

# Making Change

March 2009

How Social Movements Work - and How to Support Them

*Full document*



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Funded by  
The California Endowment



# Foreword

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Social movements are a hidden underpinning of the American story. Using the tools of relationship-building, community mobilization, and symbolic protest, they have helped bring us civil rights, labor protections, and even a healthier environment, sparking people's aspirations, imaginations, and actions for a better nation.

Why then has funding of these movements been difficult to obtain and sustain? Some suggest that funders often want more immediate and measurable outcomes – moving a nation to live up to its promise is important but hard to quantify. And yet in recent years, there has been renewed philanthropic interest and openness to investing in social movements, community organizing and policy change, and an understanding that this will require a new level of patience and a new set of relationships with grantees.

This document seeks to provide a guidepost to both funders and the field by detailing what makes for a successful social movement, what capacities need to be developed, and what funding opportunities might exist.

The document itself comes from a different model of funder-grantee relationships. The paper from which this Executive Summary draws was initially requested by The California Endowment as its leaders were thinking through the connection between place-based comprehensive change and state-level policy in the Golden State. Thinking that the connection between the two might be social movements and community organizing, TCE commissioned us, the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE), to do a series of interviews with leading organizers – and asked us to write something that would make sense to these activists as well as foundation leaders.

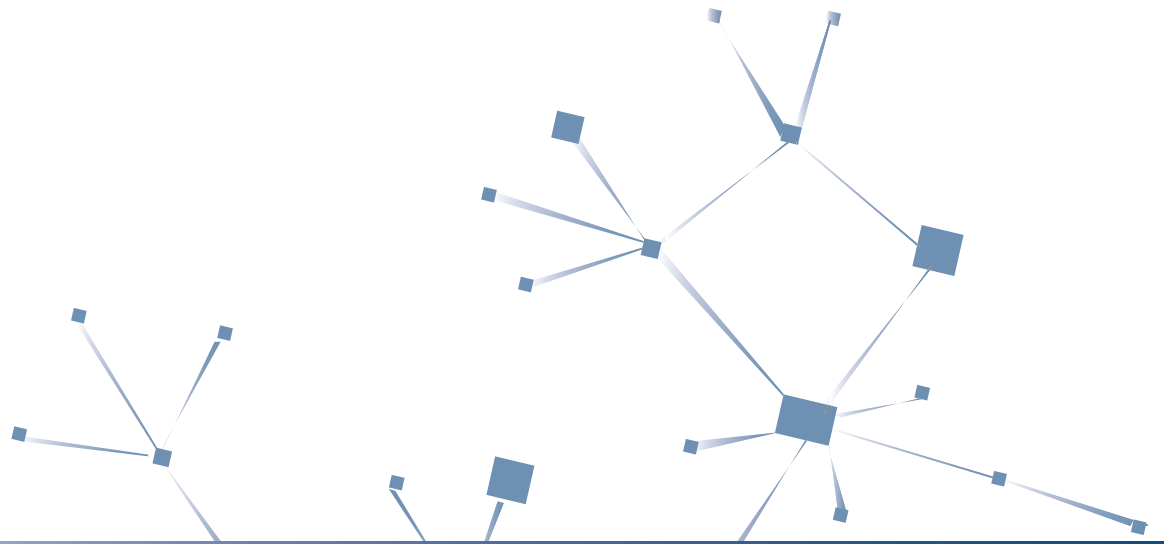
It was the sort of audience guaranteed to provoke humility – what could we say that they didn't already know? – but we presented the first draft to both program officers and community activists, both groups felt that the lessons we drew might be useful to erstwhile social movement builders and to other foundations around the country. As a result, we reworked the document away from the specific needs and strategies of The Endowment and towards a more general audience.

That said, the paper and this summary carry the legacy of their origins. For one thing, many of the examples we use are from California. Having both grown up in Los Angeles, we have the typical West Coast belief that being near the Pacific Ocean also means you're on the cutting edge – but we do realize the limits of translation and invite others to add their own examples. Another legacy of the origin may be more positively viewed by Californians and non-Californians alike: because we intended to offer a practical guide, we offer only short attention to the burgeoning academic literature and have attempted to structure this summary in ways that maximize accessibility, utility and (we hope) readability.

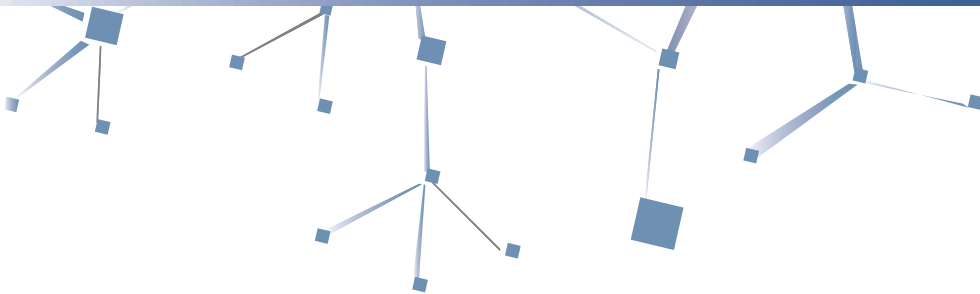
We thank The California Endowment for giving us the opportunity to do this work and we thank the various activists who read and commented on this work. Most important, we thank them for the work they do daily to help this country and its people realize their potential.

-- Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz  
Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE)  
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*For the full report, go to: <http://college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html>*



**The Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) is a new research unit and part of the Center for Sustainable Cities at USC. PERE conducts research and facilitates discussions on issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion and immigrant integration. PERE's work is rooted in the new three R's: rigor, relevance and reach. We conduct high-quality research in our focus areas that is relevant to public policy concerns and that reaches to those directly affected communities that most need to be engaged in the discussion. In general, we seek and support direct collaborations with community-based organizations in research and other activities, trying to forge a new model of how university and community can work together for the common good.**



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Photos by Dwayne Marsh

# Executive Summary

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Social movements are the threads that string together efforts bubbling up across the nation, sparking people's aspirations and imaginations for a better America. Why then has funding of these movements been difficult to obtain and sustain? It is a long-standing question sometimes answered with reference to pressures on funders to demonstrate more immediate, quantitative measurable results. In recent years, there has been a renewed philanthropic interest and openness to investing in social movements and policy change, this document seeks to provide a guidepost to this interest by detailing what makes for a successful social movement, what capacities need to be developed, and what funding opportunities might exist.

Social movements, we suggest, exist between the neighborhood terrain, where significant investments can provide comprehensive change for residents, and the state and/or national level where policy change will ensure an overall context favorable for both community health and justice. Social movement organizations and networks that fundamentally seek to challenge the configurations of power that currently produce inequity. Such organizations and networks can be distinguished from coalitions in several ways: they are sustained, not episodic, multi-sector rather than special interest, wide-ranging rather than single issue, constituency-based rather than intermediary-driven, and focused on transforming people's lives rather than on just changing policy.

Social movements have long been the glue of what's best about modern American history – think of the tremendous advances in opportunity wrought by the civil rights, labor, and women's

movements as well as by many others. In recent years, however, the actual experts at such movement building have resided on the right, with conservative forces combining pro-lifers, tax-cutters, and defense-spenders, cultivating a strong base in evangelical churches and traditional communities, framing an issues agenda around values of family, faith, and liberty, and developing a supportive set of institutions that could facilitate a long march from local school boards to state legislatures to national influence.

Those concerned with the equity side of the equation have recently returned to take social movement building as a central focus of their own activity, with organizations ranging from the Partnership for Working Families to the Gamaliel Foundation to the Right to the City Network and many others, adopting new strategies and establishing new linkages. Both these experiences as well as those of the right and of earlier movements can provide some guidance to organizations seeking to play a supportive role in such movement-building for health and social justice in the future.

We argue here that that there are ten key elements to a successful social movement, five key capacities that allow social movements to sustain themselves, and three key areas where foundations can invest. The ten elements are:

## **A vision and a frame**

Social movements are based on visions, frames, and values rather than policy. The resulting narrative helps to explain the predicament that a group is trying to correct, often in the sort of broad terms that create the



space for allies to find their “best selves” by standing in solidarity. A reliance on frames – conversational constructs that help to set the terms of the debate – allows individuals of multiple ideologies to stay in the game. And a sense of urgency, that is, a notion that we need to correct these problems now, helps to create a vibrancy for moving forward.

### **An authentic base in key constituencies**

Social movements are distinguished by their base of members and adherents. One view of change suggests that “policy entrepreneurs” can write persuasive policy papers, corner interested legislators, and enact reform. While research and lobbying have an important place, the key mark of a social movement is its attention to community, workplace, or congregant organizing, and its focus on generating grassroots leaders. Social movements make sure to directly involve those with “skin in the game” and make sure that the frames and values are derived from them and not from focus groups conducted by distant intermediaries.

### **A commitment to the long-haul**

Social movements have a long-term perspective – they believe that the problems that their members face are due to misalignments in power and they understand that it takes time to right that ship. Such organizations take the time to train leaders and craft relationships, understanding, in the words of Working Partnerships founder Amy Dean, that “you don’t build relationships in the middle of a fight – you have to create deliberate space to understand each others’ interests.” This

continuity allows them to persist even as issues and times change, for example, protecting community residents against both gentrification and bank foreclosure under the banner of community stability.

### **An underlying and viable economic model**

Social movements have an underlying economic model that is viewed as being sensible and viable. This is critical because social movements are essentially about the redistribution of resources; if economic collapse is soon to follow from a group’s policy recommendations, few community members and even fewer decision-makers will be supportive. Conservative forces thus had to explain why reducing the government role would actually expand the overall pie; progressive forces need to stress why living wage laws, community benefits regulations, and expansions in health care will not just share but grow the wealth. Such arguments cannot simply be assertions – they must be made with research backing and with appropriate modesty and qualifications.

### **A vision of government and governance**

Social movements have a vision of what the government ought to do, not simply in terms of issues but in terms of its basic relationship to social forces. Generally, social movements of whatever stripe wave the flag of democracy in terms of governance. Conservative forces argue against state intrusion in the economy but hold that certain moral precepts should be set by majority or democratic rule; progressive forces suggest that democracy requires certain economic and social protections to



level the playing field. Progressives have had a tougher time in the governance arena, partly because of widespread mistrust of government bureaucracy; they have had some success with concepts like “community benefits” (in which subsidies to firms are conditioned on performance standards) but there is a long way to go in terms of crafting a positive vision of government.

### **A scaffold of solid research**

Social movements always have an intellectual side in which problems are identified and strategies are explored. The conservative movement elevated this aspect of movement-building to a new level with a series of think-tanks that provided research, framing, and policy development alongside the organizing and mobilization on the ground. Recent social movement groups in the U.S. have become even more conscious about the power of using research as a scaffold to support and weave together the personal stories generated by base constituencies; they have dealt with this by both building in-house research capacities and forging effective alliances with academics and intermediaries, to wit, the careful studies of the Living Wage or the framework studies about environmental injustice.

### **A pragmatic policy package**

Developing policy is particularly important because Americans are a pragmatic lot: if something is bad but there is no viable solution, it is often accepted that this is “just the way things are.” To convince the public that the poor may not be with us always (at least in their current situation of poverty), one needs a

policy package that looks like it might actually work at alleviating poverty. An old Alinsky axiom is that people are more motivated when they win; while some progressive forces seem to have preferred the moral high ground of frequent defeat, most new social movement organizations are at the ready with practical programs to rework job training, use public bonds to build parks, and/or remake health care to better serve the poor.

### **A recognition of the need for scale**

While there is a tendency to think that small must mean authentic, the scale of the social problems faced – and the extent of power on the other side – often requires a scale of organizational capacity to match. We do not mean to dismiss small groups, many of which are doing excellent work and are critical in the social ecology of change. Rather we agree with the New World Foundation in their emphasis on anchor organizations, those with the scope, sophistication and reach to be able to challenge power and policy. Determining how to select and support large groups that can nonetheless lead with humility is a central challenge for funders.

### **A strategy for scaling up**

Social movements are often seen in retrospect as having arrived on the scene fully formed: Martin Luther King appears on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with 200,000 supporters and an eloquent frame, conservatives show up to the 1980s elections with vibrant national support and a complete ideology. The truth instead involved a geography of power: conservative organizing was built up from local

bases, and most social justice organizations are working hard to move from the local to the regional to the state to the national. Such scaling is the stuff of success and is a new arena for research and investment.

### **A willingness to network with other movements**

No one wins alone. It is critical that social movements that may be focused on particular issues and particular constituencies are able to find their way to potential allies in other movements. Too much diversity can be negative – a cacophony of interest groups produces a laundry list of demands rather than a narrative of commonality – but the success of the right was largely due to welcoming a broader range of interests than many realize. Social movement organizations that are too exclusive or too focused on building their own group may fail to build the movement; the goal is to find those who seem to view their own activities as streams flowing into a raging river of social change.

Of course, presenting ten elements all lined up in a row may make it seem easy; it isn't. Social movements are marked by tensions and tightropes, with organizations trying to strike a balance between scale and base, organizing and advocacy, vision and research. Foundations need to be patient with this balancing act and also accept that the ten elements are not likely to characterize a single organization but may characterize a movement.

Still, if these are ten elements that mark successful social movements, it is important to note the

capacities that will allow groups and networks to put them in place. In our view, there are five:

### **The ability to organize a base constituency**

Organizing is tough, taxing, and time-consuming. Not every organization has the capacity to do this but those that do are able to cultivate new leadership and represent members effectively. While organizing is an art, it can be taught, and building this capacity is crucial. Investments in organizing and leadership training are important.

### **The capacity to research, frame and communicate**

Since research capacity, viable economic strategies, and messaging are key to success, organizations must embody this ability. While there is a tendency to think that this can be provided externally, it is important for groups to have their own capacities. It is also important that the “frame” be derived from grassroots leaders rather than helicoptered in by messaging experts.

### **The ability to strategically assess power**

Power analysis helps organizations assess who is on the other side, who can be moved, and what it will take to win. Since movements are about transforming systems rather than simply changing policy, the capability to take an honest and realistic pulse of the situation is critical. Likewise, organizations and movements need to become comfortable with taking and exercising power, recognizing that this may come in many different forms.

## **The capacity to manage large and growing organizations**

Since scale is important – both the size of the organization and its plans to go up geographic levels to make broader change – organizations must be able to effectively manage their resources and collaborate with others. While some of this is dispositional (can you really play well with others?), some of it is managerial and investments in improving organizational effectiveness, including training of top leaders, is important.

