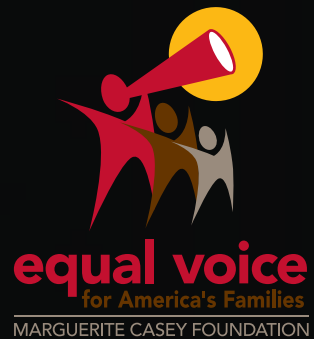


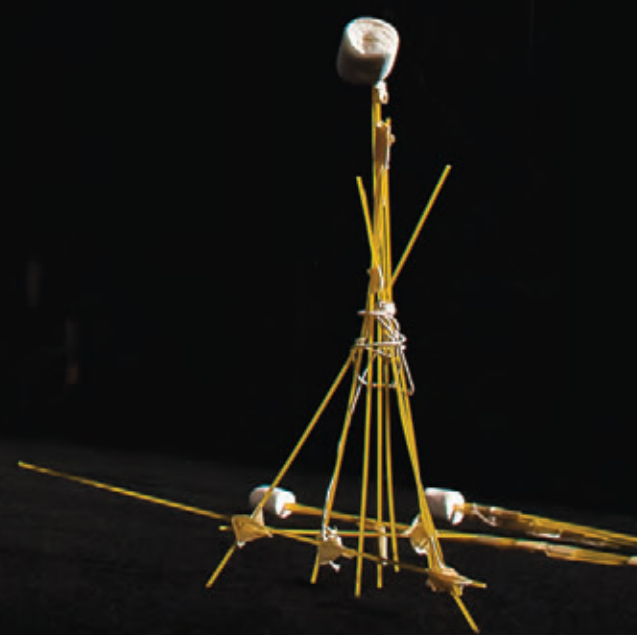
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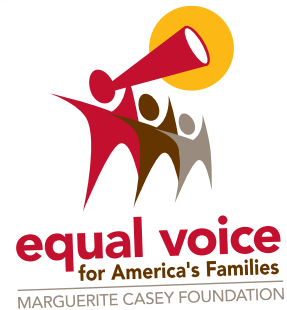
Equal Voice National Convening

Equal Voice: Turning the Corner



September 26–28, 2010 | Chicago





Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Marguerite Casey Foundation was honored to be joined by 420 passionate and dedicated individuals representing our 220 grantee partner organizations and their communities for the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening, held Sept. 26–28, 2010, in Chicago. We spent three days exploring how we can continue to build a movement of low-income families to make our communities and our country better for everyone. I am pleased to share the proceedings with you.

Convenings have a special place in our work. Since the inception of Marguerite Casey Foundation in 2001, we have used convenings to bring people together to exchange ideas, to build relationships, and to create an environment of collaboration. Each convening has brought us new insight and inspiration.

At past convenings, we asked our grantees: *What would it take to build a movement of low-income families? What role should Marguerite Casey Foundation play?* Our grantees responded that such an undertaking would take all of us coming together. No organization could do it alone, but perhaps, together, we could spark something big. Our grantees then asked if Marguerite Casey Foundation could play the role of convener, bringing people and organizations together and creating a vehicle for collective work.

We jumped in, following our founding promise of *Ask, Listen, Act*. We organized convenings and planning groups, and those efforts evolved into Equal Voice, a dynamic cross-regional, cross-issue, cross-strategy campaign and framework for building the base of mobilized families and for creating change. During 2008, Marguerite Casey Foundation and its grantees built the Equal Voice for America's Families campaign, which engaged 30,000 individuals in the creation and release of a national family platform that sets forth a family-centered vision for America. Since then, Equal Voice has sparked local projects and cross-sector work rooted in the principles of network building, family leadership and systems change.

Today, Equal Voice is not only the framework for a movement led by low-income families to bring about change in public policy, attitudes and practices but also the framework for Marguerite Casey Foundation's work.

The foundation has gone from viewing Equal Voice as an effort that complemented and amplified our work to a realization that Equal Voice is the framework for our work – the heart of our grantmaking, our communications and our partnerships with grantee organizations.

What does this mean?

We seek to partner with organizations that:

- Prioritize working with others and that are active in networks that build collective power.
- Engage in multiyear dialogues and collaboration with the foundation and with our other grantees.
- Help us advance the Equal Voice National Family Platform by building the base of families who advocate for change, influence policies, advance a unified message, and build an infrastructure that will sustain collaborative efforts in the future.

To amplify our grantmaking and partnerships, we will:

- Serve as a coordinator and convener of partners and their collaborative efforts.
- Build the collective capacity of our grantees and their communities to organize families and foster family leadership.
- Develop and implement communication tools that insert the voices of families into public discourse and policy decision-making.

During the September 2010 convening in Chicago, we engaged our grantees in conversations about the structure that will most effectively advance our collective work. We gathered an incredible breadth of ideas and affirmed that we must be unambiguous about our expectations and plans, transparent with our decisions, and willing to hold ourselves and our partners to the highest possible standards and accountability.

This is an exciting moment. It is a moment to focus on strategy and the strategic priorities that will allow us to build a movement that lifts up what unites families and that cultivates hope, joy and change in families and in our country. Marguerite Casey Foundation is grateful to everyone who joined us for the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening, to everyone who engaged in vital conversations with us, and to everyone who works to improve the lives of low-income families in the United States.

Sincerely,



Luz Vega-Marquis
President & CEO

“Equal Voice is the heart of Marguerite Casey Foundation. It is also the strategy, the tactics, the philosophy that we embody.”

— Luz Vega-Marquis, President & CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation



Contents

The Convening Focus and Key Lessons	5
Convening Participants	7
We Are Equal Voice	9
Building an Equal Voice Structure for Action	10
Equal Voice National Family Platform Issues	18
Equal Voice Learning Conversations	21
Equal Voice: Where Do We Go From Here?.....	26
Acknowledgements	30



The Convening Focus and Key Lessons

What Were the Objectives of the 2010 Convening?

The key objectives of the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening were to:

- Cultivate a shared understanding of Equal Voice as a framework for strategy and movement building.
- Build on the commitment to advance Equal Voice.
- Facilitate cross-issue, cross-community networking and alliance building.
- Gather ideas for an Equal Voice structure for action.

What Did We Hear at the Convening?

Over three days of workshops, caucuses and discussions, the following key lessons and ideas emerged:

1 Equal Voice is turning the corner.

- > It is time to “double down.” Families and our communities need us to put our all into building a movement for change.
- > Building on what we have accomplished, we must take our work to a new level.
- > We must be ready to experiment, to refine our strategy, and to act on key ideas.

