

FORD FOUNDATION



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Promoting Community Organizing

by Marilyn Gittell
Charles Price
Barbara Ferman

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Howard Samuels Center
CUNY Graduate School & University Center

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Authors' Note

The Howard Samuels Center engaged in an evaluation of the Ford Fund for Community Organizing Initiative over the course of the entire program, from its inception in 2000 to its conclusion in 2007. The initiative was established to support community organizing and the first round of funding went to three sites, Los Angeles, Chicago and the South. For the initial round of the evaluation, the project team was comprised of three investigators: Marilyn Gittell, professor of political science at the City University of New York Graduate Center and director of the Howard Samuels Center; Cathy Cohen of the University of Chicago; and Jocelyn Sargent, then-deputy director of the Howard Samuels Center. Collectively the team was responsible for the development of the research protocols; however, each investigator was responsible for the primary data collection and reporting in one site and worked with a locally based research assistant. Gittell focused on Los Angeles and was assisted by Phil Harris. Cohen focused on Chicago and was assisted by Dorian Warren. Sargent focused on the South and was assisted by Kimberly James.

For the second round of the evaluation, Barbara Ferman from Temple University joined the team at the Chicago site and was assisted by Jon Rogers. Charles Price from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, joined the team in the South and was assisted by Phil Hasset. Gittell continued on the team in Los Angeles and was assisted by Giannina Perez. This second team also evaluated the two additional sites, Denver and Florida, which were funded by the initiative in 2005.

This executive summary publication is based on the evaluation work described above.

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Introduction to the Ford Fund for Community Organizing Initiative



Community organizing, in contrast to advocacy, lobbying and research, can simultaneously develop local assets, strengthen relationships among diverse groups and empower people to actively and effectively participate in the civic life of the larger society.

The Ford Foundation's Fund for Community Organizing Initiative (FCO), implemented in 2000 and concluded in 2006, sought to tap into the positive potential of community organizing and supported the development of local organizing infrastructure in five distinct contexts. Los Angeles, Chicago and the South (involving seven states) were funded in 2000. Ford staff added Denver and Southern and Central Florida to the initiative in 2004. Over the course of the FCO, 69 organizations were funded.¹ The FCO relied on local philanthropic partners experienced in and committed to community organizing to assist in developing the capacity of grass-roots organizations that employed community-organizing strategies. These intermediaries provided technical assistance and awarded grants to grass-roots organizations to support community organizing, peer learning and peer exchanges. This work facilitated relationship-building, collaborative action and outreach at multiple levels.

Our purpose here is to provide a stand-alone overview of the FCO, distilling into a digestible document several years' worth of research and two hefty volumes of reports to the Ford Foundation. First, we briefly summarize some key points and lessons learned—the value of building local organizing infrastructure and encouraging collaboration and networking among local funders and organizing groups. We then dig deeper into the key themes that explain the FCO and its outcomes. The second section furnishes some historical context on the significance of the FCO as a Ford Foundation project and on community organizing as a strategy for social change. The third section describes our research methodology, summarizes the findings drawn from our quantitative indicators of progress and relates examples of the increasing eclecticism and sophistication of community organizing. Section 4 addresses the process and structure of the FCO and summarizes the sites, focusing on the different structures each site developed. Collaboration and relationship-building characterize much contemporary community organizing, and both are central to the approach of the philanthropic partners and organizing groups funded through the FCO. In Section 5, we concentrate on the collaborative aspects of community organizing. We then conclude and offer recommendations.

A Variety of Models

Each site, employing a unique, locally defined model, used Ford funds to strengthen, and, in some cases, build the community development infrastructure to develop networks that foster collaboration and to leverage additional sources of local foundation and other funding for community organizing. The five intermediaries represented diverse structural arrangements: a single funder (Los Angeles); a collaborative of funders of varying size (Chicago); a partnership of three funds (the South); a private foundation (Denver); and a community-private foundation partnership (Miami-Orlando).