## **The capability to engage and network with others**

Social movements pull together disparate elements under a broad umbrella. The most effective movements are wide-ranging in their constituencies and organizational types, bringing together not simply like groups with common interests but diverse groups with common destinies. Understanding one's role in the broader ecology, and working effectively to support other strands of the movement, is a key capability.

Building social movements is difficult and demanding work. At the same time, movements need to make their visions clear, their values apparent, and their fire visible. To keep the balance, social movements must have a cross-cutting capacity:

## **The ability to refresh organizational vision and organizational leadership**

Since organizations and movements can stagnate or dissipate, it is crucial to bring leadership back to the well of inspiration.

This involves creating time for intellectual and spiritual reflection by leaders as well as a commitment to training a new generation of leadership. A wide variety of programs exist to do this; supporting them could build the capacities to stay the long course.

How then could foundations help? We think it useful to start with three things they should not do: think that they are the movement, shy from confronting power, and let the urgent dictate the agenda.

Foundations may find movements attractive but they should play the role of supporter not partner, partly because they arrive with so much power and partly to retain an objective stance. If they do choose to pursue the social movement route, they need to be aware that they are backing groups likely to pick a fight – it might be a good fight, it might be the right fight, but it is always likely to involve struggle against entrenched interests. Finally, while there is a tendency for the most recent new event or policy fad to dominate interest, it is important to be in this for as long a haul as the movements themselves.

With these admonitions in place, we suggest three basic directions for philanthropic investment, the first of which is crucial to building success, the second to maintaining success, and the third to judging success. In that order, they are:

## **Provide operational and long-term funding**

We have provided a list of elements and capacities above – and the trick is that the priorities of each shift over time. While organizing and communications are always

crucial, organizational and networking needs evolve with each stage. Thus, funders should consider general operating support (particularly for organizing and constituency development), specific investments in leadership training and renewal, and significant resources for research, communications, and advocacy.

### **Support network building and expansion**

The geography of change is important and will be especially so in place-based approaches. Supporting efforts to scale up is important and this will involve both building networks of like organizations and networking networks of seemingly disparate forces. Thus, funders should consider providing resources for network creation and convenings and peer-to-peer learning, and they should be sure to encourage and structure incentives for groups to work together organically.

### **Develop metrics to judge and publicize movement success**

Movement success can be a difficult thing to gauge: the passage of a living wage may benefit few people directly but it can signal a shift in power that soon translates to widespread improvements in living standards. Metrics that focus on process and that take into account stages of development is important for organizations to learn from their work as well as to both justify one foundation's investment and to encourage others to jump in. Thus, funders should consider including evaluation capacity from the beginning, utilizing evaluation strategies that provide immediate

feedback, and basing evaluation on a model that recognizes phases of development.

The country stands at a crossroads: with a financial system in crisis, an economy adrift, and an environment at risk, people are looking for a broader frame and a broader solution than typical politics can offer. Getting to this broader conversation—and making real change—will require groups that are willing to challenge power as well as policy, values as well as legislation. Social movement thinking and doing will be a key element for both strategy and giving.

# I. Introduction

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“Martin Luther King famously proclaimed ‘I have a dream,’ not ‘I have an issue.’ -- Van Jones, Ella Baker Center and Green for All, Pegasus Conference, 2007.

Traditionally, philanthropic organizations seeking to tackle issues of economic, social, and health justice have operated and funded at two very different scales: (1) a neighborhood level in which significant investment in intersectoral efforts aim to embody and model comprehensive change, and (2) a state and national focus that seeks to bring the lessons from neighborhood experiments to achieve policy changes that will transform a broader system that too often fails to deliver either community health or justice. Between the neighborhood level and the state and/or national level of policy change, lies the terrain of social movements— that is, organizations and networks that fundamentally seek to challenge the configurations of power that currently produce health inequity.

Such social movement organizations combine an authentic base (for example, in neighborhoods, congregations, or the workplace) with a compelling strategy for leveraging local and regional action in the service of systemic change. Such organizations are not generally the service delivery groups that have been the bulwark of most foundation investments nor are they the single-issue intermediaries that have frequently picked-up the banner of policy change. They are, rather, groups that see themselves as part of a broader fabric, groups that are conscious about building and growing a new “social movement.”

What is a social movement? The term is often used as loosely as is its counterpart “community” – think, for example, of reference to the “developer community” – and sometimes used as shorthand for a set of policy preferences (such as a “movement” reforming the inheritance tax). Social movements are, we would submit, more than particularistic interests and episodic coalitions around issues: they are sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in community, and that build for a long-term transformation in the power systems that produce the outcomes that often trigger dissatisfaction and protest.

The civil rights movement, for example, targeted unequal public accommodations but its fundamental frame involved the democratic promise of America and its fundamental goal was the erosion of the exclusive white power embodied in Jim Crow. The women’s movement worried about equal pay but it was focused more broadly on the full realization of personhood and the toppling of male privilege. And the environmental movement promised cleaner air but it was more deeply about a new relationship with the earth and a restored role for humans as caretakers of the planet.

And while the social movement literature often seems more focused on the progressive end of the spectrum, it is clear that some of the greatest practitioners of movement building in recent years have come from the conservative side of the aisle. The right has built from an authentic base, often in evangelical communities worried about America’s drift in values, rallied its troops around core principles that go beyond any particular



issue or candidate, and carefully assembled a set of institutions – only now slipping in stature and coherence – that were the vehicles for a long and patient march to winning both the frame for dialogue and the reins of power and policy-making.

This paper seeks to provide basic criteria for social movement building – that is, a way to identify and understand the common elements of successful movements and, through this, to think about the capacities and investments that might be needed.

A word about the origins of the paper is in order. The paper was initially prompted by a report for The California Endowment as its leaders were seeking to think through the connection between local comprehensive change and state-level policy in the Golden State. When we completed our first draft, we presented it to both foundation leaders and an audience that included some of California’s most dynamic social movement activists. Both groups felt that it should get a much wider audience—that it would be useful to erstwhile social movement builders around the country and might inform the philanthropic strategies of other foundations. As a result, we shifted the topic away from the specific needs and strategies of The Endowment towards a more general audience.

That said, the paper carries part of the legacy of its origins. For one thing, most of the examples we use are from California. While we think that is appropriate—having both grown up in Los Angeles, we have the typical California belief that we seem to be at the cutting edge—we do realize the limits of translation and do draw on

examples from elsewhere as well. Another legacy of the origin may be more positively viewed by Californians and non-Californians alike: because we intended to offer a practical guide, we offer only short attention to the burgeoning academic literature and have attempted to structure the paper and utilize language in ways that maximize accessibility, utility and (we hope) readability.

We do begin with a reference to the literature, paying special attention to two trends: the way in which a “framing” perspective has come to dominate the literature, and the new attention being paid to the geography of change. The latter refers to how scaling from the local upward is an important consideration for philanthropic investment and has increasingly become a topic of discussion amongst movement builders themselves.

We then turn to what we term the top ten elements of movements. While three have been implied in the discussion above – a frame or narrative, an attention to constituency, and a commitment to the long haul – we also delve into four elements that are needed to make the movement vision real (including a theory of the economy, a vision of governance, a solid scaffold of research, and a pragmatic policy package that can actually solve problems). We conclude that section with a discussion of three elements that are critical to thinking about the geography of power: how big organizations have to be to be successful, how they can move from neighborhoods, congregations and workplaces to the nation, and how they interact with other movement strands.

Since those elements come into place as a result of organizational capacity, we then

identify five capacities that we think are crucial for successful movement builders, including the ability to organize a base constituency, the capacity to research, frame and communicate, the ability to strategically assess power, the more straightforward capacity to manage large and growing organizations, and the capability to engage and network with others. We add a sort of bonus capacity – the ability to refresh on a continual basis both organizational vision and organizational leadership – and we argue that it is the last of these that is crucial to sustaining change over time.

We end by pointing to some implications for foundations – including what they ought not to do. We argue that this is one case in which you are definitively not the change you want to be. As much as foundations can learn from and support social movements, they are part of the general infrastructure of movement-building and not the movement itself. We specifically warn that since social movements are fundamentally about power, foundations need to be brave about the space into which they are entering. We suggest that avoiding the tyranny of the urgent is critical since these are long-term processes. We do note some potentially important and positive roles, orienting our recommendations around building success, maintaining success, and measuring success. Along the way, we suggest that organizations may need to be big to match the challenge and the task – and note that this implies avoiding a faddish emphasis on the small as authentic and understanding the need for size and scale.

A final word on the research process. In developing our views on these very complex issues of

movement-building, we have relied on a review of the available literature, a series of interviews with activists and others, and our own years working with various community organizations.<sup>1</sup> We accept that this knowledge base will allow us to offer only an incomplete picture and celebrate the great work of researchers such as Mark Warren, Richard Wood, and other who have settled in and done participant observation with a single organization over a long time period.<sup>2</sup> Our purpose here is less ambitious: we hope to cull a few lessons, offer a few directions, and help start a deeper conversation about how advocates and funders can work together to achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> To inform this paper, we interviewed leadership from Center for Policy Initiatives, Coastal Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy, East Los Angeles Community Corporation, Gamaliel Foundation, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, Miami Workers Center, Partnership for Working Families, SCOPE, Transportation and Land Use Coalition, Urban Habitat, and Working Partnerships, USA. In addition, we used information gathered from previous work with environmental justice organizations like Communities for a Better Environment, Environmental Health Coalition, Pacoima Beautiful, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, and West County Toxics Coalition. Finally, we draw on our own experiences with various groups like PICO, the IAF, the Community Coalition, the Right to the City Network, the Center for Community Change, and many others.

<sup>2</sup> Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Richard Wood, *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Marion Orr, ed, *Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2007).



## II. The Literature on Movement Building

“. . . there are certainly easier ways than movement organizing to get a seat at the tables of power, but not if the goal is turning the tables—changing the purposes of power and empowering the people to hold it.” -- The New World Foundation, *Funding Social Movements: the New World Foundation Perspective* (2003, p. 13).

The study of social movements is not new – although a recent resurgence in both movements and the literature has led to renewed attention to the field.<sup>3</sup> The central task of this literature overview is to provide a framework for examining collective action by organizations that are committed to some form of social change, usually through power struggles that reform or dislodge existing institutions. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the scale or geography of change. This is partly because while social movements traditionally began in the workplace, they now also evolve from grassroots community (and even internet) organizing – and so the spatial frame of reference has changed. But it is more than a community-workplace dichotomy: while the nation-state was once the focal point for organizing, a variety of factors have combined to make local, regional, and state platforms more important.

### Social Movement Theories

Social movements differ from coalitions in several ways: while the latter are episodic, the former are long-term, while the latter are concerned with

<sup>3</sup> This section is adapted from Manuel Pastor, Chris Benner, and Martha Matsuoka, *This Could Be the Start of Something Big: How Social Movements for Regional Equity are Reshaping Metropolitan America* (forthcoming: Cornell University Press).

policy, the former are concerned with power, and while the latter are brought together by common interest, the former are stitched together by common destiny. According to Kreisi, for example, social movement organizations “mobilize their constituency for collective action, and ...they do so with a political goal, that is, to obtain some collective good (avoid some collective ill) from authorities.”<sup>4</sup> One of the explicit strategies of these organizations is to build a base or “people power,” meaning a large constituency of politically educated and empowered people with a common goal.

Social movement theories – analytical frameworks that attempt to connect people, organizations, and social change into one unified understanding – generally fall into six categories: deprivation theory, economic theory, resource mobilization theory, political process and opportunity theory, new social movement theory, and “framing” theory.<sup>5</sup>

According to the deprivation approach, social protest movements occur when rising expectations are not met with tangible material results.<sup>6</sup> Such theorists also note that institutional shifts

<sup>4</sup> Hanspeter Kreisi, “The Organizational Structure of New Social Movements in Political Context.” In *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 152-185.

<sup>5</sup> In the literature, the first two are known as classical and Marxist theory; we shift the labels here in order to focus, as with the other theories, on the major drivers of social movements.

<sup>6</sup> Ted Gurr, “A Causal Model of Civil Strike: A Comparative Analysis using New Indices,” *American Political Science Review* 62 (1968): 1104-1124. ; James C. Davies, “Toward a Theory

caused by major societal changes - depression, industrialization, urbanization - fracture the ties that bind people to institutions and associations that exert control over the political behavior of individuals, leading to a relaxation of norms and a rise in social protest.<sup>7</sup> Economic theories also focus on deprivation, usually in terms of class. Here, however, the deprivation is not temporary or even relative but structural; economic crises and hardships at any particular time catalyze social movements by signaling a “far more profound conflict which cannot be resolved within the existing social formation.”<sup>8</sup> In both cases, deprivation plays a role, particularly in the formation of self-interest and grievance, and social movements emerge in breakdowns of, and seek breakthroughs in, the social structure.

Resource mobilization theory, which emerged in the 1970’s, sees social movements not as acts of deviance or even necessarily defiance, but rather as deliberate, patterned frameworks of collective action directly related to the flow of social resources.<sup>9</sup> Resource mobilization theorists argue that in periods of economic growth, people find the time and resources to participate or contribute to social movements – social movements emerge therefore not from levels of grievance, beliefs, or other psychological conditions of participants, but

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of Revolution,” *American Sociological Review* 27, 1 (February 1962): 5-19.

<sup>7</sup> William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed and How They Fail*, (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, 6 (1977):1212-1241.

by the opportunities, benefits and costs perceived by members to flow from collective action. Thus, social movements are “integral elements of social and political life and not the product of social or psychological pathology.”<sup>10</sup> The model suggests that charitable and philanthropic involvement in social change efforts establish a resource rich context for the expansion of social movement organizations.