2 Together, we can spark a movement.

- > Through alliances and networks, we can amplify our impact and leverage our power to ensure families’ voices are heard.
- > A successful movement will be one that brings people together across traditional lines of division.

3 Equal Voice is a movement-building framework, philosophy and strategy that is already in motion.

- > Equal Voice brings organizations and families together across communities, states and issues.
- > Equal Voice is a channel for connecting local, state, regional and national efforts and policies.
- > Equal Voice has sparked networks, projects and organizations across the country. Those efforts are rooted in family leadership, network building and systems change.

4 We are committed to building Equal Voice.

- > Moving Equal Voice forward requires a structure for making decisions and taking action, for pushing back and building consensus, for bringing in new partners and sustaining connections.
- > We will hold ourselves accountable through the clarity of our purpose and processes.



The Convening Focus and Key Lessons (con't.)

What Did Participants Take Away from the Convening?

- ✓ Common ground and connections
- ✓ Appreciation of our collective skills, knowledge and commitment
- ✓ Ideas and strategies to mobilize families
- ✓ Strategies for including families in planning, implementing, evaluating and messaging our work
- ✓ Leadership skills and insights
- ✓ Commitment, individually and collectively, to contributing to and building a movement of low-income families
- ✓ Strengthened alliances within and across states and regions
- ✓ Inspiration and energy



“ I am inspired by our people in the Los Angeles area coming together quarterly in organizing events to talk about mobilizing and strategies that bind us...I am inspired by the hope that Equal Voice gives us. ”

– Stewart Kwoh, Asian Pacific American Legal Center

What Comes Next?

- To advance our collective work, Marguerite Casey Foundation will draw from ideas presented at the convening regarding the structure and strategic direction of Equal Voice.
- Families will remain at the center of the work, their stories, their needs and their leadership guiding the direction of Equal Voice.

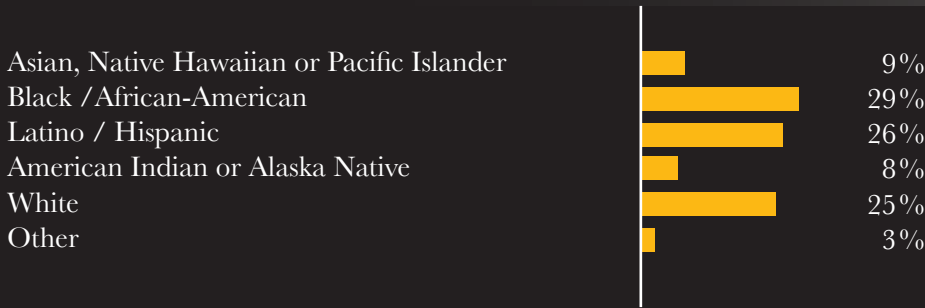


Convening Participants

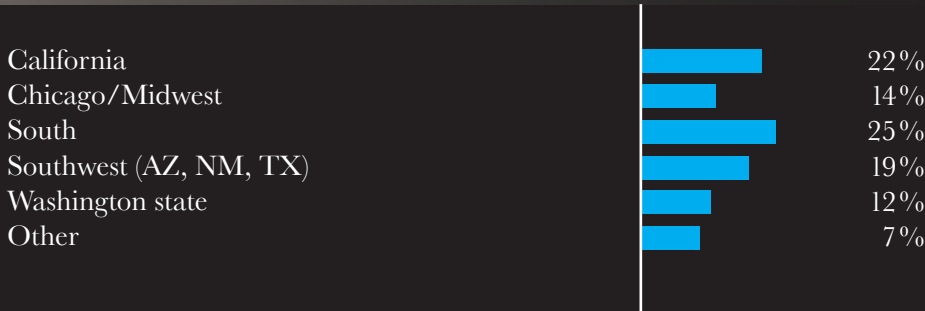
Marguerite Casey Foundation planned the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening with the input and leadership of its grantees. During listening tours in each of its five grantmaking regions and through a grantee survey, the foundation learned what the grantees needed and gathered recommendations for the focus of the convening. In addition, the foundation formed an advisory group of 20 individuals from its grantmaking regions to provide guidance about the content and design of the convening.

Marguerite Casey Foundation welcomed 420 colleagues from 20 states across five distinct regions of the country. Throughout the convening, Marguerite Casey Foundation employed cell phone-based polling technology to gather demographic input from the participants, as well as their hopes for the convening and ideas about Equal Voice.

Race / Ethnicity of Participants



Grantmaking Region of Participants



What Participants Hoped to Gain From the Convening



The Equal Voice Vision

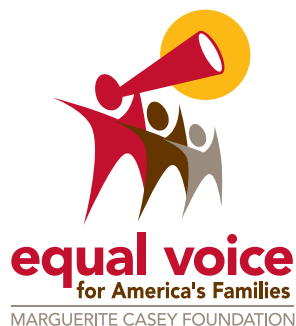
The families that created and ratified the national family platform have the following vision:

We envision a nation in which America's promise of prosperity, security and opportunity is enjoyed by all families, a nation in which all families are nurtured, supported and celebrated, and a nation in which families work together to build a better future for themselves, their communities and their country. We envision an America where equal opportunity translates into equal outcomes.

We envision a future where all families have decent jobs, health care, education opportunities, affordable housing, child care and safe neighborhoods.

We hope for a future where no family has to struggle to meet basic needs such as food and health care.

Equal Voice Objectives



- 1 To build a base of families advocating for change in their communities.
- 2 To influence local, regional and national policies.
- 3 To advance a unified message.
- 4 To build an infrastructure that will sustain collaborative efforts in the future.
- 5 To advance the Equal Voice National Family Platform through work at the local, regional and national levels.

We Are Equal Voice

The 2010 Equal Voice National Convening opened with musicians and spoken-word artists, who drew on a variety of cultures to welcome participants to the convening and to set a celebratory tone for the three-day event.

Foundation President and CEO Luz Vega-Marquis was joined by Equal Voice leaders representing the foundation's grantmaking regions. Jennifer Allen of Border Action Network, Sophia Bracy Harris of Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama, Becky Dennison of Los Angeles Community Action Network, Lori Goodman of Diné CARE, Stewart Kwoh of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Olivia Pearson of the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative, Salvador Reza of Tonatierra/Puente, and the Rev. Patricia Watkins of TARGET Area Development Corporation offered a range of perspectives on the power of the Equal Voice approach in their communities and the potential for building a movement by and for low-income families.