The Importance of Organizing at the Local Level

Contemporary community-organizing groups are effectively redressing inequalities and problems, tackling enormously complex problems—globalization, redistricting, new immigrants, privatization, digital divides—that are affecting communities. Local groups are better placed to understand these issues, identify existing assets and develop new ones. By working locally to build an organizing infrastructure, the effort becomes intrinsically more

sustainable, exponentially increasing opportunities for effective work on policy change, leadership development and community asset-building. In turn, these local infrastructures provide a stable base from which to build broader regional and national organizing efforts.

Key Outcomes

Significant positive outcomes have resulted from the FCO. Across the five sites, participants engaged in cross-learning and networking and, potentially, collaboration on specific issues or strategies. Site-specific examples of key outcomes involved victorious citywide organizing on policy campaigns, power mapping and pre-election organizing work in Los Angeles, Chicago and Denver; in the South, examples include the convening of national conferences on rural job loss, the crossing of racial and place boundaries to develop a local food economy, culturally grounded organizing, and putting race, juvenile justice, education reform and political redistricting on the table in state legislatures. The FCO in Denver, Chicago and Los Angeles encouraged strong working relationships among funders and community organizers, and Central-South Florida has made progress in this regard. As a result of being able to tap into the experience of the three original sites, Denver and Central-South Florida greatly reduced their learning curve. All grantees bridged differences of class, identity and sectors (e.g., universities, city governments, bureaucracies) while maintaining their autonomy.

“Organizing has to be about more than wins; it has to be about witnessing for social justice. . . . Community organizing is about much more [than counting victories].”

— Denver PCOC leader, November 2006, meeting at Ford Foundation, New York City

While the FCO provided the framework and support for some important policy victories (which are significant outcomes), we believe that the infrastructure, relationships and learning that make victory possible are as important as winning particular reforms—if not more so.

The infrastructure, relationships and education provide benefits in the absence of victory and hold the possibility for future collaborative endeavors. For example, in Los Angeles, Denver and Chicago, the FCO provided the basis for enduring relationships because it allowed for the cultivation of trust, learning

and experimentation with collective power. The enduring relationships in this case laid the groundwork for later collaborative work around organizing and education.

Potential for Future Impact

The Ford Foundation contributed to building local assets by supporting local philanthropic partners and community organizing—generating assets where they did not exist and nurturing and strengthening them where they did exist. Ford’s commitment catalyzed communication, networking and capacity-building among the five sites, activities that can result in a sustainable grassroots network that nourishes civic participation and social capital development.

The work of the five intermediaries nearly evolved into a “national collaboration” that remained firmly rooted in their respective localities, attesting to the potential benefits of working across diverse community-organizing styles, foundation structures and local contexts. This effort demonstrated the possibility of “scaling up” community organizing outside of the national networks. However, without additional support through the FCO, the effort to scale up withered.

Effective collaboration is rare and difficult to sustain, and the FCO approach encouraged it across funding and organizing styles and across institutional sectors. It provided a framework for “bottom-up” collaboration. This approach has led to both new and renewed interest on the part of funders to support community organizing, evidenced by the successful leveraging of additional dollars across the sites. Thus, the work to date offers a model that could be of interest to other national and regional funding and networking efforts.

Historical Context of the Ford Foundation and Community Organizing



The politics of why and how foundations identify particular priorities and support certain issues instead of others may be mysterious and secretive to people standing on the outside looking in. Therefore, some historical context will help us gauge the significance of the FCO as a Ford Foundation project, as well as situate the staff’s view of community organizing as a strategy for social change and social justice.

The Ford Foundation engaged in an internal and public debate from the 1950s through the 1970s regarding the adoption of an appropriate social action agenda and the development of strategies to address fundamental issues of exclusion and poverty in America. These debates provide a significant backdrop to the adoption of the Ford Foundation’s Fund for Community Organizing Initiative in 2000. During the debate, the different strategies of social change were variously described within the Ford Foundation as “structure vs. process,” “product vs. process” or “substance vs. advocacy.” There was strong board and staff support for a “no enemies at city hall” position, which relied on cooperation with local, state and federal governments. There has also been periodic staff and board support for funding activist groups to

encourage more oppositional strategies challenging local bureaucracies and elites. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. In the late 1960s, both approaches were supported by foundation funding.