Political process and opportunity theory argues that shifts in political power and structure create shifts in the costs of challenging authorities thereby creating openings or disincentives for social protest and movements to occur and develop. The changing cost-benefit calculus is critical: even though resources may be available (or provided by philanthropy) to launch a social movement, the nature of political conditions and structures may be so repressive that the costs of collective action are too high.<sup>11</sup> The emergence of social movements thus depends on how venerable or vulnerable the political structure is to change – and the relationship of social

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<sup>10</sup> Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein, and Richard Flacks, *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Doug McAdam, “The Political Process Model” in *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). See also Charles Tilly, “Repertoires of Contention in America and Britain, 1750-1830,” in *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Control, and Tactics*, eds. Mayer Zald and John McCarthy, (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop, 1979) 567-589 and Sidney Tarrow, “Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest.” Western Societies Program, Occasional Paper No. 21, 2d ed. Center for International Studies, (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 1991).

movements and political structure determines how social movements evolve and how their repertoires of collective action change over time. In his analysis of the civil rights movement, for example, McAdam argues that a slow loosening of traditional social controls in the South gave African Americans greater political leverage, creating a momentum that resulted in the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Montgomery bus boycott.<sup>12</sup>

The “new social movement” theory rose in the context of the explosion of social protest and movements that characterized the 1960’s. Theorists in this camp suggest that culture and identity, in addition to class, are mediating social transformation and informing political struggles over the state and economy.<sup>13</sup> According to this “newsocialmovement” theory, in a post-industrial era, the working class is in decline as a political actor and new “agents” such as women, minorities, gays, and even environmentalists, consumer advocates, and other issue-focused groupings, are rising to take their place. The emergence of cultural and agency-centered explanations as basis for collective action gave rise to a new focus

on cultural resonance in grievance formation, and an emphasis on the central place of social identities and political consciousness as the basis for collective action.<sup>14</sup>

The new social movement theory also shifts the location of struggle: efforts that arise around communities of interest and geography are seen as important as those that arise from the workplace. It also embodies a distinct vision from tradition: the ideological glue of new social movements is not class interest but a neo-populist vision of democracy; the struggle over culture and social identity plays a greater role; and strategies focus on community self help, empowerment, and independence rather than a focus on attaining and wielding state power.<sup>15</sup>

A final approach to social movement theory is even newer – “framing” or “social constructionist” theory. This perspective suggests that social movements provide ways for individuals to make sense of their experience, particularly the interpretation and expression of grievances. These “frames” help to identify an injustice, communicate a sense of agency, and create a “we” identity that is then counterposed to those who are seen as doing the harm.<sup>16</sup> Frames are often components of ideology, a set of beliefs that more broadly organize an interpretation of the world. Frames, however, reach out to both

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<sup>12</sup> See Doug McAdam, *The Political Process Model in Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982) for an overview and discussion of social movement theory as the context for the emergence of women’s and multiracial organizations, see also Debra C. Minkoff, *Organizing for Equality: The Evolution of Women’s and Racial-ethnic Organizations in America, 1955-1985*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Alain Touraine, *The Post Industrial Society*, (New York: Random House, 1971); and Manuel Castells, *City and the Grassroots*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Dorceta E. Taylor, “The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm: Injustice Framing and the Social Construction of Environmental Discourses,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, 4 (2000): 508-580.

undiscovered allies and sometimes potential ideological opponents by helping explain the world in ways that seem to be common sense. As such, frames are places for debate rather than political litmus tests.

Frames also come, as Taylor notes, in both restricted and elaborated forms: “Black Power” lets in just a few potential allies while “civil rights” casts a broader umbrella, even though both may be used by actors seeking to primarily further the interests of African Americans.<sup>17</sup> Of course, the risk is that the elaborated frame can be too mushy – consider how former U.C. Regent Ward Connerly has spent a decade packaging anti-affirmative action initiatives as a fight for “civil rights” rather than the rollback of justice that many believe it to be.

The frames approach to building social movements lifts up the important element of consciousness building, detaches this from specific class, ethnic, or sexual preference locations, and stresses the activity of creating a new shared identity through story-telling, collective action, and camaraderie.<sup>18</sup> It brings in resource mobilization and other practical elements but it shines a light on the struggle of ideas while avoiding ideology.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall Ganz. “Left Behind: Social Movements, Parties, and the Politics of Reform,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> This quick review may make it seem like the different strands are additive, with each evolving on the ground set by the previous theory. In fact, there are real tensions between perspectives but given our focus on pragmatic recommendations, we are simply highlighting that there are different analytical approaches.

## The Scale of Change

In the last decade, the role that scale (or geographic levels) plays in social movements and in the strategies of social movement organizations has become a topic of interest for many researchers as well as activists.<sup>20</sup> This may seem an odd consideration since social movements seem to be about broad issues – civil rights, the role of women, respect for evangelical values – but scale has always been a critical component of the implementation of change strategies.

One basic role for geography is simply the constitution of community and community interests. Such interests need not be geographic: consider the notion of an artist community or a gay and lesbian community. Yet even those communities are helped in their struggles by a place-based frame that situates a group of individuals (partly in reality and partly in the public imagination) in the lofts of an industrial district or the homes of West Hollywood. “Community” then becomes connected to neighborhood, city or region – and the value of such a place-based reference is that it helps with framing common interest. Note, for example, that the city of West Hollywood came about not because of

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<sup>20</sup> Wilton and Cranford, for example, argue that “a full understanding of the political potential of social movements requires recognition of their inherently spatial nature”; see Robert Wilton and Cynthia Cranford, “Toward an Understanding of the Spatiality of Social Movements: Labor Organizing at a Private University in Los Angeles,” *Social Problems* 49 (3), 2002: 374-94. Deborah Martin focuses on “place frames” in which the geography of community is an important organizing tool in her article, “‘Place-framing’ as Place-making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (3), 2003:730–750.



concerns about gay rights but rather because of the struggle to maintain rent control, a goal that linked younger gays with elderly residents – but West Hollywood has since become an important “safe space” for gay and lesbian individuals. The geographic aspect of community allows people to cross traditional interest lines in ways that reflect the broader ambitions of social movements, and may allow them to achieve their transformational goals.

But by scale, we wish to stress here the levels at which organizations and movements operate to create change. Consider, for example, that the civil rights movement utilized the national stage of conscience to transform the regional system of Jim Crow. Note how the conservative movement built its constituency by focusing on what are now known as “Red” states and by creating a base in rural areas and suburban mega-churches. There could be, we would submit, no possibility for a book about conservative gains entitled *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* unless there was something important about Kansas – and by extension, the geographic scales at which social movements work to make change.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, the choice of which geography matters is not purely opportunistic by issue nor is it completely accidental. One important background phenomena in the last decade or so has been the rise of regions as economic and political units, something partly rooted in the importance of regional industrial clusters and partly rooted in the devolution of federal authority to states and local entities as public

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

fiscal supports have eroded.<sup>22</sup> And some of the most influential movements in recent years – the labor-community alliances associated with the Partnerships for Working Families, the interfaith organizers of the Gamaliel Foundation or PICO, the community-based groupings seeking to reduce the prevalence of asthma or ameliorate the disparities in environmental exposures, the activist organizations seeking to shift transportation dollars and resources to better serve the poor – have often had an explicit focus on organizing at a regional scale and networking those regions for change.

The changing role of scale influences the nature of social movements in profound ways. First, it creates new possibilities that might not otherwise be seen. In recent years, several analysts have argued that, at a regional level, businesses may actually be “sticky” rather than “footloose” because of regionally-based workers, markets, expertise, and business relationships.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See Andrew E.G. Jonas and Stephanie Pincetl. “Rescaling Regions in the State: The New Regionalism in California.” *Political Geography*, 25 (2006): 482-505.

<sup>23</sup> See Robert Cox, “Critical Political Economy.” in Björn Hettne, ed. *International Political Economy: Understanding Global Disorder*, (Halifax: Fernwood Books, 1995): 31-45. and Ash Amin, “An Institutional Perspective on Regional Economic Development.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23 (2), 1999, pp. 365-378. These are the sort of “untradeable interdependencies” to which regional theorist Michael Storper refers, see Michael Storper, *The Regional World: Territorial Development in a Global Economy*, (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1997):18–22. See also Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1984) and Charles Sabel, “Flexible Specialization and the Reemergence of Regional

If businesses are indeed at least partially rooted in regional networks in this way, it becomes possible to implement change locally in ways that might be impeded by power relations at a national scale. Thus, we saw a wave of local living wage laws and statewide hikes in the minimum wage prior to any such movement on the national front – change is coming from the region “up” rather than the nation “down,” and smart organizers have taken advantage of this new causal route.<sup>24</sup>

Second, this bottom-up approach – rather than organizing a national alliance or coalition, building from the region to the state to the nation – raises the important issue of how to network efforts. Groups are struggling with this issue and finding different answers, some of which we explore below. But it also means that the relationship between “grassroots” and “treetops” – between organizers and policy wonks – is different than in the past. Research, framing and communication need to be located closer to the ground.

Third, this all has implications for a different meaning of scale: organizational size. The need to define community at at least the regional level and to network with others who are doing the same implies a need for bigger yet more nimble organizations. There is a tendency to think that

smaller and more boutique organizations are somehow closer to community and better able to reflect local interests. That may be true – but making change requires size and organizational capacity, particularly if one is to move gracefully and quickly from one level to another.

Do we stress geography too much? We think not. Those who were not watching at the local and regional level would not have noticed how the conservative movement worked city by city, school board by school board, church by church, to achieve the sort of refashioning of the American consensus that redefined politics in the 1980s and 1990s. And those who are surprised today at the emergence of an Obama candidacy and the striking shift in the tone of the country were not paying attention in 2004 when the Democratic national candidate lost, but minimum wage hikes were passed in some of the most conservative states in the country.<sup>25</sup> To hear the rumble of the train coming, one needs to get a bit closer to the ground.

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Economies” in *Reversing Industrial Decline*, Paul Hirst and Jonathan Zeitlin , eds. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> While our tendency here is to focus on economic issues that might be rooted in the region, the regional strategy can also be seen in other areas such as the struggle over gay marriage, in the ways the conservative movement sought to dampen the clamor for marriage rights at the state level, and the way in which gay and lesbian activists and allies have responded in kind.

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<sup>25</sup> See Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom. *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

### III. Top Ten Elements of Building Movements

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“The difference between a movement and a coalition is that when an issue changes, a movement doesn’t have an identity crisis – its ‘frame’ holds a story and has an explicative value even as times change.” – Gihan Perrera, Miami Workers’ Center

Why spend time on theory? Aren’t social movements a bit like that famous expression – you know one when you see one – and so academic musings of the sort above provide a lot of paper but little practical guidance?

Aside from the general utility of providing guideposts, the unique aspect of theory in this era is that movement builders have become extraordinarily self-conscious about their actions – and thus the interplay of theory and practice is tighter than might generally be the case. In particular, a newer generation of movement builders is often college-educated and they have reviewed the theories into which their actions now seem to fit. This point was drilled into us most sharply when we had the privilege to sit in at the founding meeting of the Right to the City Network, a new national group consisting of organizations that had been struggling to limit gentrification in their local urban areas.

One might assume that the meeting, which took place in Los Angeles in December 2006, would be a rehash of policies and tactics, including, for example, strategies to build coalitions that could force cities to pass protections against tenant eviction. The talk, however, was all about whether or not they should collectively agree on a new “frame” revolving around “the right to the city” – a theory first promulgated by French

intellectual Henri Lefebvre – and how they might use this “frame” to build a national movement.<sup>26</sup> It sounded like a graduate seminar – but with real consequences– and yet it was launched by grassroots organizers.

Of course, theoretical guidance is one thing, practical guidance is another. Below, we try to distill the research, interviews with a variety of community leaders, and our own experience working with such groups over the years into what we think are the ten most pertinent elements for building strong and lasting movements. In deriving this top ten list – our nod to David Letterman in particular, and short attention spans in general – we have sought to meet the following constraints: that the elements be clear and identifiable, that they be equally true of movements from the left and the right, and that they have meaning to those in the field with whom we talked and thus can provide some particular guidance to foundations as they decide on investments.

The ten elements come in three “buckets.” The first bucket includes fundamental elements: strong movements need a clear vision or frame, a solid membership base, and the commitment

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<sup>26</sup> Translated writings are available, Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996); see the review in Mark Purcell, “Citizenship and the Right to the Global City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27 (3), 2003: 564-590. Watching this process of theorizing and reframing reminded us of the notions of community-based efforts to come up with a collective grounded theory, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967).



to be in it for the long-haul. The second bucket involves what we think is necessary to implement and make the movement real: a viable economic model, a clear understanding of governance and what it should look like, research and communication to change the story, and a clear policy package to push the desired change. The third bucket is all about scale: to go from a single problem to a movement on a broader scale, there must be a willingness to grow as an organization or set of organizations, a strategy for scaling up from the region to the state or from the national level downward, and a program for networking amongst various movements to build streams of organizational development that come together into a single river of change.

So what are the elements essential for movement building?

### **1. A vision and a frame**

Movements may make change but they also give meaning. Using visions and frames to create a narrative, the fate of minorities is cast against the promise of America, the shortfall in health care is depicted against the human impulse to provide care, the fragmentation of modern life is contrasted to a community anchored by traditional values. In a world of challenges, social movements help to identify the source of problems, the groups and individuals that stand in the way of solutions, and the way in which resolving those issues will lift up our best and highest selves.

This is, as a former President might remind us, the “vision thing” – but it involves more than identifying a common enemy and a common

path ahead. Like the thinner alliances in coalitions, movements may seek to address and respect the needs and self-interests of their partners but they also root the achievement of these goals in some set of unifying values and beliefs. The political right has recognized this for years; the political left has traditionally focused too exclusively on messaging – how to repackage its ideological view in the wake of its seeming rejection by voters – while often neglecting the important task of aligning ideas and incorporating values. It is the value base that reminds and attracts movement members, helping them articulate to themselves why the movement is the right (as well as the self-interested) thing to do.<sup>27</sup>

What is specifically meant by frame? George Lakoff and others have offered powerful definitions based on the notion of a conceptual structure for thinking, and focused heavily on the words and messages that produce a particular narrative of who is to blame and why for problems. We want to offer a slightly different definition: a frame is a set of assumptions that structures discourse, one that sits in the interregnum between a vision and a policy package. Frames change the way

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<sup>27</sup> Such a focus of values has been the stuff of new organizing and writing, and it has been reflected in the recent struggle within the Democratic Party between a message focused on policy and self-interest, and a message focused on hope and unity. For more on values and movement-building, see Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get it*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005) and Michael Lerner, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right*, (San Francisco: Harper, 2006).

we talk – they accommodate debate but they set new terms.<sup>28</sup>

Consider the frame of “community benefits,” a concept made popular by a series of labor-affiliated groups such as the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy and adopted by many others around the country. By stressing the accountability of private developers to provide public goods for received subsidies, the “community benefits” frame shifts us from “the power of the market” – a frame in which any intervention is considered risky – to one in which we constructively debate just how much the community should benefit without overtaxing developers. Or consider more powerfully the “living wage” – a frame that shifted a series of local debates from whether one should intervene to how one could be opposed to providing a wage at which workers could actually live.