Marguerite Casey Foundation works with its grantees to shape the structure and direction of Equal Voice to sustain and grow a family-led movement for change.

What Is Equal Voice?

Equal Voice is a framework for movement building, a collaborative approach to building a movement of low-income families to bring about change – change in public policy, attitudes and practices – to ensure the well-being of America's families.

Equal Voice began as a yearlong campaign to raise the visibility of issues facing low-income families by identifying family priorities and policy solutions through the development of a national family platform. Between 2007 and 2008, 15,000 families came together through 65 town hall meetings to create the platform, which was ratified and released in September 2008 at a three-city convention attended by more than 15,000 families in Birmingham, Chicago and Los Angeles. The platform articulated a collective vision for America, identifying eight priority issues for families – child care, criminal justice reform, education, employment/job training, health care, housing, immigration reform, and safe and thriving communities – and presenting policy solutions for each.

Since then, Equal Voice has sparked local, regional and national leadership and advocacy efforts and has become the cornerstone of the foundation's work, framing its approach to grantmaking, communications and partnerships with its grantee organizations.

Current Equal Voice Focus

Equal Voice is the framework that guides the foundation's grantmaking and communications work, with the goal of building a base of connected families and organizations that advance family issues and promote a unifying message. Marguerite Casey Foundation funds 20 projects designed to advance Equal Voice at the local, regional and national levels.

Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees actively work to improve the lives of families by advocating for equitable health care, education, employment policy and opportunities, and on other family-positive community issues, while reflecting the principles of Equal Voice: network building and collaboration, a vision that lifts up all families, and a focus on policy and systems change.

The *Equal Voice* newspaper and website connect grantees and constituents around the country, keeping them up to date on local, state and national activities and on progress on the eight issues identified in the national family platform.

Building an Equal Voice Structure for Action

Marshmallow Challenge

During the opening plenary session, the 420 attendees participated in the marshmallow challenge, a simple exercise that provides lessons in collaboration, innovation and creativity. The task: In 18 minutes, build the tallest freestanding structure possible out of 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string and one marshmallow, the marshmallow ending up at the top of the structure.

The attendees split into teams of five. As each team opened a red bag filled with the spaghetti, tape, string and marshmallow, a giant clock started to count down the 18 minutes in seconds. Laughter and boisterous discussions rose above the zydeco, jazz and salsa music that played in the background.



When the 18 minutes were up, less than half of the groups had succeeded in building a freestanding structure. During a debriefing, attendees drew out lessons from their marshmallow experience that they could apply to building a structure for Equal Voice and the work of organizing families:

1 Success rests on prototypes.

- > The most successful groups build prototypes; they build a model, test it, set aside what does not work, and then build upon what works.
- > Those that invest more time in planning are less successful than those that plan efficiently, experiment, get instant feedback, refine and build on the lessons learned.

2 Success rests in facilitation skills and finding the right process.

- > The most successful groups spend no time jockeying for power; they get to work, building, testing and repeating until they find a structure that works.
- > Bigger teams and higher incentives are no substitute for having the right skills and the right process in place.

The attendees then engaged in a series of small group discussions to identify functional and prototype ideas for an Equal Voice structure.

Functions Needed in an Equal Voice Structure

- **Grantee cross-regional collaboration**
 - > Ensure a mechanism for broad representation.
 - > Provide easy access to the broad range of issues addressed by grantees.
 - > Focus on prioritizing and resolution; accept disagreement.
 - > Facilitate communication between convenings.
- **Support for improving organizational capacities to work at the local level and engage in Equal Voice**
 - > Offer collective “how-to” resources that explain, for example, how to complete a power analysis, conduct electoral work, perform policy advocacy, move from local to national work, and navigate lobbying and advocacy options and regulations.
 - > Connect organizations to each other so that they can strategize, learn from each other, exchange best practices, and lift up success stories.
 - > Provide leadership training and education.
 - > Provide a mechanism to hold elected officials accountable to low-income families.
- **Media and communications**
 - > Develop messaging about the economic and social challenges families face.
 - > Tell the stories of low-income families.
 - > Create a database of resources.
 - > Foster issue-based networks.
 - > Develop and host a quick response system.
 - > Coordinate efforts through online hubs so that grantees can see who is doing what on particular issues and in different geographic areas.
- **Accountability to each other**
 - > Set clear expectations for the partnership between Marguerite Casey Foundation and its grantees.
 - > Require local check-in meetings.
 - > Require that partner organizations commit hours to Equal Voice work each month.
 - > Host regular webinars.
 - > Adopt a long-term plan to advance Equal Voice.
- **Engagement of other organizations**
 - > Conduct outreach to ally organizations.
 - > Send representatives or delegates to events hosted by other organizations or groups.
 - > Bring in service organizations.
 - > Host Equal Voice gatherings (including audience-specific events, such as a youth forum, LGBTQ family forum or mothers forum).
 - > Connect Equal Voice with policy organizations and think tanks that do not have a grassroots base.
 - > Develop joint initiatives to engage other organizations at the local level.
- **Prototypes**
 - > AARP model to advance a family agenda: Membership-based advocacy organization with individual and/or organization memberships
 - > Louisiana Equal Voice Institute: Local organizing and network building with an Equal Voice frame
 - > South Texas/Rio Grande Valley model: Regional organizations pursuing coordinated efforts and connected by a network weaver

Components of an Equal Voice Structure – Prototype Ideas

Participants worked in small groups to identify the most useful ideas they heard for an Equal Voice structure, coming up with the following common components:

- **Governance structure**
 - > “Big idea” team: Volunteers from grantee organizations come together to develop major cross-cutting ideas and messages
 - > Multitiered coordination: Coordinating teams on the national, state and local levels
 - > Issue caucuses and networks
 - > Regional teams
 - > Communications team
- **Coordinating staff**
 - > Network weaver in each region
 - > Accountability to constituent needs
- **Constituent engagement**
 - > Town hall events
 - > Introduction of Equal Voice into existing structures that have shared goals
 - > Process for constituent feedback and revisions to the platform
- **Communications network**
 - > Regional, skill-building and issue-based convenings
 - > Local roundtables
 - > Webinars
 - > Ongoing communications, resources, and response system

Participants identified the following challenges as essential for advancing the work:

- *How can we take Equal Voice to all 50 states?*
- *How can we ensure that Equal Voice maintains its bottom-up approach, with ideas and leadership continuing to emerge from families?*
- *How can we leverage the power of Marguerite Casey Foundation to bring in more partners and elevate the visibility of Equal Voice?*