The Ford Foundation could not ignore the movement politics of the 1950s and 1960s, which involved organized groups and associations in a broad struggle for institutional and social change. Advocacy was an essential strategy in the women's, anti-war and civil rights movements, creating broad coalitions to promote a common agenda. At the same time, strong and active local organizations supported a more open and participatory political system. Community organizing and advocacy became intimately associated with that tradition and perspective. "Process" funding, which stressed community organizing and bottom-up constituency-building to encourage new voices in the policy process and institutional change in political structures, was supported by the foundation during the 1960s and 1970s. These efforts, however, were challenged within the foundation, when the emphasis changed to a leadership-centered structural approach. The "program" approach as it evolved at the Ford Foundation became more concentrated on measurable quantitative goals. Ultimately, support for community development corporations became the foundation's priority. In 1996, the FCO revitalized interest at the foundation in the area of community organizing. The program officers who were the original conveners were funding both Ford Foundation approaches to social issues: community organizing and top-down reform policies.

What was most important to the Ford Foundation initiative deliberations was wide staff recognition that community organizing as a concept and practice had changed from the single confrontational model that characterized the movement politics of the 1960s. The politics of the 1980s and 1990s encouraged the acceptance of a range of organizing tactics with greater stress on internal organization-building and the participation of community in the process. "Bottom up" did not equate with tearing down but with constructive restructuring and building up. Engagement in process was an answer to exclusion for marginalized populations. Democracy was both a process and an essential response to practices of exclusion.

In an effort to take a fresh look at community organizing, the FCO working group engaged in a study of the field, including commissioning reports. It conducted seminars and engaged in serious discussion of the issues. The FCO represents a synthesis of the many points of view that emerged from the coalition-building that went on for three years within the staff before the initiative was launched. A bottom-up constructive process in its own organization verified the validity of the new advocacy position that emerged within Ford. Our perusal of the documents of the three-year planning process and the reports commissioned, supplemented by interviews with program officers and assistants involved in the process, strongly suggests that these participants were able to combine their policy interests and priorities. They recognized that successful and sustainable policy victories required a more inclusive engagement of otherwise marginalized participants. This could happen only if they recognized that their mutual support for community organizing could help build viable local organizations. The alternative was to take it upon themselves as individuals to determine the best strategies and solutions and to construct their grant programs to further their own agendas. However, the FCO staff had experienced the value of working as a team, working across the structural policy boundaries within the foundation administrative structure. Their approach matched what they were hoping to achieve in their community-organizing initiative.

Then-Ford Foundation President Susan V. Berresford announced support for collaborative programs, which in turn encouraged the pursuit of the FCO. Berresford prioritized “the importance of CBO [community-based organization] goals as opposed to program officers’ goals.” The FCO was an effort by program staff at the Ford Foundation to voluntarily collaborate on a problem. As such it was at odds with the incentive structure of the foundation in which program officers were rewarded for the creation of plans judged to be innovative and self-contained within an individual portfolio. Ultimately, the FCO group decided in 2001 to pilot the initiative using local funding partners to regrant to local organizations and to provide technical assistance and create synergy. Intermediaries were selected through a request for proposals, or RFP, process. After an initial meeting with eight groups, five organizations submitted proposals: Liberty Hill Foundation (Southern California); the

Wieboldt Foundation (Illinois); Southern Partners Fund (Southern region); a New York City collaborative; and Vanguard (Northern California). Three of the organizations—Liberty Hill (LHF), Wieboldt and Southern Partners—were selected as grantees, each receiving \$1.5 million for grant making, including technical assistance and infrastructure support for a three-year period. Pleased with the emerging outcomes of the FCO, Ford staff, after reviewing many possibilities, added Denver and Central-South Florida. The new sites were funded for two years at \$1 million each, and the original three sites were funded for an additional two years at \$750,000 each.

Several program officers agreed that sites should be chosen at least in part because they were at a “tipping point”—with some support, it was felt, the momentum of the organization would be increased. It was assumed that “leveraging funds is the most important contribution” that the FCO could make; the FCO should encourage “other foundations not funding community organizing” to support the work and fund “good efforts.”