A vision or ideology sets the goal, a frame sets the terms of the debate, and a policy package describes how interests might be met. Understanding the relationship between all three is crucial and difficult – but we simply want to stress here that social movements are distinguished by their commitment to idea-making (visions and frames) and not just policy. And it is a distinction recognized by

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<sup>28</sup> As Hardisty and Bhargava point out, there is a misperception of monolithic unity on the part of conservative forces. In fact, there has been quite a bit of ideological diversity and the “frame” has been broad enough to tolerate (and maybe even cultivate) a vibrant discussion about the mix of libertarian and traditionalist impulses. See Jean Hardisty and Deepak Bhargava, “Wrong About the Right”. *The Nation*, November 2005.

some of the most effective groups in California and beyond.

In San Diego County, for example, where the political environment presents sharp challenges for progressive policy, there are efforts explicitly aimed at changing the way ideas are framed. According to the Center for Policy Initiative (CPI) President, Donald Cohen, it is not about “putting the finger in the dike, we need to change the discourse.” While activists and advocates have already made some progress in the City of San Diego, with a Community Benefits Agreement and Living Wage ordinances, they had less success at the County level. In response, they have formed a strategy group to shape the “idea environment.”

This kind of fundamental shifting of the debate is not new to CPI and its partners. As primarily a research and advocacy organization, it has been able to change the way in which people have talked about the economy. Their influential report titled, “*Planning for Shared Prosperity or Growing Inequality?*” described the hour glass economy and the increasing inequality of the region.<sup>29</sup> Cohen says the report is often referred to in the press and elsewhere, and is an example of how ideas can get traction to make change.

CPI’s experience with the Partnership for Working Families, a national network of affiliated like-minded organizations working to reshape regional economies to help working

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<sup>29</sup> Enrico A. Marcelli, Sundari Baru and Donald Cohen, *Planning for Shared Prosperity or Growing Inequality?* (San Diego: Center on Policy Initiatives, 2000): <http://www.onlinecpi.org/downloads/planning.pdf>.

families, has shown that it is most important for groups coming together to have their ideas aligned first. Cohen emphasizes that this must occur before developing public messaging or frames because when the two are mixed (ideas and messages), it can be frustrating and doesn't work. A clear set of ideas is important for knitting together a movement.

Where there is a readiness to talk about vision, there is greater likelihood for movement building. This is echoed by many leaders who talk about building a movement founded and based on values and morals. The Right has not shied away from this kind of framing; in fact, they have embraced it and elements on the progressive side are now doing the same. The California Alliance, a small network of organizations, has a tax and fiscal group that has researched a value-based methodology for campaigns in preparation for the 2010 election and members are experimenting in select cities in the state to see what resonates for a strategic initiative. The Center for Community Change's Campaign for Community Values is based on the same notion that taking values seriously is the first step to movement-building.

Ideas, frames and narratives are not merely the province of identified intellectuals. One way to keep members unified around a common vision is by providing the space for storytelling. Sharing stories connects people more deeply to each other and the movement, keeping members involved even in tough times. Stories and personal connections can also help to change the way communities talk about an issue and change perceptions. For example, the organization Strengthening

Our Lives (SOL) in California tries to build commonality and solidarity between immigrant and non-immigrant communities by having individuals share the story of how and why they (or their ancestors) came to California. They have found that this radically alters the hostility, tension, and zero-sum logic that seem to dominate most discussions of immigration.

Storytelling, in short, helps build the frame and make it successful; a bottoms-up frame that really resonates comes not just from focus groups with the base, useful as those might be, but more fundamentally from organizing at the base. For all these reasons, organizations like Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) actually make storytelling central to their organizing efforts – and in his recent efforts to build a movement-style base for the get-out-the-vote efforts of the Obama campaign, famed organizer Marshall Ganz stressed the need for organizers to discover and convey their personal narratives to move others.<sup>30</sup>

A final word. In our interviews with activists, the notion of a vision and a frame was coupled with the sense of a “fire in the belly.” That is, the vision cannot simply be a bland notion that we will all be better off together – that might motivate people to collaborate on some issue but it will not move troops to making a commitment to reconsidering who holds power and who should hold power. For the latter, one needs fire, a desperate need to

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<sup>30</sup> On the latter, see Scott Martelle, “Famed Organizer Marshall Ganz Sees History in the Making,” *Los Angeles Times*. Jun 15, 2008.

respond that helps people get to the next level of commitment. People need to see the impact on their lives, they need to see their lives intertwined with each others, and they need to be involved from their hearts.

## **2. An authentic base in key constituencies**

Change comes in many ways and theories of change come in even more varieties. One model – one well rooted in the literature and in some practice – suggests that the way to change policy is to create a group of well-informed experts that can create policy and then shop that policy amongst political actors until some key set of influentials – a senator, a governor, or a mayor – bites. In the literature, this is called “policy entrepreneurship” – and one can think of the highly effective approach some environmental and urban planning groups have taken along these lines at the regional level as well as the panoply of Washington-based think tanks always ready with a new report and a new policy for any willing taker in political circles.<sup>31</sup>

That can be effective but it is often temporary and it is clearly not the social movement way. An essential factor to any movement is a membership base that is engaged or that is being organized to engage, as opposed to a think tank removed from constituents

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<sup>31</sup> See Nancy C. Roberts and Paula J. King, “Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 1 (2), 1991: 147-155; and Michael Mintrom, “Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (3), 1997: 738-770 for discussions of the literature on policy entrepreneurs.

but producing policy reports that might theoretically serve their interests. Because of this, one key element of a social movement is its commitment to organizing – the on-the-ground, one-to-one work that is part science, part art, and all important to organizational sustainability.

Community organizing has a pedigree stretching back to the work of Saul Alinsky in the 1930s and beyond, work that connected neighborhoods and unions, and sought to use the links between workplace and community to address the issues facing working people.<sup>32</sup> Founder of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), his practice and corresponding writings on organizing have been widely influential in the modern activist context. In an Alinsky-style approach, community organizing in its most traditional form is working towards building a membership based organization – and the role of the organizer is to help build leadership within the community.<sup>33</sup>

Such community organizing does embody deeper values and vision, including a broad reaffirmation of the Enlightenment concept of participatory democracy. It also focuses mightily on building leaders who can be transformative and change the circumstances of their communities and beyond. Cesar Hernandez from Coastal Alliance United for

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Drier, “Community Organizing for What? Progressive Politics and Movement Building in America” in *Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change*, ed. Marion Orr, (University Press of Kansas 2007), p. 224.

<sup>33</sup> Rinku Sen, *Stir it Up! Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*, (Jossey-Bass 2003).

a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) notes a recent effort in Santa Paula, California where after engaging farmworkers involved in Poder Popular, a few strong leaders emerged from the ranks of supposedly quiet farmworkers to speak to audiences of 400 people at a time to confront injustices beyond the original organizing around farmworker issues.

According to Mary Gonzales of Gamaliel, “Generally when we think of movements we think of civil rights, anti-war, women’s movement, where large numbers of people gather together around a certain ideology.” In the next breath she talks about the absolute need to have leadership that can articulate ideas: leaders who are talented, sophisticated and can drive the change process.

Through her many years of community organizing, Gonzales notices that building a base has become increasingly difficult due to the erosion of community structures. She attributes this to increased mobility and families stressed by having to work to make ends meet. “Fifty years ago there were community structures... a place for people to gather.” In terms of organizing, she believes that “the issue is only an opportunity to bring the people together. If you build community the issues will get addressed.” The organizing of the Gamaliel network, based on relationship building, takes time—it can involve two to three years of exploration before Gamaliel establishes an organization.

According to Alexia Salvatierra of CLUE, for people to organize they must see the impact on their lives and feel a desperate need to respond.

Like other leaders she believes base building happens when “people on a local level all at once feel that there is a need to respond, it is in their hearts and minds.” At the same time it can not only be about suffering, there must also be some sense of hope. In the Sanctuary Movement spearheaded by Salvatierra and others, there has been a groundswell of support by families who are not even directly affected by immigration laws.

Both leaders agree that for a social movement, groups need to understand that they must be unified to gather the political muscle necessary for change. In Ventura, for example, Gamaliel worked with CAUSE, on a campaign against a liquefied gas facility. Taking on this issue helped establish relationships between the Sierra Club, Malibu beach property owners, and low income strawberry pickers. The massive coalition made for a tremendous win, however, there wasn’t any organization to keep the group working together. Gonzales recalls that “even the MLK movement was more than an organizational structure.” Base building goes beyond the work of an organization, though along with leaders, strong organizations provide the glue.

The importance of a base is often forgotten in the telling of the ascendance of conservatives. As Hardisty and Barghava point out, the usual story is one of a “top-down, conservative movement structure and relentless message discipline.”<sup>34</sup> The truth is that the movement found a receptive base in the evangelical community and cultivated that, including the

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<sup>34</sup> Jean Hardisty and Deepak Bhargava. “Wrong About the Right”. *The Nation*, November 2005.



development of leadership groups from that arena of society. That the right seems in eclipse now is not so much because they have lost their base but that base has drifted as some of the economic and moral messages no longer resonate, a point we touch on below.

Finally, we want to emphasize that organizing and mobilization are different. Mass numbers of people can turn out for a demonstration but that does not mean that they are committed to an ongoing movement – such mobilizations can reflect thin alliances that shatter under pressures and even policy entrepreneurs lacking a base can nonetheless boast, for example, of a really good mailing list. But being able to generate a flurry of e-mails to senators on a key issue is different than being able to provide leadership as issues change and systems change – and this is the stuff of organizing.

### **3. A commitment to the long-haul**

Social movements have staying power and are committed to the long haul. While they may focus on particular issues at times, they are not episodic or coalitional. Movement building is different from coalition building in that it does not seek to only shift policy on an issue, it involves a strategy to build power to effect broader change and focuses on building a strong membership for the long haul. Some say that coalition building is a strategy that works towards an outcome while movement building is about people and vision. In effect, coalition building can be a tool used as a strategy to strengthen a movement.

One might think of coalitions as having a short shelf life, one dictated by the timing of a policy decision or an electoral cycle. Movements, however, are able to pivot from issue to issue, constantly referring back to a worldview and an agenda. To do this requires long-term focus and long-term investments. The right, for example, achieved their recent dominance in American politics not through short-cuts but through a long march through the available institutions – and the creation of new ones through targeted philanthropy. The defeat of Barry Goldwater in the 1964 elections was a watershed and instilled patience; the result was slow but steady progress, the creation of new institutions and new alliances, particularly between a once politically inactive fundamentalist Christian base concerned with “family values” and a more engaged business community enamored with free market ideas.

Sticking in for the long-haul does not imply an ossification of ideas. The labor movement, for example, has shifted from industrial organizing plant-by-plant to sectoral organizing region-by-region – to wit, the Janitors for Justice campaign which targets multiple employers in a way that auto worker organizing did not. Community organizing has evolved from the one-on-one listening and sifting sessions typical of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) to the more directive regional equity approach of the Gamaliel Foundation and its interfaith organizers. Approaches change but continuity and commitment are key.

This recognition of the importance of the long-term has begun to infiltrate broader

politics. One striking feature of the recent set of Democratic primaries was the way in which Senator Barack Obama took an organizing approach to his get-out-the-vote (GOTV) strategy – and recruited one of the country’s leading experts on community organizing, Marshall Ganz, to implement it. Unlike the traditional approach of swooping into town with young mobilizers that would drive up voting strength, “Camp Obama” brought in local organizers, equipped them with a four-day training, and sought to leave in place an infrastructure that could go on to organize and would be available if Obama was to make it into the general election.<sup>35</sup>

The basic point was the campaign tried to avoid a strategy that “helicoptered” people in for campaigning; instead, they built up offices and began to organize the constituency so that there would be a base to come back to. Movement building thrives within this setting where a clear vision is informing multiple steps. And it also thrives when frames are also not “helicoptered” in by messaging experts but rather they emerge from real world experience and community conversation; hence, the focus on personal narratives as a way of threading up a framework as noted in the discussion earlier of the importance of storytelling.

As Amy Dean, former head of the Central Labor Council in the Silicon Valley community of Santa Clara County and founder of Working Partnerships, USA, explains “There is no real

shortcut to building power long-term.” She also notes that “We need to think in terms of building civic infrastructure, not building coalitions, which are short term and episodic. This requires building institutions deliberately committed to building relationships. You don’t build relationships in the middle of a fight—you have to create deliberate space to understand each others’ interests.”<sup>36</sup>

One way that Working Partnerships did this effectively was through the creation in 1997 of a Labor/Community Leadership Institute (subsequently renamed Working Partnerships Leadership Institute). This twelve-week course brings together twenty leaders at a time for a series of interactive presentations, discussions and workshops aimed at developing a common analysis of the political-economic dynamics of the Silicon Valley region. Participants in the Leadership Institute are strategically recruited to represent the diversity of constituencies in the Valley, including small businesses, labor leaders, faith-based constituencies, community organizations, and public sector officials and staff members. Through a group project, participants conduct a strategic analysis of a current policy issue in the Valley, sharing their various perspectives and experiences to develop innovative solutions that might simultaneously move forward a progressive agenda while expanding progressive power in the region.

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<sup>35</sup> See David Schaper, “‘Camp Obama’ Trains Campaign Volunteers”: [www.NPR.org](http://www.NPR.org) ; and Zack Exley, “Stories and Numbers: A closer look at Camp Obama”: [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com).

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<sup>36</sup> See Manuel Pastor, Chris Benner, and Rachel Rosner, *Edging Toward Equity: Creating Shared Opportunity in America’s Regions*, Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community, 2006. [http://www.cjtc.ucsc.edu/docs/r\\_CORE\\_Edging\\_Toward\\_Equity\\_summary.pdf](http://www.cjtc.ucsc.edu/docs/r_CORE_Edging_Toward_Equity_summary.pdf).



The format provides ample opportunity for relationship building, as participants engage with other valley residents whose perspectives they may never have come across in their day-to-day work. In the over ten years this program has been running, over 450 participants have gone through the institute, and over half of those stay active in an ongoing Leadership Network. The result is a broad civic infrastructure of leaders throughout the valley, in strategic institutions and organizations, who share a common frame for understanding, and engaging in development dynamics in the region, no matter what the specific issue at any moment in time may be.