“ We’re going to work to raise our Equal Voice. And when we leave out of here, let’s not leave...and say we need to go home and think about it. Let’s say we’re going home and something’s about to happen. It’s *got* to happen. ”

– Patricia Watkins, TARGET Area Development Corporation

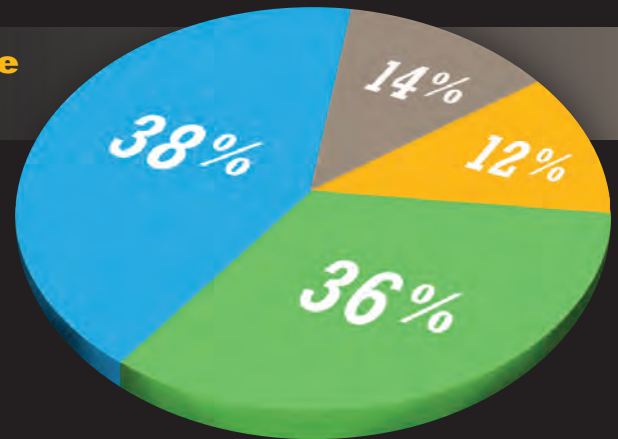


Polling Question

How could your organization contribute to building an Equal Voice structure?

Option Offered / % Response

- Integrate Equal Voice goals into our work / 38%
- Engage organization in Equal Voice / 12%
- Train families as Equal Voice leaders / 14%
- Strategic communications to advance Equal Voice / 36%



6

PILLARS OF MOVEMENT BUILDING

One of the two caucus sessions gave participants the opportunity to discuss the six pillars of movement building the convening advisors had identified as essential for building and sustaining a movement of low-income families:

- **1** Build the base of families.
- **2** Influence national policy.
- **3** Work on local or regional efforts.
- **4** Advance a unified message.
- **5** Develop decision-making processes for going forward.
- **6** Communicate across organizations.

Brief summaries of those discussions follow.

Six Pillars of Movement Building

1. Build the Base of Families

Building the movement's family base requires meaningful engagement of families and decision-making processes that build family and grassroots leadership. Families need support systems rooted in the community and mobilization methods designed, delivered and evaluated by families, for example, the *promotora* model, which uses community members to train families about advocacy and political education and prepare them to be spokespersons.

Building the base requires clear rules and promotion of shared values and a shared vision. The work starts with the family and moves to networks of friends, unions, community organizations, faith-based organizations and schools.

Requires:

- Community readiness assessment
- Grassroots leadership development strategies
- Speakers bureau of families trained to explain Equal Voice
- Consistent training with peer exchanges

2. Influence National Policy

Influencing national policy requires coalition building and constituent input to achieve and sustain economic and social change.

Requires:

- Multi-tiered coordinating committee
- A committee of delegates to visit Washington, D.C., to advance a national strategy; perhaps hold the next Equal Voice convening in Washington, D.C.
- Meetings with local congressional representatives
- Training curriculum and capacity building for all organizations working on Equal Voice
- Messaging and media strategy
- Survey of allies and what they are doing

3. Work on Local or Regional Efforts

Working on local or regional efforts requires skills in conflict resolution and consensus building, negotiation of resources among different groups, and an understanding of different mobilizing strategies. People and organizations may be at different stages in their work, but unifying around issues and network building can bring families together.

Requires:

- Regular conversations among grantees (and others) to develop goals
- Strong network weavers in every region
- Discussions and education about how race informs Equal Voice work
- Promotion of Equal Voice by presenting common issues with a common message

4. Advance a Unified Message

Advancing a unified message means being able to reach policymakers and government officials while simultaneously reaching families and constituents. Equal Voice needs to cultivate a sense of belonging by bringing the “big picture” to the local level. Using technology, investing in collective leadership, and agreeing upon a framework of collaboration will allow grantees to work together between the annual convenings.

Requires:

- An understanding that we all rise or fall together. Possible messages: “We all do well when working families do well” or “Family is the heartbeat of America”
- A message grounded in shared values (for example, during the California budget discussions, groups created a coalition around a “family recovery budget” that had three messages: create jobs, protect the safety net, and raise revenues)
- A focus on increasing civic engagement, engaging youth, connecting families across race, building awareness, and creating a values-based message
- A survey to help Equal Voice participants understand the various communities better, to identify who Equal Voice is trying to change/move, and to uncover strategies for engaging families and changing attitudes and policies

5. Develop Decision-making Processes for Going Forward

Decision-making processes for going forward require transparency, research to support decisions, communication among organizations at local, regional and national levels to foster interconnectedness, respect for cultural traditions tied to decision-making, and discovering connections among the strategies employed in campaigns and issue areas.

Requires:

- Decision-making committees at the local, regional and national levels
- Ways to engage constituents before decisions are made
- Connecting local organizations to work on common issues by hosting local convenings and helping organizations work across state lines, and then feeding the resulting findings to the national convenings
- Using national Equal Voice convenings as a report-back and planning tool for local work, and then incorporating ideas into national work

“ This is an opportunity to take that Equal Voice vision, give it some wheels, wheels that get some traction so we can continue on together to make that vision real. ”

– Jennifer Allen, Border Action Network



Six Pillars of Movement Building (con't.)

6. Communicate Across Organizations

Communicating across organizations means understanding our partners' communities and what we want to communicate in ways that allow organizations to connect across geographic regions and across issues, and to engage their self-interest by determining which connection is most effective for them.

Requires:

- A curriculum to teach others about Equal Voice that includes the documentary *Raising Hope* and leadership training
 - An electronic network, with grantee profiles, to connect groups and publicize actions, and an asset bank for grantees
 - Strategies to reach organizations that are not Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees
 - Funneling families into voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts
-

Open Discussions

In addition to the sessions devoted to the pillars of movement building, participants nominated focus areas for additional sessions; if a critical mass of people expressed interest in attending a nominated focus area, the session was held. Open discussions included:

Regional Caucuses

Grantees from Chicago, the South region and the Southwest region held discussions focused on their respective regional issues and strategies for collaboration.

Get Out the Vote – One Million Voters by 2012

Led by Stewart Kwok of Asian Pacific American Legal Center, the caucus focused on strategies for a voter-registration and get-out-the-vote campaign. Points covered included:

- Emphasis on new citizens
- Voter education/curriculum
- Tailored outreach strategies for specific populations, such as early voters and absentee voters
- Next step: Interested groups commit to meet in 2011 to develop GOTV effort



Equal Voice

National Family Platform Issues

Convening participants met in caucus sessions related to the eight Equal Voice National Family Platform issue areas: child care, education, criminal justice reform, employment/job training, health care, housing, immigration reform, and safe and thriving communities.