It was left to each site to decide whether to choose local neighborhood, city, state or regional sites, where they should be located and whom the intermediaries should be. Ford preferences for funding in the South were a major factor in its selection. The foundation had already committed itself to funding several programs in Southern states and regional agencies, and community-organizing funding would provide important support for those efforts. Cities were primary targets for most of the program officers. However, categorizing “the South” as an entity comparable to the other two city sites, in fact, ignored important differences in political culture among individual states and cities within the South.

Along with making decisions about the FCO’s structure and format, Ford staff made decisions about what evidence would best indicate its impact. While the design of the FCO was congruent with trends in community organizing, the incorporation of a broader range of data and analytic perspectives provided more nuanced understanding of the impact of the FCO.

Community Organizing and the Fund for Community Organizing: Research and Trends



Data Collection and Analysis

A team of political scientists and an anthropologist studied the FCO between 2000 and 2006. Our research strategy used a combination of participatory, ethnographic/qualitative, action, and quantitative research strategies.² While we sought to provide an accurate account of what the data showed, we also shared information with and briefed community organizations and the staff of our philanthropic partners. Most important, we regularly sought to relay what we learned to Ford Foundation staff. We found tremendous value in near real-time and regular exchanges of what we were learning. We believe that our face-to-face meetings with Ford staff were important in helping them grasp the FCO as it unfolded.

Ford Foundation staff decided that four indicators of progress (IOPs) would be the measures used to evaluate the impact of the FCO.³ The measures were:

IOP One: Strengthened Organizational Capacity

Ford staff decided that increased membership, an increased and diversified funding base of respective community organizations, and a broadened base of organizational leadership would be evidence of strengthened organizational capacity.

IOP Two: Heightened Prominence of Community Organizations

Ford staff wanted to see community organizations participating in and shaping policy debates. They decided that they would assess the contributions and “prominence” of community-organizing organizations to policy debates by how the media covered an organization’s proposals and policy victories.

IOP Three: Increased Networking by Community Organizations

Ford staff wanted to foster participation and networking that involved reaching out to and working with groups different from those that were already policy or system critics. Thus, Ford staff decided that an increase in networking would be indicated by the number of meetings across community organizations in a region, the number of issues in which an organization was engaged and the establishment of formal or informal coalitions.

IOP Four: Increased Support for Community Organizations

Ford staff wanted to encourage other funders to support community organizing. The FCO would provide demonstration and learning opportunities for funders while building capacity in organizations. Ford staff decided that an increase in grant support from regional and national foundations, an increased number of foundations making grants to community organizing and the establishment of a funder’s collaborative in the target region would be evidence of increased support for community organizing.

Ford staff selected sensible indicators for charting change and the impact of its grant making. Like the staff of many other foundations, the Ford staff is required to demonstrate the impact of its grant making. Increasingly, many foundations are turning to evaluations that focus on quantifiable variables, to the neglect of the fundamental but sometimes opaque results of the synergy between many unquantifiable indicators, as well as the relevance of local con-

text to organizing practices. For example, we can count the number of efforts an organization has made to achieve policy change, but typically neglect what people learn or how relationships develop during the process.

The IOPs identified by the Ford Foundation were relevant but had limits, given the complex and contextual nature of community organizing. Emphasis on the indicators, especially without the input of the grantee organizations, would have provided a restricted and disembodied view of community organizing. The IOPs might answer the questions of interest to Ford staff, but they would insufficiently demonstrate the FCO's achievements and impact.

To better gauge the nuances of community organizing, our research team extended the research focus. We used a questionnaire to collect data that could speak directly to the IOPs, as well as to obtain baseline and demographic information from the organizations. We researched the local political culture and organizing context (the terrain in which organizing is carried out); conducted in-depth interviews; visited the organizations and spent time with their staff and members; conducted focus groups with funders; and reviewed documents such as budgets, proposals, reports, media stories, memos, internal reviews and reports to the Ford Foundation from local funders. One of our key motivations was to identify and communicate the "insider" perspective. That is, how stakeholders and relevant participants defined community organizing, and what community-organizing organizations believed that they needed and that foundations could offer, as well as what facilitated building trust and positive relationships. Our approach revealed how eclectic and diverse community-organizing practices are across and within the sites. Depending on the site and its tenure in the initiative, we collected these kinds of data each year.