Many participants in the program have gone on to prominent elected positions in the valley—from school boards to city council—but through integrating the Leadership Institute with their political work, the Central Labor Council helps ensure that elected officials are supported through their policies and visions, and accountability to the broader progressive constituency, rather than simply their individual characteristics. This was the stuff of long-term movement-building, not just policy development.

#### **4. An underlying and viable economic model**

Vision, base, and longevity may be the basic elements but implementing all of this requires an intermediate level in which the values and visions of a good society are made real. In our view, this requires a theory of the economy, a theory of the state, a scaffold of solid research that backs up an analysis and

suggests solutions, and an ability to develop and implement policy.

We start with the economy because it seems to us to be central to everything else. Social movements, after all, are about the redistribution of resources – to aggrieved minorities, to underserved communities, to disenfranchised women. Yet while it is quite possible to argue for a pure redistributionist approach, such efforts also have to confront the counter-claim that they will shipwreck the economy and are thus not viable – the last, best defense of any system is that while it does not work well, there is no other system that will work better (this has been part of the challenge, one might note, with efforts at systemic health reform).

Thus, the labor movement hit its first stride in the twentieth century in the context of a broader Keynesian perspective that argued – and then empirically demonstrated – that raising workers' wages and expanding the role of government were actually recipes for general economic success. When the U.S. reached a perfect storm of international competition and technological change in the mid-1970s, conservatives were at the ready with a market model that seemed to make sense, particularly in light of the collapse of socialist alternatives, even as progressives failed to articulate a new vision of the economy's underpinnings. This vision also had its redistributionist impulses – toward the wealthy and away from the government – and cemented support from their own constituency but did it all in the context of a full explanation about why this was good for the economy.

In our view, having an underlying economic model is critical. Scholars like Frances Fox Piven might decry the failure of the “welfare rights” movement as evidence of an uncaring America but we think it may be more the natural fall-out of a model with no economic viability and weak value appeal.<sup>37</sup> After all, how would the economy work if everyone was on welfare? And exactly how does this square with the American emphasis on work as a method of self-definition?

Thus, we are not surprised that ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), which was founded nearly 40 years ago in the heat of the welfare rights struggle but has grown to become the largest grassroots membership-based community organization in the country, now lists as its central campaigns: Foreclosures, Gulf Coast Recovery, Immigration, Living Wage, Paid Sick Days, and Voter Engagement. Moreover, ACORN was a major force in the evolution of the state campaigns to raise the minimum wage ahead of the federal shift. These are all connected to a new vision of the economy.

The importance of economic viability has recently entered into the debate about health care. Many critics of universal health care have suggested values based in individualism but coupled that with an argument that universal care is not economically viable, particularly if it is run by the government. For the proponents, argumentation has shifted from a notion that everyone has a “right” to health

care to a notion that we cannot afford the cost of not extending care to all and, in part, to the negative impacts of inadequate health care on national economic competitiveness. Return on investment studies repeatedly show the economic advantages to spending on preventative health care upfront.

The shift to stressing a viable economic model has been most vividly seen in the efforts of organizations now associated with the Partnership for Working Families (although there are also elements of it in the regional equity perspective taken up by Urban Habitat, the Gamaliel Foundation, and others). Working Partnerships, USA and other effective movement builders have come not only to an understanding of underlying economic conditions but have critiqued them and offered alternatives. An analysis—economic, political, and policy—is a critical groundwork for moving agendas, organizations and movements. Having a developed economic model offers alternatives that can work. This proactive approach is more hopeful and creative than the common focus on grievances or fixing policies that may be broken beyond repair.

Gamaliel’s work on regional equity offers a good example. Organizing for regional equity starts from the premise that the current metropolitan form is causing strains for both older suburbs and central cities. It points to the possibility for wedding together economic prosperity and fairness, and it relies on building relationships to solve our society’s problems face-to-face, race-to-race, and place-to-place.

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<sup>37</sup> See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed and How They Fail*. (New York: Random House, 1979).

It is important to stress that economic models are most effective in supporting movement building when they are locally-rooted—when constituencies of base-building organizations can see how the models relate to their own lives, and see achievable opportunities for advancing these models. This may seem like a surprising point, since undoubtedly we are in a global economy in which local achievements can all too readily be swamped by broader economic forces, and local policy victories are overturned by state and federal action. Yet without being rooted in people’s local experience, and without targets for action that are achievable in ways that help build hope and power, economic policy can all too easily remain in the hands of ‘experts’ with few opportunities for popular input, and substantial opportunities for elite domination.

Thus, while an increase in the national minimum wage is an important goal, it is only the hundreds of local living wage and higher state minimum wage campaigns around the country that were able to build a significant constituency that eventually led to increases in the national minimum wage. Similarly, broad efforts to reform economic policy at a national level, such as *The Agenda For Shared Prosperity* developed by the Economic Policy Institute or the 12-point plan to halve poverty in ten years developed by the Center for American Progress and prominently endorsed by John Edwards and a range of progressive organizations, are exciting efforts to elevate and sustain a focus on economic opportunity

at a national scale.<sup>38</sup> But unless those policies and visions are linked to achievable victories at a local scale, they are less likely to generate significant numbers of motivated and engaged supporters and their future will remain uncertain.

## 5. A vision of government and governance

Having a clear understanding of public institutions and the role of the state is a basic piece of movement building. Conservatives triumphed by tying together a diverse coalition – free-market business types, religious fundamentalists, Southern traditionalists, and ordinary working and middle-class Americans – many of whom felt that government had overreached in some way or another (through, say, economic regulation, imposition of secularism, Affirmative Action, or simply high taxes). For this group, a smaller state was consistent with more freedom and more personal and societal success – and the embrace was of a small, lean (and some might say mean) state.

The challenge for those on the progressive side of the equation is how to make the government seem like a positive system, particularly given all the issues of incompetence and bureaucracy individuals see in their everyday interactions with public institutions. CPI’s

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<sup>38</sup> See the Economic Policy Institute’s Agenda for Shared Prosperity website: <http://www.sharedprosperity.org/> for more information. For more information on the 12-point plan, see <http://www.halfintention.org/> and the Center for American Progress Task Force on Poverty’s *From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half, 2007*. [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/poverty\\_report.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/poverty_report.html).

President Donald Cohen asserts that people need to see “the public role in managing the economy, regulating industry, social goods... where we can exercise and pass laws, set rules.” In effect, he adds, it demonstrates what we care about and how we would make it happen with “responsible managed capitalism.”

Responsible managed capitalism may not be the most compelling term but it does suggest an intertwining of the public and private sectors, and a role for public policy and public solutions. It embodies a vision of the government as a helper rather than a hindrance, and it does harken back to an earlier era in which public systems (educational investments, labor protections, regulation of health and safety) were viewed as positive supports to achieving the American Dream.

Much of what has gone wrong for progressives has been a counterposing of the state and the individual: the right stressed the strength of one while the left stressed the importance of the other. The challenge is to weave the two together, and to offer a narrative and a set of policies in which government is seen as an expression of democracy and an enhancer of individual opportunity rather than an impediment to democracy and a barrier to individual initiative.

The mix of messages is implicit in the frame of “community benefits.” Implicit is a recognition that the private sector does development better but that the public sector has a role in insuring that the broader communities benefit. The benefits are then constructed to support those who might demonstrate individual drive – the

promise is for decent training and good jobs not simply subsidies to those who are displaced – and the implicit model is of a public sector which has a limited but important role.

Whatever the mix, social movements need to have a theory of the state and a way to show, at least in our culture, how that role for the state is a full expression of democracy. This is critical because the government is one of the most important tools of change: by reclaiming government to the people, movements have the infrastructure to shape the changes they want to see.

It is also necessary because while foundations may be forced to skip direct investments in this arena, Marshall Ganz points out, movements do eventually have to find an electoral expression (although they may not run candidates and they should avoid excessive entanglement).<sup>39</sup> This is reflected in the labor mobilization in Los Angeles which changed the face of public policy but also elected a mayor and much of the city council; it is evident in the accountability sessions with public officials that is part and parcel of IAF organizing;<sup>40</sup> and it is evident in the role of evangelical churches and their ministers in the election of politicians ranging from the school board to the Presidency.

There is a delicate balance involved in such work: social movements make their mark by challenging policy and politics but oppositional

<sup>39</sup> Marshall Ganz. “Left Behind: Social Movements, Parties, and the Politics of Reform,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> See Mark Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 2001).

strategies can take a movement only so far. Interestingly, various social movement organizations are experimenting with working directly with public officials as a precursor to policy change. The Leadership program of Urban Habitat, includes civil servants and elected officials as participants—not as speakers, but as students. They invite them to learn some of the same leadership skills they develop with the community leaders and guide them in understanding regional equity issues. Working Partnerships’ Leadership Institute provides a similar opportunity, with the Institute’s focus on specific policy issues providing an opportunity for public sector officials to engage in policy discussions with diverse constituencies away from the glare of public hearings or city council meetings. These are examples of bringing in the public sphere, while also working from the “outside” to leverage for change.

## **6. A scaffold of solid research**

There is a tendency to think of social movements in terms of the numbers of their constituents, the size of their demonstrations, and the power of their values. But while this is a strong and essential component of the actions, such a view misses the underlying efforts that go into targeting issues, areas, and possibilities. This has always been the case with social movements: the Montgomery bus boycott was not simply Rosa Parks becoming tired one day of her position in the back of the bus but also the result of careful research and preparation about whether a boycott was viable and could be sustained; labor struggles in the 1930s were not simply the expression

of worker frustration but also reflected careful thought about which sectors would be more open to organizing and why.

The role of research in analyzing problems and suggesting solutions has become increasingly important in contemporary social movements. To some extent, this is a reflection of the success of the right in amassing a series of research institutions that could provide a narrative, facts, and policies, and progressives have sought to study and mimic that success. It may also be due to the complexity of issues that are confronting contemporary America, many of which require that the “common sense” that may emerge from vision and values be supported by a scaffold of solid research about intended and unintended consequences of any action. In any case, we have been continually struck by how, for example, research on the impact of the living wage preceded the campaign itself – and allowed the proponents to dismiss the shoddy research of resistant chambers of commerce – or how environmental justice organizations have marshaled outside resources to produce sophisticated studies that document a problem of health inequity and use this to move people and policy.

Many of the organizations we spoke with have strong research capacity internal to their organizations dedicated to examining the increasing complexity of current injustices. This research is then given to organizers who educate, equip, and empower community members to speak truth to power – justified by our nation’s commitment to participatory democracy. Working Partnerships USA



Executive Director Phaedra Ellis Lamkins describes their work as having three legs: research and policy (to understand the problem and identify solutions); organizing (because having a base is necessary for a movement and it is helpful to have a base to be accountable to); and advocacy (which is needed it to be effective). This model gives equal weight to having research capacity – in her words, “they all three go together.”

Others, like the interfaith organizers of the Gamaliel Foundation, recognize the need for strong research capacity so they have brought academics and others (such as John Powell, David Rusk and Myron Orfield) into the network to provide this expertise. Not atypical of the Gamaliel approach is to have these “strategic partners” help to determine organizational direction, and then be available to frame issues in the initial organizing meetings that launch a new part of the network in a new location. Likewise, the environmental justice community, particularly in California, has collaborated with a series of research partners, utilizing the work to make progress on policy.<sup>41</sup> And anyone familiar with the contemporary IAF knows the constant – and often surprisingly high-level – interactions with various academic advisors.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Martha Matsuoka, *From Neighborhood to Global: Community-Based Regionalism and Shifting Concepts of Place in Community and Regional Development*, (Dissertation for the Department of Urban Planning at UCLA, 2005). Also see Liberty Hill Foundation, “Change, Not Charity,” (Santa Monica, CA).

<sup>42</sup> Partly as a result, they have also developed their academic fans: see Paul Osterman, *Gathering*

As the research demands get more specialized, some groups, like Urban Habitat, have contracted with experts for specific policy areas. For example, when working with residents on the Richmond General Plan process they hired Public Advocates, Inc. for researching policy options around housing. This enables them to have the research capacity without taking away from staff capacity. It should be noted that to ensure relevance and rapport with the organization, it is most effective when the organization or group selects the experts to work with.

In addition to pure research capacity, SCOPE engages in power analysis, which is another kind of analysis that differs somewhat from traditional research. The point here is not simply to determine the causes of, and solutions to, a problem but also to create a visual analysis by mapping who holds power and potential openings for leveraging power. SCOPE trains other organizations in this approach, with the eventual goal being that the groups are able to update the analysis on their own, and see the progress they have made or where they need to shift their energies.

Our point here is simple: modern social movement organizations have analytical and research capacity at the ready, often both internal and external to their organizations. It is a part of making the intermediate-level case that flows from a vision of the economy and the government, and the research scaffold has been a key element in recent social movement successes.

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*Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

## 7. A pragmatic policy package

Americans are a pragmatic lot: if the best ideas and the deepest values find no expression in a doable set of policies, attention quickly wanders back to sports, reality TV, and everyday life. Having a viable vision of the economy, a clear role for government, and the research capacity to identify problems is important – and so is having a policy package that is rigorous and coherent enough to be taken seriously.

Thus, the civil rights had a broad moral vision – and a Voting Rights Act. The labor movement had a vision of economic justice – and a Wagner Act. The immigrant movement has a compelling logic – and a designated path to legalization. The vision must have a practical policy side, and it must create enough of a change in material circumstances that it reinforces the sense that the movement is gaining momentum and can win its broadest aims.

At the same time, policy for policy's sake is not the stuff of movement-building: the challenge is to identify policy that will highlight the need for systemic change. Jennifer Ito, Senior Director at SCOPE, says for this long-term systemic change to take place organizations need to direct efforts towards strategic targets, especially those with control over the allocation of public resources, focus on large-scale and long-term positive impact, and push for fundamental changes in decision-making structures and allocation of resources. It helps in this work to design models to demonstrate policy change, advocate for funding and set up long-term oversight structures as well.

For example, through research and organizing strategies, SCOPE developed policy and implementation plans to shift the local workforce development focus away from “demand occupations” as determined by the Workforce Investment Act. These occupations are based simply on numeric growth and include many low-paid jobs such as retail salespersons and cashiers, and highly paid jobs, such as software engineers and systems administrators, whose need for public assistance is certainly less pressing. Instead, SCOPE pushed their local Workforce Investment Board to prioritize targeted industries and sectors that could offer a more high road occupational track for their communities. This was a huge policy win that operationalized changes within the Los Angeles City Workforce Investment Board and the Los Angeles City Council to emphasize more high quality jobs targeted to low-income individuals.