The caucus sessions were designed to provide a forum for participants from different parts of the country to weave together their ideas and experiences toward common issues facing their communities. Participants reviewed the national family platform, shared policy progress and strategies at the local, state and federal levels, and discussed what comes next, including shifts in the landscape, priorities, resources, tools and infrastructure needed to build on the progress.

Themes running through the discussions included progress made on the eight platform issues, providing more opportunities for issue discussions, and the value of exchanging experiences with people addressing the same issue in other regions:

- **Progress has been made on every family platform issue**, with success rooted in family engagement, network building, and alliances. The consensus: Equal Voice participants need to celebrate that progress and use it to position our communities for further progress.
- **Participants want more and ongoing issue-based discussions to share best practices and strategies** for advancing policy solutions. Suggested formats for continued conversation include issue roundtables, webinars and conference calls, and collaborative work to hold national groups accountable.
- **Participants in every issue caucus expressed that the opportunity to exchange ideas with people from around the country working on a specific issue was invaluable** – whether it was immigration-reform advocates from Arizona talking with advocates from San Diego, Mississippi, and Washington state; child care advocates from Alabama talking with those from Chicago; or job training advocates from New Orleans exchanging ideas with their counterparts from Seattle.



What progress have we made on National Family Platform issues?

Following are snapshots of each caucus discussion:

Child Care

Forming broad coalitions, developing permanent revenue sources, technical assistance for coalition building, developing messaging, and creating pre-K programs at the state level are strategies that have proven effective in several states. Coordination among those working on the child care issue would allow them to share best practices and conduct a power analysis.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Feeder relationships with child care centers close to high schools
- Participation in coalitions that address state funding for child care
- Accessing block grants at the state level

Criminal Justice Reform

Progress has come about through networking, coalitions, building trust and relationships with people in power, policy messages with the theme of saving tax dollars, and focused campaigns.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Pre-release programs
- Alternatives to mandatory sentencing and zero tolerance in the juvenile justice system
- Prevention programs

Education

Government budget cuts have placed strains on schools and education improvement options. No Child Left Behind should be adjusted to better reflect funding inequities. Alliances with teachers' unions and faith-based institutions would strengthen advocacy efforts.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Chicago: Development of an action-oriented civics curriculum
- Parent engagement and training: Advocate for incentives to teachers for parent-engagement work
- Challenges to charter schools that operate to the detriment of public schools
- Reframe issues to reflect budget and funding concerns and constraints

Employment / Job Training

Strategies should be based less on government funding and more on aligning with the private sector. Develop messages that focus on public funding mismanagement and waste. Common challenges are state budget crises and limited private funds for job development, though people are willing to try new strategies for job development and training in the current environment.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Seattle: Job program designed for the skill set of new immigrants
- Oakland: Urban Habitat program to train commissioners on how to advocate for families from inside government
- Strategies that focus on targeted hires, such as for construction

Equal Voice

National Family Platform Issues (con't.)

Health Care

The Affordable Care Act is a great achievement, but now efforts should focus on educating the public about its benefits (for example, the act will make health care coverage available to 4 million additional children), sustaining support for the act, and helping people gain access to its resources.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Affordable Care Act
- Shift efforts to educating the public: Ensure access to the resources, trumpet the act's features and benefits, and address repeal efforts

Housing

The ongoing housing crisis has created spaces to address housing policies, particularly related to interconnections with employment and banking policies.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Sweet Home Chicago Coalition: Accountability in tax-increment financing
- New Orleans: Enforcement of how money is spent to further fair housing via community development block grants
- Mississippi: Push for landlord accountability

Immigration Reform

Arizona passes Senate Bill 1070, aimed at identifying, prosecuting and deporting undocumented immigrants.

Areas of progress and potential:

- New Mexico: Framing the issue of immigration reform in terms of human rights
- South Texas: Successful campaigns to get out the vote, and to know one's rights
- Florida: Informing elected officials and judges of racial profiling practices
- San Diego: Establishing a communication network to respond to violations and organizing a day of action
- Los Angeles: Forming relationships with police officers and departments
- Mississippi and other Southern states: Forming alliances with African-Americans around citizenship and voter registration

Safe and Thriving Communities

The quality-of-life issues included in this family platform issue range from parks and open space to substance abuse and environmental health.

Areas of progress and potential:

- Connecting the wide range of safe-and-thriving-community issues to community infrastructure and economic development
- Framing safe-and-thriving communities as a child welfare issue
- Alliance-building across issue areas, including the other issues within the national family platform

Equal Voice Learning Conversations

The 2010 Equal Voice National Convening offered learning and capacity building opportunities, including:

- Capacity building workshops
- Presentation of the *Raising Hope* documentary
- Keynote address by Maya Wiley

Capacity Building Workshops

Convening attendees selected from 14 capacity building workshops, 13 presented by peers from Marguerite Casey Foundation grantee organizations and one by the foundation's communications team. The workshops included peer learning tools and an exchange of experiences to support each organization's local work. The following workshops were offered:

- ✓ *Advocacy Strategies* to Protect Equal Voice Issues in the Face of Severe Government Funding Cuts
- ✓ *Building Leadership: An Equal Voice Curriculum for Community Members and Staff*
- ✓ *Building Understanding* Toward Unity and Movement Building
- ✓ *Communications: Using Social Networking, New Media and the Equal Voice Website as Tools for Movement Building*
- ✓ *Community Organizing* with an Equal Voice Frame
- ✓ *Constituent Base Building: Using the Equal Voice Platform as a Tool*
- ✓ *Cross-Regional Movement Building Models: Partnership for Working Families and Right to the City*
- ✓ *Electoral Work* to Impact Equal Voice Platform Issues
- ✓ *Networks for Equal Voice: Prototypes for Regional Multi-issue Structures*
- ✓ *Site Visit: Albany Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago*
- ✓ *Strategic Communications* and Message Framing
- ✓ *Strategies to Connect Local Priorities* to State and National Policies
- ✓ *Working Across Race and Region*

“ Equal Voice offers a set of principles in which we should always have been working, and through which we can hold each other accountable...so that we can move across issue areas, across communities quickly, and respond to our environment right now. ”

– Becky Dennison, Los Angeles Community Action Network



Workshop Highlights

Networks for Equal Voice: Prototypes for Regional Multi-issue Structures – The Rio Grande Valley-Equal Voice Network Experience

The Equal Voice experience transformed the way 10 community-based organizations in the Rio Grande Valley work together. The Rio Grande Valley–Equal Voice Network (RGV–EVN) was born of the “hunger to be heard” that the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign awakened in communities and families whose voices historically had been ignored. Member organizations, including Brownsville Community Center, Proyecto Azteca, START Center, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, and LUPE, discussed their experience building the network and highlighted a recent victory.