General Summary of Findings

IOP One: Strengthened Organizational Capacity

The majority of the grantees, across all the sites, showed increases in membership and funding; leadership was also strengthened. In general, organizational capacity increased. The FCO Initiative was either critical or very important to raising new funds for organizations whose funding increased. In many cases, having a Ford grant gave organizations the ability to leverage additional funds.

IOP Two: Heightened Prominence of Community Organizations

Heightened prominence was one area in which the fit between Ford conceptions of community organizing, the IOPs, and the needs of community-organizing groups did not match well. For some organizations, prominence in the media was simply not a priority; garnering media attention had to compete with board development, policy analysis and fund-raising, among other things. Some organizations in the South and Chicago said they preferred to keep as much control over their message as possible, knowing how easy it is to lose control of the message and representation once the media latch on to it.

All five sites showed evidence of increased involvement in policy work that crossed issue areas, as well as evidence of an increase in policy victories. The issue areas the organizations handled were very diverse, including workers' rights; education; immigrant rights; juvenile justice; gay, lesbian and transgender issues; mental health; cultural preservation; and housing and campaign finance reform. The policy victories in different sites included both formal legislation (Illinois, for example, increased its minimum wage) and changes in the practices of public agencies such as the police department, school districts and individual schools.

While the number of policy adoptions is clearly an indicator of the effectiveness of community organizing, we urge caution when using such an indicator. First, the definition of policy should be expanded to include the internal workings of public agencies, as the Chicago case illustrates. Local public agencies, as the implementers of legislative policy, have a greater impact on the daily life of residents in communities than the formal bill itself. Second, policy victory is a long-term, multistaged process that is better captured through qualitative data. Thus, it may be more useful to focus on groups moving into new areas or getting issues on the table than on policy "adoptions" narrowly defined.

The Ford initiative did assist grantees in being able to meet more regularly with other organizations within their communities. However, more meetings is not necessarily a benefit to grantees. Grantees recognized the value of

“Organizations learn more about building organizational capacity from each other than from consultants, especially around leadership development and fundraising. We encourage peer-to-peer training.”

— Chicago FCO leader, November 2006 meeting at Ford Foundation, New York City

coming together. What mattered to them, though, was having the capacity to manage additional meetings. Some philanthropic partners, including Liberty Hill, the Philanthropic Community Organizing Collaborative (PCOC) and Dade Community Foundation-Edyth Bush Trust, recognized these

challenges and brought grantees together in ways that enhanced opportunities to network and collaborate without overburdening their capacity. For example, technical-assistance workshops were used to achieve other ends, such as networking. The use of technical assistance to serve additional purposes such as relationship-building is indicative of the kind of proactive and catalytic activities that organizations should be encouraged to develop.

IOP Three: Increased Networking by Community Organizations

All five sites exhibited strong increases in formal and informal coalition work. The Ford Foundation and its philanthropic partners did well in selecting organizations that already had collaborative orientations, which accelerated the networking aspects of the FCO. The most cited types of collaboration among grantees were holding public meetings, planning campaigns and training together. The FCO Initiative, with the support of philanthropic partners, helped groups focus on and develop these collaborative orientations. If the initiative to support community organizing is large, foundations should consider providing additional support to assist organizations with these activities. An important example of this is Denver and how the PCOC acknowledged the collaborative orientation of its grantees (aided previously in this regard by an Annie E. Casey Foundation grant) and leveraged additional resources to support their community-organizing initiative.

IOP Four: Increased Support for Community Organizations

All the sites increased the number of grants and funders supporting their organizing work. The actual number of funders supporting community organizing may be greater because some funders support community-organizing organizations when, in fact, they have told us they do not. In the

context of this increasingly sophisticated field called community organizing, parochial notions of community organizing as “disruptive,” “confrontational” and “unproductive” (all things we heard some funders say in our focus groups) are incongruent with the current reality. So funders may fund leadership or youth development when in fact they are actually contributing to community organizing.