The PICO California Project, an effort of 20 faith-based organizations in California affiliated with PICO's national network of organizations, provides step-by-step guidance to their affiliates as to how best to move health policy. In a very user-friendly training manual they prescribe an easy three step process to influencing health in communities: 1. Build relationships, 2. Research the policy blueprint to help illuminate the power structure of the local health care system, and 3. Take action through community meetings with public officials, speaking at city council meetings, letter writing campaigns or other strategies. PICO importantly distinguishes the need



for communities to understand the particular health processes of their community so as to time actions around important decision making points that will be more effective.<sup>43</sup>

This model can be demonstrated clearly through efforts in Santa Clara County to provide free health care coverage for all children in the County. People Acting in Community Together (PACT), a PICO affiliate, and Working Partnerships USA came together to develop a policy alternative. The two organizations approached and convinced the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to work on a plan which included funding the project through the tobacco settlement. PACT and Working Partnerships USA then partnered with the Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System to develop and implement the first Children's Health Initiative (CHI). These efforts have led to a tremendous increase in insured children through Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. In addition, the success of this Initiative has created momentum throughout the state, where today there are 29 counties with their own CHI.<sup>44</sup>

Land use and growth issues are at the center of many debates in California communities. In the CDC world, they understand the need to get ahead of development to have some influence. The East Los Angeles Community

Corporation (ELACC) has been gearing up to do just that. According to the Director, Maria Cabildo, residents have created a "community plan of the development landscape that charts everything. Our goal is to build capacity to talk about development, public and private. The plan is so key."

ELAAC has also become involved with organizing around the General Plan that guides the development of their neighborhoods. Similarly, Urban Habitat has helped form a resident led agenda for the revision of Richmond's General Plan. Executive Director Juliet Ellis talks about impacting land use to establish the next wave of CBAs, before developers flood the area. Of course, having the policy is one piece of the puzzle. Ellis emphasizes the accompanying need to "do the delegations and apply some pressure to the electeds." But one also needs to have a policy solution to offer such officials and this is a key part of movement-building.

## **8. A recognition of the need for scale**

Organizing often starts small, but movement building inherently implies growing to something significantly larger. Community or grassroots level work is essential, partly to maintain the constituency base noted above. But moving power is not a boutique task and it requires organizations that are at a scale sufficient to challenge concentrations of existing power.

This implies two elements of size. The first is organizational: According to Don Cohen of CPI, the motto should be "Gotta be large." We have noticed that many of the victories that

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<sup>43</sup> Jim Keddy and Rebecca Stark, Making Families Healthy: A Training Manual on Health Care Organizing, PICO California Project, <http://www.piconetwork.org/linkedddocuments/MFH-English.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> For more on PICO organizing on health, see Tom David, "Advancing Advocacy for Health Equity in California," April 2008.

are now celebrated as landmarks, especially community benefits agreements, were won by relatively large and sophisticated organizations, ones that often have internal capacities for research, framing, communication, and policy development, as well as organizing and mobilization. Holding all these skills require specialization, management structures, and often sizable budgets.

The second element of size is at the level of the movement: as Gihan Perrera from the Miami Workers Center notes, organizations must be built in relationship to a larger movement and that needs to be at scale, with multiple organizations and multiple networks, as well.

Indeed, it is the allying of multiple organizations that leads to movements. Rather than working in silos, social movements are usually comprised of many organizations working together, for a few reasons. A larger combined membership simply means more people power to effect change. Heterogeneity also results in unusual partnerships that can point to the broad importance of an issue, like the blue-green (i.e., labor-environmental) alliance at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Many of the organizational leaders we interviewed pointed to the importance of pulling in many different constituencies that include the usual and not-so-usual alliances, for example, labor, environmental, faith-based, but also business, chamber of commerce, and the public sector.

Cesar Hernandez from CAUSE warns that the right scale truly depends on the context of the movement and the vision it is working towards; he also acknowledges

the importance of scaling up in the process of allying with organizations. He describes their work as a vehicle that needs to be built, run, and maintained. They use their vehicle to move down the road towards a vision of a more just Central Coast region (Ventura and Santa Barbara counties in California). However, to arrive at that destination they must pick up a lot of people on the way to insure that it stays on course. They need mechanics to tune-up the “vehicle” and make any repairs or adjustments as they experience problems, they need people to fuel the vehicle to maintain movement, and others to look at the map and navigate to make sure it stays on course to the destination. All the people and organizations assume different roles but are equally important to insure that they get to the vision.

While conservative movement builders and philanthropies have not backed away from making big bets on large groups, many progressive funders have tended to focus on grassroots groups, often of smaller size. We attribute this to a confusion between authenticity and scale – and while we acknowledge that bigger organizations can lose touch, we are reminded of the Irving Stone book, *Men to Match My Mountains*, about the “winning” of the American West. Changing power and policy is a big task, particularly when one has to link together various sectors – matching that scale of change requires an appropriate scale of organization.

Of course, scaling up can create tensions within and between groups. Many people feel that only through small grassroots

organizations can change take place that truly benefits the community. There can be a feeling that in order to stay rooted in a place, an organization and its budget must be small – or that organizations have to make important trade-offs in terms of the strategies they use and movements they support. This can be problematic for small organizations as they shift resources from local issues to align with statewide movements. Only through systematic organizational development and capacity building for the whole organization, will the understanding of how to grow and stay rooted take place. As organizations do grow, it is vital that they plan strategically so that they incorporate funding to address both the statewide or regional issues as well as the continued local work that grounds them in the community. If not, they risk losing the authentic base that we considered to be a second key element of success.

## 9. A strategy for scaling up

In analyzing the rise of the right, Marshall Ganz has stressed how “locally rooted, nationally coordinated, social movement organizations” have pressed their claims.<sup>45</sup> Progressives have begun to appreciate and mimic that success, with a particular expression of that in the emerging Partnerships for Working Families now headed by Leslie Moody of Denver. That vision, articulated by Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins of Working Partnerships USA in San Jose is to

“build strong regional hubs, go to the state and then national.”

In part, this regionalist approach was dictated by a set of opportunities and foreclosures – with change in Washington deemed unlikely, many organizations settled in for a long march through local institutions and upward from that base-building. But the very success of that regional strategy has lifted national ambitions, and many of the organizations that took this approach, largely adopted by ambitious central labor councils, have been trying to form a new national network.

Overall there is ample interest in connecting local organizing to broader movement building. There is a sense that this can be done from the bottom-up (from municipalities to regions to the state and nation) and potentially nationwide down as larger networks branch out into new regions. However, there is concern that a focus on social movement building across the country will devalue the important work on the neighborhood level without being grounded in the local; which is vital for the ownership and engagement needed to sustain a movement. Maintaining the relationship to the base is critical.

At the same time, any successful movement has an implicit and sometimes explicit geography of change. The civil rights movements targeted the South but utilized the conscience of the North. The environmental movement has often focused on California, hoping that changes there would ripple across the country.

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<sup>45</sup> Marshall Ganz. “Left Behind: Social Movements, Parties, and the Politics of Reform,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada, 2006:6.

There is no single geographic approach and it can depend on the constituency and the issue area. In terms of immigrant organizing, for example, Alexia Salvatierra of CLUE says you need both—you have to operate at different levels. However, she sees how the higher the linkage, the longer it will take to have an objective result. In her words: “With immigrant organizing we are ten years away from a humane policy, that’s what it is like to work federally. It is three to five years on the state level. There are fewer people to go through. To pass a good ordinance in LA can be done in six months.”

There are even important challenges with rising from the neighborhood to the region. Juliet Ellis of Urban Habitat describes this well: “I guess you have to start small. Like the Harlem Children’s Zone, a great success, yet it took eight to ten years. You need to develop the relationships. It took four to five years in Richmond. Start small, get it together, and get big.” Ellis-Lamkins suggests that it is through alliances that scale is attainable, and Salvatierra suggests looking for people who are strategically intersecting in real ways to make the connections necessary for scaling.

One of those conditions is trust. It is through personal and organizational relationships that scale takes shape and it requires time and trust for scale to take hold at any level. To scale upward to real policy and political change requires that the opportunities be extended to build the relationships that can sustain this.

With large numbers and diversity, infrastructure begins to become an issue.

Can the movement logistically work together? Allied members need to have some organizations at a different level of maturity that results in good internal infrastructure, thus adding to the overall strength of the movement. As movements scale up from local to state to national, organizational infrastructure becomes increasingly important.

How do we get a scale? One alternative is to build to scale on the basis of like organizations, the sort of model practiced by interfaith federations such as Gamaliel, PICO, ACORN, and others.<sup>46</sup> For each of these federations, local affiliates have similar structures and strategies, although there may be some variation. A similar model is embodied in the Partnership for Working Families which, according to Director Leslie Moody, has 19 affiliates nationwide and a goal to get into 50 cities nationwide. They provide technical assistance to organizations to help build enough capacity in local contexts and relationships to move common themes. But the central elements are similar: an active central labor council, alliances with the faith community, the development of research capacity, and the willingness to weigh in on local development issues.

A second variant of scaling involves organizations that may be quite distinct but are somehow united by their frame or general

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<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the IAF does not seem to have a similar approach to scaling; they scale up to the level of their regions but do not have a single national presence. Gamaliel, by contrast, does and has used it to weigh in on issues like immigration reform.

politics. This is reflected in the Right to the City Network, which was founded by the Miami Workers Center, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy in Los Angeles, and Tenant and Workers United from Alexandria, Virginia – each has fought around issues of gentrification and displacement but their forms of organization and emphasis are distinct. So too with the immigrant movement of the last several years – it embodies a wide range of organizations, some with more of an emphasis on naturalization and voting, others with an emphasis on protecting the undocumented, others with a stress on the provision of services to immigrants currently here.

One way to differentiate these variants is as a tight or a loose grouping – in one case, organizations are very parallel in function and structure, in the other, they are less similar; in one case, general philosophical agreement is a basis for unity, in the other, disagreements may be profound despite general issue alignment and mutual strategic benefit from coming together. There are parallels on the right: the National Rifle Association is a highly effective vehicle with a tight organization structure while the Christian Coalition involves the looser alignment (with the context of a shared frame) that we note above.

In any case, the central point here is that successful social movement organizations have a theory of how to scale up – they do not seek to go from zero to sixty by fiat, from neighborhood to the state capitol with a policy paper. Rather, they have explicit and implicit theories about the best level at which to build alliances, and how to network those alliances

into something bigger and more substantial for social change.

## **10.A willingness to network with other movements**

The final step in the process is connecting with other networks of movements. It is one thing to build an effective voice for organizations that are similar (the tight affiliation) or occupy a similar issue space (the looser networks above). It is another to take those various streams of change – and their organizational embodiments – and create the ways for them to flow into a river of broader social transformation.

Multi-sector, issue, and identity networks are the infrastructure for this final step of movement building. On the right, a realignment of American politics was achieved when pro-life, pro-market, and pro-defense forces came together under a larger banner. This is actually a recipe for division – pro-life involves restrictions on individual liberty, pro-market excuses the craven consumerism that erodes traditional values, and pro-defense requires a large and often wasteful state – but conservatives were highly effective at re-branding the contradictions into a banner of liberty, faith, family and patriotism.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, progressive forces have often seemed (and been) fragmented into market segments and issue silos.

The sorts of organizations that can anchor a new social movement tend to offer a larger

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<sup>47</sup> Marshall Ganz. “Left Behind: Social Movements, Parties, and the Politics of Reform,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Montreal, Canada, 2006.



frame, such as “accountable development” or “regional equity” or even “healthy communities.” But the final challenge to achieving scale is weaving together the different organizations into a broader whole that can be fundamentally transformative of politics.

Everyone agrees that it is not easy to network on this larger scale due the balancing act of maintaining all the aspects of this work. There is caution about forcing networks to form or connect before their time. However, leaders and groups understand that they cannot do it alone in their places. Gamaliel, a national network, sits at many national tables with other groups like SEIU, ACORN, and the Center for Community Change. WPUSA has partnered with numerous community organizations, as in the health initiative profiled above.

There are many kinds of networks, ranging from loose to formal. According to Cabildo, “There are different rings of support. We are on the outer ring with education, it still benefits our residents. We are on the steering committee of Housing LA. We decide our level as it is related to our mission and needs of the members. We are part of SCOPes Apollo Alliance as we saw the connection with jobs. Sometimes we are very involved, sometimes to a lesser extent.” Some leaders appreciate informal networks for peer support and mentoring as it reduces feelings of isolation and is a great resource. This can also set the stage for replication and sharing best practices.

However, to operationalize a network or have a working relationship, Cohen insists that a sense of discipline is needed. With the Partnership, the groups see their agendas intertwined, it is in their interest to see the other partners succeed. Cohen states that “If it was just about CBAs I wouldn’t be involved.” This is the stuff that movement building is made of—where people deeply care about each other’s successes and feel compelled to make it happen.

Some organizations represent an explicit coming together of different networks. CAUSE has affiliated with both Gamaliel and the Partnership for Working Families. In this way they are able to build relationships, receive training, mentorship and technical assistance from Gamaliel, as well as peer learning through the Partnership.

Our point here is straightforward: bridging networks will eventually build streams of social movements that flow into a river of change.

### **It Can’t Be This Easy**

It isn’t. While we have taken up the challenge of organizing key elements into ten easy-to-follow categories, each of these reflects a complex set of decisions and trade-offs, something perhaps muted by our presentation.

In fact, movement-building is fraught with tensions and tightropes.<sup>48</sup> Among these are the relative emphasis one places on

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<sup>48</sup> We thank Jonathan London of UC Davis Center for the Study of Regional Change for stressing this point to us in his reading of an earlier version of this document.

organizing and policy advocacy; more time spent in Sacramento or Washington can steal away from the grassroots and simply admonishing folks to strike an appropriate balance does not a balance strike. Scaling up and streaming together requires numerous decisions, including just who is in and who is out of the broader movement one is trying to build. Having a viable theory of the economy makes sense but who gets to decide what is viable – and how much disagreement about economic policy can a movement tolerate.