During 2009–2010, RGV–EVN focused on improving the return of census forms to reverse the outcome of the 2000 U.S. Census, in which Texas came in next to last in the number of census forms returned, costing residents \$1 billion in federal funds for schools, hospitals and job training.

The 2010 Census proved to be a turning point for the RGV–EVN and a clear demonstration of the power of networking. When the RGV–EVN learned the Census Bureau had decided not to mail forms but to go door-to-door in the colonias, unincorporated communities scattered along the U.S.–Mexico border, the member organizations launched a media and advocacy campaign aimed at changing the census approach, convinced that it would produce a massive undercount that would drain the Rio Grande Valley of resources for a decade to come.

In response to the united advocacy, Census Bureau Director Robert Groves offered something he did nowhere else in the nation: a permanent, on-site liaison from Washington, D.C., along with 2,000 census workers who worked with community-based organizations in the Rio Grande Valley to ensure a complete count. The RGV–EVN member organizations conducted outreach to other community-based organizations, churches, local radio stations and neighborhoods, ultimately achieving an astounding 97.4 percent census response rate. By working together, the RGV–EVN achieved an outcome that will positively affect families and communities for years.

Communications – Using Social Networking, New Media and the Equal Voice Website as Tools for Movement Building – Marguerite Casey Foundation

You can’t create a movement if you’re not speaking to one another. In this workshop, participants learned about several ways to do exactly that: through the Marguerite Casey Foundation website, which links grantees by region and issue; through the *Equal Voice* online newspaper, which presents original reporting on the policies affecting working families; and through social media tools that are revolutionizing communication at the grassroots level.



Marguerite Casey Foundation Web Manager Vanessa Ushio and Public Information Officer Claudia Rowe led grantees through the foundation's materials, and Laurie Posner, of the Intercultural Development Research Association, demonstrated ways that grantee groups might use the Ning social network to share information, coordinate events and strengthen connections. Already, the Rio Grande Valley-Equal Voice Network (RGV-EVN), a loose affiliation of some 25 different groups, is using Ning as a central hub for communication. There, network members have been able to share best practices, coordinate meetings and plan for further action.

Equal Voice, the online newspaper, grew out of the notion that informing the public dialog around social issues is key to laying a groundwork for movement building. Since its inception in 2010, the newspaper has blogged on breaking news that affects low-income families and provided a forum for contributors to weigh in from around the country. *Equal Voice* has also reported, in depth, on contradictory immigration policies, systemic problems in public education and the lack of access to green jobs within minority communities, among numerous other topics. Each of these reports – many of them featuring Marguerite Casey grantees – has been disseminated online, through social media network sites Facebook and Twitter, and each has been republished or linked to on other websites, providing new avenues for family voices to be heard.



Participants also learned how the foundation is utilizing social media to increase readership of the *Equal Voice* newspaper and engagement with grantees. The rapidity, ease, and viral effectiveness of social media makes it an ideal medium for distributing information to the general public, sustaining grantee relationships, and forging partnerships with journalists and media outlets. Since expanding its use of social media, the foundation has seen a dramatic increase in the visibility of the newspaper and interest in the work of the grantees, and the foundation itself.

Please visit the Equal Voice sites below for useful information, current news, and helpful ideas:

Marguerite Casey website:

<http://www.caseygrants.org/>

Equal Voice online newspaper:

<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/>

Equal Voice on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/EqualVoiceNews?>

Equal Voice on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/caseygrants>

Workshop Highlights (con't.)

Community Organizing With an Equal Voice Frame - Louisiana Equal Voice Institute (LEVI)

Louisiana Equal Voice Institute (LEVI), founded to capture and build on the momentum of Equal Voice, builds partnerships throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas and Florida, offering a model for regional organizing. Following are the key lessons from LEVI's presentation on organizing coalitions:

Why Are Coalitions Valuable?

- Coalitions help advocacy campaigns develop a stronger public image, bring together diverse resources and ideas, and avoid duplication of effort.
- Coalitions can link groups working locally, statewide or nationally on an issue and give opponents a way to engage in negotiations.
- Coalitions provide moral support to participating organizations and help newer advocates learn from more experienced ones.

Forming Coalitions

The most important decisions a coalition makes are in the beginning:

- What goals will the coalition set for itself?
- Who will the coalition seek to include and not include?
- What kind of structure will the coalition create to facilitate its work?
- How the coalition answers the above questions will determine most of the outcome.
- Be inclusive: Including grantees and nongrantees illustrates that the coalition can reach across various organizations.

Whom Do You Need to Move?

- Who actually has the authority to give the coalition what it wants (city council, state legislature, Congress, the president)?
- Who else does the coalition need to woo to its side as a way of influencing those with authority (media, other citizen groups)?

Who Should Carry the Message?

- Who are the most persuasive "messengers" the coalition can recruit?
- An advocacy campaign needs a mix of messengers: people who can speak from personal experience, people with recognized authority, and others who might have some special influence with people the coalition targets.

LEVI's Top 10 Coalition Gumbo Ingredients

1. *Form partnerships*
2. *Engage communities with food and cultural tie-ins*
3. *Be flexible*
4. *Be in the "mix"*
5. *Be willing to offer in-kind services*
6. *Be willing to work with "non-like" organizations and elected officials*
7. *Make sure your elected officials know "you"*
8. *Don't assume everyone knows the Equal Voice work*
9. *Don't forget about local "mom and pops"*
10. *Don't be territorial*



“ We will all, all have to be one family if we are to survive. ”

– Maya Wiley, Center for Social Inclusion

Keynote Presentation: Maya Wiley, Center for Social Inclusion

Maya Wiley, founder and executive director of Center for Social Inclusion, is a civil rights attorney and policy advocate who has litigated, lobbied the U.S. Congress, and developed programs to transform structural racism.

