then we informed ROP where both senators were going to be. We asked, ‘Can ROP do something for us here and here?’ And they responded.”

Marcy Westerling recalled the kind of response that ROP could give to CAUSA when they called about getting ROPers out to protest Wyden:

“...I think the whole guest worker stuff really helped us define our relationship, in terms of people having a hard time understanding where ROP can be useful. We kept trying to say, ‘We are useful in our own communities.’ Ramón could hear that, but most people can’t. Their response is, ‘I don’t even know where your community is.’ But he said, ‘Okay, we need this many people to show up at this town hall in Burns.’”

On October 18, 1998, *The Register-Guard*, the main daily newspaper for Eugene, Springfield, and Lane County, Oregon, reported that the agricultural guest worker bill “fell prey to a groundswell of grassroots opposition from farm worker advocates and labor unions, who contended the legislation was a cleverly disguised attempt to exclude U.S. workers and open the border to a flood of cheap foreign labor” (Neville 1998). President Clinton also strongly opposed the bill and made it clear that if it passed, he would veto it.

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PART 2: DEFEATING ANTI-GAY PROPOSITION 9 IN 2000

The success of the ROP/CAUSA collaboration in derailing the Smith/Wyden guest worker legislation (and other state-level legislative initiatives) cemented the relationship between the two groups in working together in state-wide politics. During the 2000 election season, ROP provided trainings, materials, and talking points for CAUSA organizers to use in the Latino community to encourage voting against Measure 9, an anti-gay measure prohibiting teachers and employees of public schools from teaching about or discussing homosexuality. Two of the groups that participated in CAUSA, Voz Hispana Causa Chavista (a civic participation and voter education organization) and LUS (a youth organizing project based in the Latino community), published their own materials in Spanish. The Voz Hispana political action committee published a voter guide that recommended Latino voters vote against Measure 9. They also put out a separate detailed one-page leaflet in Spanish that is partially translated below.

Proposition #9

...If this measure is approved, it will be prohibited for public school teachers and employees to support or explain any themes related to homosexuality. If it is determined that any teacher or employee violates the contents of this measure, then funds can be taken away from the entire school district.... The Comité de Estudios y Sugerencias (The Study and Suggestions Committee) recommends that you vote "NO" on this measure because this measure is an attack on minorities and on human rights, and furthermore, it sets a precedent for discrimination and oppression (Voz Hispana 2000).

This leaflet and similar ones were used by Voz Hispana and LUS in voter education campaigns and in public events. ROP staffer Kelley Weigel worked with Voz Hispana staff person Juan Argumedo and fed him material, and he did the same for her.

The youth group LUS was very active in receiving trainings from ROP and others around the issue of homophobia. LUS members followed this up by conducting their own workshops and public education forums on the topic and the importance of defeating Measure 9.

Reaching a very important audience

Because they were prepared, the LUS youth responded and took advantage of a terrific political and media opportunity to get their message across. In one case, they directly confronted an Evangelical preacher who was trying to convince Latino voters to vote for Measure 9. In the Latino community, where a lot of fear and lack of knowledge about the topic of homosexuality still exists, their statements no doubt reached an important audience.

Jon Brier, former staff person for CAUSA, talked about how important the CAUSA and ROP collaboration was in bringing the issue of homophobia to the attention of Latino and other youth of color:

"[Beyond fighting Measure 9] the deeper more important stuff was the relationship. LUS was and is a really vital youth organizing project based in the Latino community. And in the year 2000, LUS members started to engage more heavily and directly with ROP in terms of doing trainings and collaboration. LUS members started to go to trainings with ROP, these retreats. It was basically a youth retreat that had mixed youth of color and white youth and included GLBTQ youth. I think it was a key point of contact for LUS members to begin to challenge themselves on issues of homophobia.... Those were some key points of contact for LUS to begin asking the hard questions about homophobia within their group and in CAUSA. And so I think they (ROP) should be credited for putting homophobia on the map within CAUSA."

A final key factor in ROP trainings and materials that helped defeat Measure 9 had to do with the commitment of Ramón Ramírez. Just as Marcy Westerling and Kelley Weigel continued to press ROP groups to continue with anti-racist education to understand the issue of immigrant rights, Ramón pushed all of the organizations he was involved with, including CAUSA, to take homophobia seriously and to work hard at being allies with the LGBTQ community. PCUN secretary-treasurer Larry Kleinman pointed this out in an interview and emphasized how Ramón's commitment to LGBTQ issues has been recognized by the gay community. Larry stated:

"I think a big part of this has been Ramón setting a tone with ROP, setting a tone in his relationships with organizations focused on gay and lesbian issues and civil rights, setting a tone in CAUSA, in LUS, in PCUN. So Ramón is held in very high esteem by some of those (gay and lesbian) organizations."

The two examples cited above of successful ROP/CAUSA collaboration date from 1998 and 2000. While ROP and CAUSA leaders clearly recognize these two examples as successes, a mutual understanding of how the two organizations had grown to respect and understand one another at a deep level became even clearer to them when they began to work in a larger coalition with other organizations. Often the lessons learned and the benefits gained from working together are not evident in the immediate aftermath of a campaign—won or lost. More often, what was learned and how well relationships solidified become more apparent in other contexts.