And these are just a few. Consider the challenges involved around race: should one emphasize that form of collective identity, particularly because it is so strongly felt, or deemphasize it because of worries about an expanded coalition? Consider the relationship to electoral strategies: how does one relate to political figures while continuing to have the capacity to react to, and challenge, key decision makers? And what about the relationship to other partners, such as those policy entrepreneurs and academic think tanks: are they to be held at a distance or integrated into the movement-building enterprise?

As if that weren't enough, how does one balance practicality and principle – that is, when is a policy victory good enough, a tension shown in the recent struggle over whether to support the health care reforms proposed by Governor Schwarzenegger in California? How do community organizations who often feel small and neglected, coalesce with labor unions who may be important allies but have what seems like more power and a different agenda? How do you share scarce resources which have the

goal of both building your own organization and building the movement?

Negotiating all these dilemmas and trade-offs is the stuff of leadership. We do not mean to diminish any of the difficulties of that balancing act or underestimate the skill (and energy) it takes to address this. Indeed, we would stress that because it is so difficult, foundations may want to be patient with sometimes imperfect vehicles for social change, understanding that organizations may be in evolution as they find their own spot on the social movement continuum. Foundations may also want to realize that while not all these qualities may be in a single organization, they need to be in a single movement – and so supporting a diversity of intersecting groups may be more effective than simply choosing a single winner in the social movement sweepstakes.

## IV. Five (plus one) Key Capacities Organizations Need for Movement Building

“Nothing trumps the power of broad based support and strong leadership.” Themba-Nixon

It is convenient (and certainly romantic) to think that movements are born not made: there is a moment of zeitgeist (the nation becomes appalled by Jim Crow), a small group of sterling leaders arise (Martin Luther King as first among equals), and a devoted and loyal following quickly jumps in (freedom riders, marchers, and others), and change then inevitably results.

But if we are right that there are ten elements that characterize successful social movements, these generally do not simply fall into place. This is very well demonstrated in the case of the conservative ascendancy following the defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964. Building on the grassroots organizing that coalesced around his campaign, conservatives turned to local community organizations, school boards, churches and policy think-tanks, spending long hours building constituencies across the country. In the process, they developed strong leaders with roots in middle America, some of whom would eventually build from these roots to become national leaders (think Ronald Reagan), and become a dominant force in American politics. To stay the course, in addition to the ten critical elements, certain capacities allow organizations to put them into place. Recalling that our ten elements are:

- 1. A vision and a frame,**
- 2. An authentic base in key constituencies,**
- 3. A commitment to the long-haul,**

- 4. An underlying and viable economic model,**
- 5. A vision of government and governance,**
- 6. A scaffold of solid research,**
- 7. A pragmatic policy package,**
- 8. A recognition of the need for scale,**
- 9. A strategy for scaling up, and**
- 10. A willingness to network with other movements.**

We argue that organizations need the ability to organize a base (the *sin qua non* and our second element), the capacity to research, frame and communicate (elements 1, 4, 5, and 6), the ability to strategically assess power (helpful for a policy package, element 7 as well as scaling up, element 9), the capacity to manage large and growing organizations (elements 3 and 8), and the capability to engage and network with others (element 10, but also important for elements 2 and 7).

We add, however a final capacity that we think is crucial to the others: the ability to refresh on a continual basis leadership, vision and tactics. This last is critical to an organization or movement staying relevant and persisting.

In our view, these capacities also present a link between the top ten elements and the potential for foundation investments. Foundations cannot provide the frame themselves – but they can provide the resources to craft a frame that resonates. They cannot do the organizing – but they can strengthen those organizations that do. They cannot force scaling or networking but can

provide the convening opportunities to make this possible. And they cannot force organizations to renew themselves – but they can recognize in their operational support that such renewal is important. Overlap with the key elements is to be expected, however here we briefly highlight key capacities.<sup>49</sup>

### **1. The ability to organize a base constituency**

Base building and leadership development may be the most important capacity needed for building solid movements. This may sound simple and axiomatic; after all, you can't have a social movement without having people mobilized. But at the same time, effective base building and leadership development is a complicated process that involves substantial inter-personal and communication skills as well as sophisticated popular education capacities. Base building involves sophisticated listening skills, with the ability to engage constituencies on issues that are of immediate concern, and understand how these concerns link with their own deeply held beliefs and values. It involves an ability to understand and communicate connections between individuals' own situations and the broader social, political and economic processes that shape those conditions. It involves long-

term relationship building, with a particular attention to the importance of social networks. It involves an ability to build trust. It involves an understanding of the actions—ranging from small group discussions, to meetings, to hearings, to demonstrations—that help people build cultures of solidarity and find hope in that collective identity and collective action.

Much of the discussion of movement building focuses on strategies that have worked well in the past, including those mentioned here: one-on-one organizing, institution building, and power analysis. However, more recent social movement activity amongst the “millennial” generation revolves around the internet, including blogs, YouTube and social networking communities. Investments need to be made to address and create new technology-based mechanisms for moving people to action. This could include building social justice networking tools or a Facebook-type platform geared toward activists.

Whatever the method, organizing a base constituency takes time. But in no way is it time wasted. Base building leads to an informed constituency with the necessary education to push policies and know who to push. Long investments in base building allows for organic growth to take place in a community to sustain change and avoid episodic involvement that fizzles out. In addition it brings people along and up and helps to identify new leaders from within the movement.

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<sup>49</sup> Our brevity is dictated partly by the fact that an excellent companion piece has been developed for The California Endowment by Makani Themba-Nixon and the Praxis Project entitled: “Key Lessons & Recommendations from Movement Profiles and Case Studies.” We draw some of our capabilities discussion from that document and we refer the reader there for more details.

To improve these capacities implies addressing both infrastructural issues as well as engagement strategies. Therefore, funding is necessary to hire organizers, create strategic short-term and long-term plans, provide training, build tracking systems, and allow for peer guidance opportunities from other organizations to sustain the infrastructure. When addressing technology issues, it is important to remember funding is needed for hardware and software, but in addition, there is a need for dedicated staff time for content management. Social networking tools are most successful when they are carefully managed and actively promoted. At the same time, to engage base constituencies, messages need to be fine-tuned and communicated in a user-friendly manner and training is needed in how to outreach to one's own community and listen to their needs.

## **2. The capacity to research, frame and communicate**

Building a movement is not simply about having significant numbers of people with a common vision for change. It is also about having a clear analysis of how that vision can be realized through achievable actions, and being able to communicate that analysis in ways that resonate with people both intellectually and emotionally. Creating a vision and research go hand in hand. A vision can define an overall direction, but the research provides the grounding in why and how a vision works.

Research is not simply about gathering and presenting data. Research is about analyzing that data to understand the processes causing the conditions people experience in their lives. When done effectively, research can empower a community by offering an explanation of what is going on, helping to reveal the actors and forces shaping the process of inequality or poverty. At its best, research also is not simply about documenting past practices or current conditions, but can also point a direction for how things should be, identifying points of leverage that could be utilized to create a different future. This capacity also implies being able to put forth best practices or models for other organizations as well as learning from other organizations best practices.

Research by itself can be valuable, but if it simply informs a few people and results in a report that sits on a shelf, it does little to build movements. Once the vision, frame and research base is in place, it is vital to also have a solid communication plan for disseminating and using the results. It can also be as an organizing tool. Targets of the communication plan may include both community members, and policymakers, and it is important to recognize that strategies for reaching those different audiences often need to be quite different. But while the specific language and medium of communication about the research itself may differ, an effective communication strategy is able to push to the forefront a common frame and overarching vision in these different forums, in ways that helps build mutual comprehension between diverse social movement constituencies, and



between those constituencies and potential targets of policy or strategic action.

### **3. The ability to strategically assess power**

Social movements are about change, and change inevitably involves power—the power to make change and to overcome those resisting change. Often power is manifested most directly in the policy process, and the ability to advocate and push policies is fundamental to achieving long-term systemic change. But power is also manifest in the on-going, day-to-day practices of institutions and organizations at multiple levels in our society. Assessing power is not simply about determining who has the most resources, or how many people can be mobilized in favor of particular policies or actions. It is about a much more subtle analysis of the ways that agendas get formulated, decisions get framed, consultation processes are set in place, deals are struck, and resources are allocated. It is thus vital that organizations have the ability to strategically assess the power dynamics of their own movement, their community, their region, and beyond.

The power-mapping tool developed by SCOPE in Los Angeles has become a popular and effective method many organizations have adopted for understanding and mapping political power in their communities. It is significant that one of the first steps for organizations in using this tool is to both clearly articulate their own agenda, and to identify competing agendas. By starting with a broad agenda, rather than a specific policy, this process immediately connects specific policy

opportunities to a broader strategy to shift power relationships, recognizing as well that power is exercised in causing and maintaining whatever conditions social movement organizers are trying to change.

Subsequent steps in the power mapping process include identifying organized opposition and organized supporters, along with potential supporters and sympathetic constituencies that could be mobilized. The tool displays this analysis in a simple, visual way that recognizes a spectrum of positions and power levels, rather than simple binaries such as for/against or weak/powerful. This provides a broadly accessible way of analyzing shifting power relations and identifying promising leverage points or openings where they can push and influence policies. This is an extremely important capacity for organizations building and maintaining movements.

### **4. The capacity to manage large and growing organizations**

As movements grow, so do organizations. Smaller organizations have different capacities than larger ones; as organizations grow, it is important to provide the capacity to manage the growth so that it can be successful and not implode on itself. Size has consequences for funders and others. Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins of Working Partnerships notes that her staff are becoming more specialized, not generalists, which has implications for organizational capacity. For example, there may be more in-depth in-house skills but also new challenges of management and team-building.

An appropriate qualification here is that what works for one organization or movement at one time may not work for another at a different time. “Bigger is not always better,” as Jean Hardisty and Ana Perea remind us, and “smaller is not always less important.”<sup>50</sup> Supporting the work of a myriad of different kinds of organizations, small and big, is not just important, but in fact crucial to social movement building. Hardisty and Perea suggest that different sized organizations each fill critical roles in movement work. Larger, more established organizations can often work in concert with larger efforts, legislations, and policy projects, while providing the resources and infrastructural support to efforts bigger in scope. On the other hand, smaller organizations often are able to maneuver in ways that larger organizations cannot, often more efficient than their counterparts and able to build the base.

However, we should be careful not to idealize the grassroots organizations as the only true members of the movement. A mix of different types and sizes of organizations even at different stages of development will be crucial. And the work of the New World Foundation suggests an important role for anchor institutions in the movement – and we suspect that these are likely to be the bigger ones. They need help growing and managing their relationships.

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<sup>50</sup> Jean Hardisty and Ana Perea. “Mapping the Progressive Movement,” Political Research Associates, December, 2001.

## **5. The capability to engage and network with others**

As we discussed above, it is one thing to build an effective voice for organizations that are similar or are at least working on similar issues. It is another to take those various streams of change and create the ways for them to flow into a river of broader social transformation. This requires building relationships and engaging in networks beyond their immediate constituencies. Building relationships and engaging in networks takes time and resources. It is easy for organizations or people to think that it is time and resources being taken away from what is often referred to as the “real work,” yet organizations need to have this capability so as to create the space for learning communities to share strategies and models and build relationships.

Thus, key capacities in the ability to engage other networks include curiosity and humility—an awareness that there is always more to be learned, that no single organization or model has all the answers, and that innovation and strategic insight often comes from unexpected and unfamiliar perspectives. Building relationships across networks is not simply about trying to get other people to buy into your agenda, but it is about coming together to identify areas of common interest, and developing a sense of common destiny. Engaging across networks, however, also requires a strong sense of self-identity and self-definition. Being able to articulate and communicate a clear frame helps organizations link up with other like-minded organizations. This clear self-

definition also helps facilitate appropriate and productive levels of engagement with other constituencies.

For example, in the Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition (TALC), certain organizations are simply affiliate organizations, having signed onto the Coalition's platform and invited to participate in workgroups, campaigns and meetings to whatever extent they so desire. Full member organizations play a more active role in determining TALC's policies, campaigns and leadership, and are eligible to serve on and vote for the Board of Directors. This kind of tiered network structure helps build broad cross-constituency connections amongst a wide-range of groups engaged in some aspect of building a sustainable and socially just Bay Area, while also providing a range of appropriate spaces for groups with varying strategies and strategic frames to engage with the coalition as they see fit.

Foundations can support movement efforts by offering formal network support to build these relationships and the shared language necessary for working together effectively. This could be in the form of organizational development experts, facilitators, and convenings of multi-sector partners, including some of the usual and not-so-usual suspects.

### **The ability to refresh organizational vision and organizational leadership**

In order for all of the above capacities to be meaningful in the long-run, organizations also need assistance to continually refresh ideas, vision, and leadership. Many organizations and their leaders devote an enormous amount

of time and effort to building movements and their organizations in general. This effort often blurs with daily life and can take a toll on a person, with serious issues of burn-out and stagnation afflicting many movement leaders over time. This is also true for organizations, who can find themselves focusing too narrowly on an issue to a point where they become lifeless and unimaginative.

That is why it is vital that there are resources in place to help individuals and organizations renew themselves, and to delve into innovative current practices around the country and world, to see what strategies are working and being used in other places. Delving into best practices of other members of the movement and other movements altogether can provide invaluable new perspectives and inspiration, as well as give leaders and their organizations a new sense of what is going on in their own constituency. New information will help to encourage that new ideas are circulated through the organization.

Providing resources for this might include providing coaching for leaders (both arriving and departing) and strategic planning at all phases of the movement, as each phase needs different types of leadership. It also means encouraging organizations and groups to practice peer leadership, in which co-equals sometimes take command of an issue or a strategy. Learning to both follow and lead is a difficult challenge for many – in the words of one activist, “when peers step forward, they often get shot down” – and creating a skill set that combines conviction with humility is necessary.

## V. Three Key Warnings, Three Key Directions

“Social movements are not built overnight but in stages. They require strong anchor organizations, grassroots organizing, strategic alliances and networks among multiple constituencies. They need to generate new agendas and visions, foster many layers of leadership, and enlarge power for social change through focused and sustained mass action from the local level to the centers of power.” – The New World Foundation, *Funding Social Movements: the New World Foundation Perspective* (2003, p. 5).

The New World Foundation, with long experience in funding social movement work, albeit at a small scale, has laid out a fairly extensive agenda for funding. While many of their recommendations echo some of our proposed elements above – including the need for a frame, the advantage of partners and peer networks, the long-term infrastructure, etc. – one area where they do make a distinct contribution is in their insistence that foundations look at the stage of development of a social movement (or social movement organization) and take this into account when funding.