All organizations, with the exception of Liberty Hill, the only stand-alone philanthropic partner, established a funder’s collaborative. This was a choice made by Liberty Hill, which already had a collaborative structure in place with its Fund for a New Los Angeles. Ford staff was satisfied that the Liberty Hill approach could serve the purposes they envisioned for the FCO.

Based on our experience with the FCO, we suggest that community-organizing researchers promote collaboration with stakeholders and strive to:

- be accessible to stakeholders
- be ready to change research and program course based on what is learned as the project unfolds
- share information
- listen to what grantees want to learn and incorporate it into the research and analysis
- be as transparent as possible
- systematically communicate with funder(s) and grantees
- build relationships grounded in trust and confidence
- identify and communicate nuances

Increasing Sophistication in Community Organizing

Over the past 30 years, community organizing has moved from obvious parochialism and limited action repertoires to complex operations that are open to collaboration, networking, relationship-building across categories of difference, and using or conducting research to inform organizing and advocacy. This trend toward increased complexity, though, continues to circulate around core community-organizing values such as citizen-led definition of issues and solutions, leadership development, nurturing and expanding relationships, and building a citizens’ base able to defend and promote their interests.

The infusion of Ford funds, as well as the technical assistance and additional support provided by the local philanthropic partners, created a synergy that fostered sophisticated organizing where it already existed and furthered it where it was emergent. In Los Angeles and Denver, collaboration, networking, research and bridging were already in motion, and the FCO advanced these efforts. In Chicago, the FCO encouraged bridging, networking and collaboration in an environment typified by competition and turf struggles. Even in the Southern region (where the philanthropic partners struggled with how to use the FCO to catalyze community organizing), the organizations greatly benefited from the support of the FCO because it facilitated their relationship-building, networking and learning. Given the shortcomings of funding a region versus the city-based focus of the other sites, the region still gained from the FCO, because it provided sustained funding and allowed organizations to develop capacity in areas they deemed important. The organizations got the rare opportunity to learn from leading organizing groups in the Southern region. For example, the Center for Community Action in Lumberton, N.C., took what it learned from the Community Farm Alliance in Frankfort, Ky., about how family farmers were organizing to build a local food system and applied it to its local context. The center is now involved in addressing the inadequacies of its local food system, for instance, seeking to get local institutions to buy local foods rather than purchase it from distant vendors. As the center has learned from the farm alliance, “buy local” is a means to addressing a wide range of problems related to health, the local economy, energy conservation and stewardship of natural resources. Buying local can ensure stable, nearby markets for producers and at the same time provide healthy, fresh foods and help dollars generate a local multiplier effect.

Eclecticism: Variation Is Key to Adaptability and Survival

The variety and variation in community-organizing practices that we have witnessed suggest how people have adapted to new situations and diverse localities. To use an evolutionary analogy, humans have been spectacularly successful as a species because of their variety and capacity to adapt to different niches. Eclectic community organizing is potentially vibrant community organizing because it can be adapted to any niche. Eclectic community organizing can draw on what is most useful and conducive to local needs and what “makes sense” to people’s locally situated understandings, needs and issues. For

example, the Community Farm Alliance's organizing of rural farm families in central and eastern Kentucky has drawn on seasonal routines such as tobacco stripping and curing during the fall months as time to work on base-building. In Los Angeles, North Carolina and other places, we saw how immigrants from Mexico and Central America utilized their own cultural experience to inform their organizing work in the different context of the United States.

Eclecticism suggests inventiveness and viable local practices. Through community organizing, people who are connected to particular places and concerns have an opportunity to develop their own talent and capacities, as opposed to having to wait for someone from "the outside" to "come in" with a solution to local problems. External assistance can be invaluable to social change efforts, as the FCO demonstrated. However, assistance from outside always involves the risk of leaving localities high and dry when externally provided resources evaporate, when funders suffer their own crises or when funders decide to change their policy priorities.

While we found much eclecticism in community organizing in the five sites, we also saw common themes across the sites. Common to all the organizations were the language of developing and cultivating relationships; having citizens define issues and take leadership; and building broad-based power embodied in communities' local residents. The understandings of power varied from conceptions of locally focused membership associations to thousands of members and dozens of institutions organized into a confederation. A faith-based organizer defined organizing in a way that would probably be acceptable to all of the FCO organizers and organizations:

Organizing is when people in the community identify what issues they want to address and are the main voice fighting for change on those issues . . . there is no one else fighting on their behalf . . . the role of the community organizer is to spur this action, work on their behalf. . . .