Wiley presented a keen analysis of structural racism and the extent to which public policy can either perpetuate structural racism or serve in dismantling it. She shared the following ideas about how to break down structural racism:

- **Understand the Context:** Decades-old public policy decisions, such as the founding structure of social security, created disparities that continue to affect low-income families and communities of color.
- **Talk About Race:** Discussions and understanding of race are necessary because many public policy decisions are driven by misinformation and fear. Race is talked about every day, but veiled as welfare, crime and other public policy issues. To reframe those issues, we must be able to talk about race.
- **Build Community Power:** For low-income families and communities of color to have equal opportunities, they must control economic resources and contribute to a political economy that does not take advantage of communities of color.
- **Restructure Society:** We need to recreate structures around health care, what we are building, who benefits from what we are building, how we generate energy and who owns it.
- **Realize That All of the Issues Are Connected:** We need to choose the issues closest to our community needs, work on them, and ensure that we are in alignment with others working on the wide range of issues facing low-income communities and communities of color.

Raising Hope: A Powerful Tool for Discussion and Advocacy

Raising Hope: The Equal Voice Story chronicles the efforts of 30,000 low-income people to create a national platform for lifting families out of poverty. Produced and directed by Maria Bures of Onda Films, *Raising Hope* was filmed between 2007, when the Great Recession began, and 2009 and follows Equal Voice participants through town hall meetings, a multicity convention and, finally, to Washington, D.C., where those who have long been talked about – but rarely spoken to – deliver the Equal Voice National Family Platform to federal representatives.

Raising Hope was screened during a lunchtime event at the convening and facilitated by Tony Gomez of KCTS in Seattle, whose viewing and discussion guide demonstrated how organizations could use the documentary to inspire discussion and an exploration of strategies to change the systems that create poverty.



Equal Voice: Where Do We Go From Here?

The convening concluded with several participants sharing their experiences and ideas for advancing Equal Voice with the full group. One participant, capturing the spirit of the event, urged her colleagues to “Think of the possibilities that are ahead of us.”

Foundation President and CEO Luz Vega-Marquis closed the convening by urging participants to give their all to building a movement of low-income families and to ensuring that *all families have an equal voice*:



“ We are going to do this together. It’s important that we put our fear aside. We have to make the choice between love and fear, and to love what we do. We have to persevere. We are going to build this movement together. ”

– Luz Vega-Marquis, President & CEO,
Marguerite Casey Foundation

Vega-Marquis said Marguerite Casey Foundation would weigh all of the ideas provided by the convening participants for advancing the Equal Voice movement and would also do the following:

- Maintain its support for family-based activism and advocacy and for network building and collaboration.
- Continue its commitment to transparency by communicating its plans for Equal Voice.
- Report on the convening proceedings.
- Analyze the ideas and address key challenges identified by the convening participants:
 - > **Structure:** Evaluate and update approaches to governance, foundation and grantee commitments, communications, caucus options and the role of convenings.
 - > **Accountability:** Ensure clarity and effective processes for gathering input, making decisions and taking action.
 - > **Leverage:** Build on what has been done by Equal Voice and others, and leverage the group’s collective power and the foundation’s power in support of Equal Voice.
- Move – tangibly and visibly – on key ideas.

Outcomes

hope
ONE
VOICE
換乘

Education

Solution
Housing
Salarios Dignos
將來時
FUTURE

Familias

solution
希望,期待

Travay
Salud

Living
Wage

HOPE
future

住房

Emplloymment
Educación

Change

教育 Lojman

Inmigración

unidos
公平地分享

Empleo

家庭

Fair
Share

Swen
Sante

Healthcare
Bon jan sale

工作

What Are You Taking Away From the Convening?

At the close of the convening, the participants texted their responses to the question “*What are you taking away from the convening?*” As the attendees responded, their answers scrolled up the two large screens:

Ready to work, new ideas > Clarity of purpose and ownership of Equal Voice > Bring the social justice message forward in our work > **Hope and energy** > Think bigger, and take local successes on the road to share and learn > One person, one family, one voice = Equal Voice > Alliances and more ways to collaborate > I will proclaim that **I am an Equal Voice advocate everywhere I go** > A stronger connection nationally and a structure for local collaboration and renewed energy! > Clarify my message and strategically present it > National community! > **Explore regional, state and national connections** > Energy to take back to my organization > Better connections in our region and concrete next steps to build Equal Voice in Washington > **A one-voice national platform** > The ideas of a national movement to advance the Equal Voice platform supported by organizations already doing the work locally and regionally > The importance of connecting national nonprofits with local community nonprofits to work to eliminate poverty > Renewed energy, commitment and dedication to work toward victory! > **Strong people fighting for change** > More integration and appreciation for the Marguerite Casey Foundation network > A path to greater engagement with Marguerite Casey Foundation and grantees > The knowledge that there is a multicultural, multilingual national movement focusing on lifting everyone up...and a foundation that supports it...

Awesome experiences > **Movement building must be intentional**
> We have lots of work to do and many decisions to make NOW > Inspiration and healing! > We need to connect beyond this gathering to build real power and keep our voices equal
> **2 million voters and more!** > Urgency of youth and young professionals involvement > We must expand alliances to carry our agenda to a national platform > Listen, communicate, plan, action...and being committed to transcend cultural norms and differences to unite with one voice > **Solidarity with new allies**
> Working across race and region > Inspiration, energy and hope equals possibility and passion > **A sense of strategy**
> Reconnection with allies > Expanded perspective and positive energy > Motivation to act intentionally and on a regular basis with my regional constituents > A great way to practice working in collaboration and building power > Better relationships, better analysis, more buy-in to the future direction, hope for a stronger Southern movement and concrete next steps
> **New allies, fresh insight, and a great spirit** > Possibilities
> Energized to go forth and to do more! > More working relationships with other organizations > Knowledge, motivation
> Sharing resources to build Equal Voice power > **Determination**

.... A new vision, a motivation, a PLAN!

Acknowledgements

Marguerite Casey Foundation thanks the convening participants, advisors, planners and presenters for contributing their time, expertise and passion to the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening. The foundation thanks its board of directors for their vision and guidance, and its staff for all their hard work.

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Marshmallow Challenge: www.marshmallowchallenge.com
Real-Time Text/Cell-Phone Polling: www.pollingeverywhere.com

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Acknowledgements (con't.)