It is an important point and one we return to below. However, in developing our own “to-do” recommendations, we believe that it is critical to start with a series of “please don’ts.”

### 1. Don’t think you’re the social movement

Foundations can play an important role in building a movement, but it is important to remember that its role is not as a leader or a designer, but as a supporter – in Tom David’s

eloquent statement “Movements belong to the people not their funders.”<sup>51</sup> Foundations can help jumpstart or maintain efforts through resources, but the actual movement and credit needs to come from and for those organizations doing the footwork. This is especially important since movements are predicated on power building for its communities and it will be important that organizations do not confuse the power of money with their own power to move what needs to be moved.

Moreover, foundations arrive to any table with unequal power – they hold the purse strings. Building alliances amongst unequals is always hard, and foundations can confuse the picture if they play too intimate a role in strategy development. One of the lessons of the California Works for Better Health program, an initiative of The California Endowment, is that an excessively directive strategy can sometimes backfire; that effort improved mightily in effectiveness once the organizations being funded found their own footing and pushed back on foundation officials for more fitting goals and strategies.<sup>52</sup>

Of course, our emphasis on the separate roles of foundations and movement-builders does not imply a lack of engagement. We would, for example, urge some in the social movement community to stop holding program officers

<sup>51</sup> Tom David “Building a Movement for Health Justice,” The California Endowment, February, 2008 p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Pastor et al, “Coming Together: Lessons on Collaboration from California Works for Better Health,” (The California Endowment, October 2007).

and others at such a distance. We have been struck by those times when organizers deemed it best to keep the foundation outside the doors – even though it sometimes means keeping important expertise in policy and resources at arm’s length. There is a role for new partnerships – and while the best way to do this is for the roles to be clear, that will require some experimentation along the way.<sup>53</sup>

Such separation and understanding of different roles does not imply that foundations can simply fund movements without themselves being transformed by those movements. While they will not become equal social movement partners, they need to be as committed to the long-term, to relationship-building, and to a willingness to listen to community as are the organizers they support. And foundations will also have to develop even more profoundly that “sixth sense” that allows organizers to figure which people and groups are most likely to stay in the game and see it through to the health justice end.

Of course, if foundations are providing support but not glue, that is a role that will have to be played by other actors. Therefore, funding within and throughout a movement is necessary for large anchor organizations building structures, small grassroots organizations building base, research-based organizations building facts, broader networks building trust, and philanthropy building supports.

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<sup>53</sup> Tom David points to a positive example in recent efforts for health equity in California where advocates saw funders as “trusted partners and a useful sounding board” (David, April 2008, p. 6).

Our point here is simple: foundations are not the change they want to see; they are supporters of that change.

## **2. Don’t be afraid of confronting power**

At their heart, social movements are about tipping the balance of power – about changing the constellation of forces that generate policy, not simply shifting the policy through a clever intervention or especially well-written memo. While we are not convinced that this means the sort of demonstrations and marches of the past – it may involve demonstrating people power, taking advantage of internet organizing, utilizing ballot measures, and sticking through with forceful bargaining – it does mean fundamental challenges to the ways things are organized politically and socially.

Some foundations clearly have the heart and the courage to do this – or at least to continue to back their grantees as they illustrate yet another “inconvenient truth.” Other foundations will find it hard to hold their bearings as they run into criticisms from mainstream forces while others, often smaller, are more nimble and less of a target. For major foundations to make movement building a central theme of investment will be quite significant. We suspect that branding movements as part of the connective tissue will help link comprehensive change at a neighborhood level to systemic change at a state level.

In any case, our warning is straightforward: as Frederik Douglas said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will.”



### 3. Don't let urgency set the agenda

In the days after the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles, many activists were hopping from hastily called meeting to hastily called meeting. In the whirlwind of activities, little was getting done although big decisions were being made that were not always the best (and were revisited later – think, for example, of the changing composition and structure of Rebuild LA). In the midst of one of these meetings, a community activist leaned back and said: “There is an urgent need ... to think long-term.”

It struck several at the meeting and led many to start thinking about both the fundamental drivers of the unrest, including poverty and inequality, *and* how building a social movement for economic justice, as time-consuming as that might be, might just be the thing to turn things around. Sixteen years later, Los Angeles is celebrated as one of the national hotbeds of organizing for economic equity time and few doubt that hunkering down for the long haul was the right thing to do.

While there is a tendency for the most recent new event or policy fad to dominate funder interest, it is important for foundations to be in this for as long a haul as the movements themselves. The organizations that we spoke with focus their work on building power within and across communities. They use actions or campaigns to build leaders and a base for the core work of economic and social justice. They are not about immediate targets – although they do move important needles on poverty and human rights – but

about empowerment to change the rules of the game. This is long, hard work – and while one hopes that organizations can respond to new opportunities, constantly shifting gears between one foundation goal and another, between one theory of change and its opposite, is not helpful.

The admonition here then is straightforward: if a foundation is to get in this game, get one's bearings firm and stick with it.

Enough of what not to do – what is to be done?

In considering funding directions within the field of movement building, it is important to think of ways to build capacities of organizations so as to fortify the essential elements described above – that is, to analytically link from an element to a capacity to an investment.

Many of the successes on the right demonstrate just such a link. For example, conservative funders provided long-term investments in think tanks that pushed their values and were able to reframe the debate to suit their slant. In addition, the right was not always aligned; it took long-term relationship building with the evangelical church base before they were able to align their social issues with an economic frame which is not necessarily linked with the social issues. Funders more oriented around a justice agenda must learn from these successes and see how a similar process can help can build the movement necessary to change the frame to work for health justice.

We see three main funding areas, each of which we explore below. One big first step in this

arena, however, involves mapping the various relationships, capacities and overlaps between organizations that could be coming together under any particular social movement rubric. This background work, similar to taking the political temperature for change but in this case focusing on the capacity to make change happen, could identify specific gaps and opportunities. Using health as an example, the focus could be primarily on health justice and the grid of organizations working in that issue area; because it would be movement-oriented, the net would necessarily be cast wide and the larger social determinants of health would be important to consider.

In any case, we think the main three funding directives after any such pre-study might include:

### **1. Provide operational and long-term funding to build success**

We have provided a list of elements and capacities above – the trick is that the priorities of each shift over time. While organizing and communications are always crucial, organizational and networking needs evolve with each stage. Thus funders should consider providing time and resources to organizations to build up their agenda, vision, case, and message to enhance their long-term infrastructure. This means “soft” investments that basically give organizations the space and time to think, which is essential at every stage of the movement. Organizations needs are cyclical— for example, funding to do research is needed as visions are developed, but it is also needed throughout the movement to build the case for the change and the vision.

Funding organizers is essential to build the base of constituencies and help set agendas, but also to network with other organizations within the movement once that agenda is set. Leadership development helps support organizational and managerial needs, to build relationships from network to network, and to help in time of transition to new leaders. And finally, leaders, researchers and organizers need resources to push a policy package and increase communications capacities.

What about the relationship between service delivery and social change organizations? Often foundations find it easier to fund direct service delivery, since the impacts of this funding can be seen in a short-term time-frame, with measurable outcomes in the number of direct individuals served and the improvements in their living circumstances from those services. Yet movement building is a long-term process, and requires substantial investment of sustained time and effort, often with outcomes that may not be visible or measurable for some time.

Furthermore, while it is possible for social service organizations to play an important role as part of a broader social movement, sometimes the relationship between service provision and social change organizing can be fraught with tensions, especially if they are wedded together in the same organization. The time-frames are different, the immediate outcomes are different, the skills required to be effective are different, the relationships required are different, and the approach to understanding and addressing power is different and sometimes at odds with

each other. Building social movements is a distinct set of activities that requires dedicated attention and resources, including organizations that are specifically focused on social movement organizing. Even for organizations that are trying to engage in both service delivery and social change organizing, they will need substantial resources to address both aspects of their work, as well as helping to manage some of the tensions (and opportunities) that may emerge in both types of work. However, the Building Movement Project has put together a promising guide to help social service agencies take advantage of their access to a large base to move beyond just service delivery.<sup>54</sup>

**Specific funding opportunities include:**

- General operating support, particularly for organizing and constituency development. Foundations often shy away from this, preferring more project-related funding for new programs, however, general operating support will be key for having the capacity to focus on long-term movement building.
- Leadership development, training and renewal. This includes enhancing the skill base of current leaders to contribute to a movement as well as to conduct locally based work; helping to bring up the skill base of new leaders; and helping both seasoned and new leaders in times of transition. Paying attention to the renewal and personal leadership aspects is essential.
- Capacity development around advocacy, communications and research. A

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<sup>54</sup> For more information see *Building Movement Project, Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide*, [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org).

combination of the three will provide the tools needed to develop a clear message based on analysis and facts to move and advocate for policy change. Consideration can also be given to forging productive academic-community partnerships around research.

**2. Support network to network building to sustain success**

The geography of change is important and will be especially so in place-based approaches. Supporting efforts to scale up is important and this will involve both building networks of like organizations and networking networks of seemingly disparate forces. Throughout this paper we have stressed the strengths of particular networks like the Partnership for Working Families or Gamaliel, each providing guidance and important support to their affiliate organizations. What is needed for these more developed networks is funding to build the bridges between these and other networks to bring together stronger networks for peer to peer learning and to work together towards common goals.

Part of this effort will include accessing the tools to experience the organizational transformation needed to build a network of movements. An example of this is Social Justice Leadership, an organization whose mission it is to “catalyze a new generation of individuals and organizations in the social justice movement.”<sup>55</sup> They offer leadership development for all levels of an organization to understand the importance of values-based work. In order to emphasize the long-term

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<sup>55</sup> See Social Justice Leadership website for more information: [www.sojustlead.org](http://www.sojustlead.org).

nature of the work, they begin by having individuals understand and be aware first of themselves, then the organization and finally the process of change.

Social Justice Leadership also calls out the importance of reflection for leaders in an organization and we cannot agree more. Leaders need to be given the opportunity to think about what they are doing and where the movement should be going without having to deal with the day-to-day details of an organization. This can only happen through programs that give leaders sabbaticals or the opportunity to visit other organizations here and in other countries. These valuable experiences can offer leaders the rest that they need to reenergize, ideas and information about new strategies, and opportunities for building relationships and trusts with other organizations. Such things may seem like luxuries but they are vital to sustaining a successful movement and keeping it from becoming stagnant.

#### **Specific funding opportunities include:**

- Provide organizational supports to create formal networks. This could include funding statewide or regional networking activities that include mapping assets to help local organizations understand the ties between groups, develop common communication strategies, and share technical assistance.
- Convene formal networks to encourage peer to peer learning and trust building. The goal should be to promote peer leadership but to avoid initial challenges this can bring, these convenings could be initially led by intermediaries or consultants that provide

a neutral lens and can build networking opportunities.

- Provide resources for spiritual and intellectual renewal in leadership. This type of renewal can give leaders the opportunity to stop, reflect and recharge so as to prevent burnout.

### **3. Develop metrics of movements to measure success**

Movement success can be a difficult thing to gauge: the passage of a living wage may benefit few people directly but it can signal a shift in power that soon translates to widespread improvements in living standards. The same is true for low-income and communities of color living next to toxic incinerators. Their fight to close down a facility or to oppose the siting of a new one in their neighborhood changes the health of their immediate neighborhood but also benefits the region and beyond as other power balances are shifted. Both examples can point to long and arduous struggles; which is why it is important to remember metrics of success in movement building focus mainly on processes of how and with whom a movement is built, not whether or not the movement succeeded. In order to make metrics or evaluation useful to the movement itself, it will be key to insure that it provides room for reflection and learning along the way.

This means looking to the levels and stages of key capacities of organizations, allies, and networks to assess indicators in building a successful movement. Essential in this is creating short, intermediate and long-term goals that are integrated into an evaluation that is done in tandem with the movement building

work that can help assess material changes, as well as help the organizations process their own successes and challenges better.

**Specific funding opportunities include:**

- Provide evaluation capacity from the beginning utilizing strategies that offer immediate feedback. This is crucial to insure that the evaluation is useful and organizations can learn from it and make program corrections along the way.
- Fund external evaluators to work alongside the movement from as early on as possible. External evaluators can provide the overall analysis of the contributions of individual organizations to the movement as a whole.
- Use an evaluation framework that lays out the capacities and phases of development of organizations along a continuum to assess progress. Include qualitative and quantitative measures to capture the various aspects of change. This framework could be based on the ten elements listed above.



## VI. Conclusion

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If one had predicted just a year ago that a novice Senator from Illinois would be able to capture the Presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, one would have seemed, well, just a little bit crazy. But there were inklings of that possibility not just in the candidate's gifted speeches but in the electoral organization he was assembling: one based on many of the precepts of community organizing for social movements, including developing a deep base, moving people with personal narratives, and staking a claim with a new frame that harkened to values, vision, and alignment that nonetheless allowed for ideological diversity.

Of course, the same might be said of an earlier Presidential candidate, a former governor of California who managed to shift the country in what once seemed like a permanent drift rightward. He too was a gifted speaker but his real strength was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a deep community base, a strategy that moved public perceptions with personal narratives, and a values-based frame that allowed for diversity even as it combined an underlying vision of the economy, theory of the state, scaffold of solid research, and a policy package that seemed to flow from all those elements.

Social movement building, in short, is not the province of one political view or another. It is, rather, a strategy that focuses more on shifting power than changing policy, more on transforming frames than arguing about specifics. The seeming contradiction is that such a one-step removed approach has often actually led to more complete and specific policy change than the targeted advocacy of experts. And the other contradiction is that while key moments of transformation and

mental remapping – think about the collapse of Jim Crow, the shift in attitudes toward HIV/AIDS, the embrace of climate change as a serious crisis – often seem spontaneous, they are, in fact, the products of long and intentional processes, including serious investments in the capacities, talents, and networking strategies of social movement builders.

Such investments are needed now. The U.S. stands at a critical crossroads. With a financial system in crisis, an economy adrift, and an environment at risk, people are looking for a broader frame and a broader solution than typical politics can offer. An emphasis on justice – at both the community and national levels – may be part of the conversation. But to get there will require groups that are willing to challenge power as well as policy, values as well as legislation. Social movement thinking and doing will therefore be key elements in any agenda for change, and intentionality in investment will be necessary. We trust that this paper will inform funders for strategic investing while also resonating with those active in building social movements.

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