Today national organizing networks are not always able to or intent on identically reproducing their model in localities. For example, in Central Florida, PICO (People Improving Communities Through Organizing) and the Direct

Action and Research Training Network, both national community-organizing intermediaries, have had to adapt to local needs and customs. The Direct Action affiliate in Lakeland, Fla., recognized race and political ideology as divisive issues (several of the national organizing networks have preferred to avoid issues involving race, abortion and sexual orientation) but regarded them as too central to its organizing work to avoid. The affiliate has found success in building its base because it tackles race and political ideology head-on. For example, the group found that it could incorporate liberals into a conservative base, but not the other way around; it also found greater success in building its African-American church base first, and then bringing in “white” churches, rather than the other way around. Drawing on such local experience and learning is vital to building a vibrant and diverse constituency.

The design of the FCO is commendable in how it did not dictate what organizations had to do, other than collaborate and build capacity; it allowed philanthropic partners and community groups to shape the initiative to meet their own needs. We believe that funders must simulate this willingness to allow local organizations to adapt any foundation program to their needs. Yet we must not neglect the fact that the Ford Foundation was the principal funder and its own agenda and constraints had to be considered regarding how long it would support the FCO even when the FCO was in our analysis, unquestionably yielding desirable outcomes. It had promised limited funding, for a limited period of time. The FCO was an “add-on” rather than an integral part of the foundation’s program work.

The FCO design meshed well with the selected philanthropic partners, community organizations and some of the trends in contemporary community organizing. We will now take a closer look at the structure, grant making and variation among the five FCO site collaborations.

Local Funder Collaboratives



The use of local philanthropic organizations to implement the FCO was essential to the overall success of the initiative, especially to the goals of social capital and community capacity-building, both of which have translated into an ability to influence public policy. Local funding partners capitalized on the broader definition and practice of community organizing to facilitate relationship-building, collaboration and networking activities in the local sites. They also promoted community organizing as a vehicle for community-building and policy change through numerous activities, including getting media coverage; providing speaking opportunities for grantees; educating their peer funders and their board members about the breadth, value and viability of community organizing as a strategy for policy change; raising money for community organizing; and helping frame community organizing in ways that resonated with novices to the field.

The governance structures set up by the local funding partners varied considerably: Los Angeles had a single funder—Liberty Hill; Chicago featured a cooperative of funders—Chicago Community Organizing Capacity Building Initiative; the South operated through a tripartite collaboration among three regional funders—Special Initiative to Promote Capacity Building; Denver had a collaboration among 11 funders—Philanthropic Community Organizing Collaborative; and Florida had a partnership of two foundations—Dade Community Foundation and Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation. Similarly, approaches to grant making varied across the five sites. These different configurations and practices reveal yet again the importance of shaping strategies to fit local political, organizational and cultural contexts. Finally, the different levels of implementation effectiveness across the sites highlights the importance of experience with and understanding of community organizing; prior relationships among funders, among grantees and between funders and grantees; as well as geographic factors.

Governance Structures and Grant Making

Liberty Hill. The local funding partner in Los Angeles, the Liberty Hill Foundation, is a single entity with a long history of funding community organizing and commitment to progressive causes. It also has an extensive network of financial supporters that includes both foundations and individuals based in Los Angeles. Rather than set up a new structure to implement the FCO, Liberty Hill incorporated the FCO into its existing Fund for a New Los Angeles program. Liberty Hill also used its own RFP procedures for the FCO, with one modification: organizations with significant community-organizing experience were given “veteran” status and funded for two years with larger grants; they were expected to be partners in the FCO, while less-established organizations received smaller, one-year grants.

Created in the aftermath of the 1992 uprisings, the Fund for a New Los Angeles program integrates leaders of grass-roots community organizations in all of its processes. The decision to do this resulted in a broad network of community organizers connected to Liberty Hill. These connections and Liberty Hill’s knowledge of the community-organizing landscape were key factors in the quick and relatively smooth implementation stage of the FCO.