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Hannah Adams	Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center/Louisiana Housing Alliance	Sandra "Jaribu" Hill	Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights
Kate Scott	Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center/Louisiana Housing Alliance	Timaka James-Jones	Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights
Richard Martinez	Greater New Orleans Foundation	Ellen Reddy	Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Emanuel Smith	Isaiah Institute	Rose Walden	Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Joe Givens	Isaiah Institute	Anne Foster	Parents for Public Schools
Bridgette Butler	Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana	Joann Mickens	Parents for Public Schools
Sarah Covert	Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana	Clifton Whitley	Quitman County Development Organization
Julia Bland	Louisiana Children's Museum	Robert Jackson	Quitman County Development Organization
Stacey Sharer	Louisiana Children's Museum	Brenda Hyde	Southern Echo
		Dianna Freelon-Foster	Southern Echo
		Oleta	
		Garrett Fitzgerald	Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative

Acknowledgements (con't.)

Betty Petty Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization
 Kimberlyn Galvin Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization
 Annette Singthong Youth Innovation Movement Solutions
 Drustella Neely Youth Innovation Movement Solutions

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Rebecca Thompson Americans for Indian Opportunity
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 Looking Elk Center for Civic Policy
 Amanda Manjarrez Center for Civic Policy
 Rachel LaZar Colonias Development Council
 Dora Dorado Colonias Development Council
 Lucia Colonias Development Council
 Veronica Carmona Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
 Ken Lucero Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
 Laurie Weahkee Institute of American Indian Arts
 Jaime Gaskin Institute of American Indian Arts
 Carnell Chosa Institute of American Indian Arts
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 Amelia Parker

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 Ramona Casas
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 Irma Montoya
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 Fund for Social Change
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 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
 National Urban League
 National Urban League
 Pushback Network
 Right to the City Alliance

United National Indian Tribal Youth
 United National Indian Tribal Youth

Community Media Organizing Project
 Community Media Organizing Project
 Highlander Research and Education Center
 Highlander Research and Education Center
 Statewide Organizing for
 Community Empowerment

Adults and Youth United
 Development Association (AYUDA)
 Adults and Youth United
 Development Association (AYUDA)
 ARISE Support Center
 ARISE Support Center
 Brownsville Community Health Center
 Brownsville Community Health Center
 Casa de Proyecto Libertad

Casa de Proyecto Libertad
 Intercultural Development Research Association
 Intercultural Development Research Association
 Intercultural Development Research Association
 La Mujer Obrera
 La Mujer Obrera
 La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)
 La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)
 Proyecto Azteca
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Sister Phylis Peters	Proyecto Juan Diego	Pramila Jayapal	OneAmerica
Michael Seifert	Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network	Liz Moore	Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane
Mario Flores	SCAN	Sharlene Lichty	Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane
Sandra Garza	SCAN	Heather Miller	Potlatch Fund
Jose Medrano	South Texas Adult Resources and Training Center (START)	Stephanie Cote	Potlatch Fund
Ron Rogers	South Texas Adult Resources and Training Center (START)	David West	Puget Sound Sage
Robert Alvarado	Southwest Workers' Union	David Mendoza	Puget Sound Sage
Genaro Rendon	Southwest Workers' Union	Leng Lim	Refugee Federation Service Center
Emily Rickers	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid	Seng Eng	Refugee Federation Service Center
Katy Youker	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid	Jeffrey Sikora	Refugee Women's Alliance
VIRGINIA		Nafiso Samatar	Refugee Women's Alliance
Julie Collins	Child Welfare League of America	Sokunthea Ok	SafeFutures Youth Center
Linda Spears	Child Welfare League of America	Sorya Svy	SafeFutures Youth Center
Amy Sheldon	Foster Care Alumni of America	Charisse Bersamina	Seattle Young People's Project
Nathan Monell	Foster Care Alumni of America	Sunny Kim	Seattle Young People's Project
WASHINGTON		Zeke Spier	Social Justice Fund Northwest
Porsche Landon	American Friends and Service Committee (AFSC)	Nanette Westerman	Southwest Youth and Family Services
Jeff Smith	American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)	Steve Daschle	Southwest Youth and Family Services
Araceli Hernandez	CASA Latina	Bev Spears	Statewide Poverty Action Network
Hilary Stern	CASA Latina	Senait Brown	Statewide Poverty Action Network
Paola Maranan	Children's Alliance	Sarah Freeman	Village of Hope
Siobhan Ring	Children's Alliance	Mary Flowers	Village of Hope
Michael Ramos	Church Council of Greater Seattle	Jeffrey Carrol	Voices for Opportunities, Income, Childcare, Education and Support (VOICES)
Erin Thompson	Community to Community Development	Kiondra Bullock	Voices for Opportunities, Income, Childcare, Education and Support (VOICES)
Rosalinda Guillen	Community to Community Development	Maria	Washington Community Action Network
Gloria Burgess	Jazz, Inc.	Guillen Valdovinos	Education and Research Fund (Washington CAN)
John Burgess	Jazz, Inc.	Will Pittz	Washington Community Action Network
Joe Chrastil	Justice Alliance Education Fund	Tara Lee	Education and Research Fund (Washington CAN)
Antonio Gomez	KCTS 9		Washington State Budget and Policy Center
Maureen Scott	KCTS 9		
Ahlan Abdullahi	Legacy of Equality, Leadership and Organizing		
Lynn Domingo	Legacy of Equality, Leadership and Organizing		
Dorry Garcia	Minority Executive Directors Coalition of King County		
Jancen Comenote	National Urban Indian Family Coalition		
Patricia Hibbeler	National Urban Indian Family Coalition		
Barbara Fane	Nonprofit Assistance Center		
Vicki Asakura	Nonprofit Assistance Center		
Danisha Christian	Northwest Federation of Community Organizations		



Marguerite Casey Foundation thanks its grantees partners, the many participants, the convening panelists and presenters for joining us at the 2010 Equal Voice National Convening. The foundation also thanks its board of directors for their vision and support, and its staff for their dedication and hard work.



About Marguerite Casey Foundation

Marguerite Casey Foundation is dedicated to creating a movement of working families advocating on their own behalf for change. We strive to bring humility and hope to our work. Our actions are guided by the firm belief that significant positive change is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. Within this framework, we seek to do the following:

- ✓ **Support and nurture strong, vibrant activism within and among families**, enabling them to advocate for their own interests and improve the public and private systems that impact their lives.
- ✓ **Examine, change and inform the advancement of social and economic policies and practices** that promote the development of strong families and strong communities.
- ✓ **Encourage the development of a coherent knowledge base** for advocates, families and the organizations that serve them.
- ✓ **Invest in system change and cross-system change** in order to generate greater knowledge and provide effective working models for practice.