Fuel for future campaigns

At the end of 1998, ROP and CAUSA joined with two other organizations to create what was later called the Oregon Campaign for Economic Justice, funded by the Ford Foundation's Collaborations that Count Initiative. ROP and CAUSA were joined initially by Oregon Action (a state-wide, multi-issue social and economic justice organization that evolved from Oregon Fair Share) and the Oregon Center for Public Policy (an organization founded to challenge regressive policies in the state). Their first coordinated campaign was to take on food stamp reform. Through their work, they were able to “simplify the application process, extend eligibility to thousands of residents, restore benefits to immigrants, and exempt all childless adults from punitive food stamp limits” (Applied Research Center 2004:193). Data collected from this project were also used to help with the CAUSA campaign to halt new guest worker legislation, on which ROP also collaborated.

Growing together

In 2002, new organizations were added to the Collaborations that Count coalition, including Voz Hispana, Ecumenical Ministries, Jobs for Justice, and others. The group took on a wide range of economic justice issues in Oregon, including tax reform, minimum wage issues, farm worker issues, and immigrants' rights. Friction in the group seems to have emerged from differences between policy initiative groups and grassroots organizations. Marcy Westerling of ROP and Ramón Ramírez of CAUSA, however, both realized how their organizational cultures and ways of reading political situations had become similar in the context of this larger coalition. In the larger coalition, they felt much closer to each other than to other organizations. This is perhaps the best evidence of how the two organizations have come to influence one another. Ramón discussed these differences:

“I didn't realize how deep that relationship was until we started working with Collaborations that Count of the Ford Foundation. There were some sharp political differences, and there were some class and sex issues that cut into some of the stuff that was going on. We didn't have to go far into this discussion to really feel that we were much more in tune with ROP than with the other folks. Sometimes the influence does not happen right away, but over time.”

What has finally emerged then out of the partnership between the two groups has been an appreciation of their history together and confidence in the future. A key question for both organizations is how to keep this relationship going and not take it for granted. Some elements of this successful collaboration can be replicated in other organizations, and some are intrinsic to the unique nature of ROP and CAUSA.

In the larger coalition, they felt much closer to each other than to other organizations. This is perhaps the best evidence of how the two organizations have come to influence one another.

A Model for Successful Collaboration: What We Learned

CAUSA and ROP have established a strong record of collaboration and have made significant strides toward becoming effective allies. Key underlying elements in the successful collaboration between ROP and PCUN are the shared underlying social values of social justice, participatory democracy, and an aim to fight discrimination of all kinds.

Common elements that could be replicated by other groups as a model for successful collaborations can be taken from the two successful case studies discussed above. These include:

- Identifying and nurturing leaders educated about and committed to the issue at hand;
- Conducting mutual trainings and workshops on campaign issues;
- Ensuring constant contact with constituents and continual feeding of talking points and counter-arguments to allow people to respond spontaneously;
- Examining organizational culture and interpersonal relationships in terms of the issues at hand (in this case, racism and homophobia);
- Creating the structural means for planning and maintaining ongoing contact between the two organizations (sitting on each other's boards, attending mutual strategy meetings); and
- Fostering trust in the ability of the leaders and participants in the collaborating organization to follow the lead of the initiating organization and do a good job representing each other's issues and concerns.



A CAUSA board meeting.

In order to sustain the collaborative potential built between CAUSA and ROP, the two organizations will likely need to continue working together in coalition on particular campaigns, and also think towards longer-term forms of collaboration. An important part of the future, however, involves the preparation of new generations of leaders. Both organizations are aware of the importance of this process and have had internal discussions about this.

Another important focus in the future collaboration of the two groups is to strategize together on the changing demographics in Oregon and to tie this strategy directly to specific state legislative campaigns. This involves longer-term, coordinated planning on the part of both organizations to prepare for likely legislative measures.

As the recent political climate suggests, it is painfully clear that the United States is divided into two countries (Blue and Red) of people with fundamentally different world views. Successful collaborations such as that of ROP and CAUSA on issues such as gay rights and immigrant rights are important models not only for Oregon but nationally. We hope that this ethnographic report has helped to provide insights for how to take political crises and develop progressive collaborative responses.



Amy Dudley, ROP staff and CAUSA board member, leads a workshop on local tactics to challenge anti-immigration fervor at a 2006 Rural Caucus and Strategy Session.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University

The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that helps strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Research Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation. Visit www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program

Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive \$115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research, and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and RCLA, NYU Wagner. Visit www.leadershipforchange.org.

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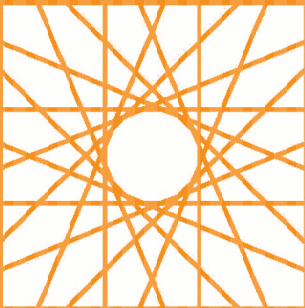
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