Liberty Hill's internal structure also contributed to the smooth implementation process. In contrast to other sites, where foundation officers sometimes had to tiptoe around the priorities, orientations and concerns of more conservative board members, Liberty Hill has, over the years, constructed a board that embraces commitment to community organizing as a strategy for empowerment and progressive change. Moreover, through the development of a community board that makes funding decisions, Liberty Hill created a highly democratic approach to decision making. Thus, the FCO had a ready-made implementation structure that was based on democratic principles and practices.

Chicago Community Organizing Capacity Building Initiative (CCBI). Chicago represented a collaboration among numerous funders of varying sizes, orientations and backgrounds. CCBI began as a collaboration among eight funders with one, Wieboldt, taking the lead, then dropped to seven. In the second round of funding, the number of participating funders grew to 10 at one point, and CCBI moved in the direction of a more structured operation, culminating in the creation of a funders' collaborative that required each member to contribute at least \$5,000 and that granted each member one vote. CCBI developed an RFP for its second round of funding, and development of the RFP and the regranting process had significant input from the then-existing grantees. CCBI also encouraged grantee participation in its decision making about meetings, funding, and policies and procedures.

One constant throughout the process, and one that distinguished CCBI from the other four sites, was the hiring of an executive director to administer the initiative. Three other sites (Los Angeles, Denver, the South) relied on local foundation staff, and Florida used a combination of local foundation staff and consultants. While having a dedicated executive director enhanced Chicago's ability to raise funds, publicize the initiative, respond to grantees and monitor progress, it also created a layer between the initiative and the participating foundations, which, in the long run, might have hampered a sense of ownership of CCBI among the funders. This might explain why the CCBI disbanded after the Ford Foundation ended its financial support.

The initial eight funders that comprised CCBI had varying levels of community-organizing experience, ranging from extensive, as in the case of the MacArthur and Wieboldt foundations and the Woods Fund of Chicago, to no experience at all with funding community organizing. The presence of funders experienced and knowledgeable in community organizing in general, and in Chicago in particular, helped to guide and educate funders that were novices to community organizing.

“Funders should assist in teaching each other the breadth and depth of community organizing.”

— Denver PCOC leader, November 2006 meeting at Ford Foundation, New York City

Special Initiative to Promote Capacity Building (SIPCB). In the South, a collaboration was formed among three regional funders: Southern Partners Fund (SPF), Fund for Southern Communities

and the Appalachian Community Fund (the Southern Funding Collaborative). Each used its networks to inform organizations about the FCO and the RFP process. They then reviewed applications and selected grantees from the applicant pool. With Southern Partners as the lead organization for the FCO, SIPCB attempted to implement the FCO across seven states, which raised challenges and needs that the other sites did not have to address. At the same time, each of the funds already focused on funding in four or more states, so in this regard the FCO was not requiring a completely different funding strategy.

Throughout the entire initiative, SIPCB struggled with providing the same kinds of leadership, proactivity and vision as the other sites. The FCO offered the Southern Funding Collaborative an opportunity to think outside the box in terms of how the infusion of money could further community organizing. Compounding the problems of geographic dispersion were the relative newness of SPF (it was established in 1998) and the relatively small size of the other two funders that comprised SIPCB. As a new fund, SPF had to raise several million dollars to support its own organizational development while the two smaller funds had to establish their credibility in terms of capacity-building. Thus, implementation of the FCO occurred in the context of significant competing priorities. It was further complicated by limited managerial capacity, in that none of the three funders had experience in managing an initiative as large and complex as the FCO. Finally, although the three funders

did know each other, they had no prior experience working together. Consequently, the potential and promise of the FCO was never as deeply tapped as it was in the other sites.

Philanthropic Community Organizing Coalition. The local funding partner in Denver was the Philanthropic Community Organizing Collaborative (PCOC), which comprised nine local philanthropies, the city of Denver and Making Connections–Denver, a collaboration funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Piton Foundation served as the fiscal agent for the Ford Foundation grant. The approach to grant making involved an initial scan of the community-organizing landscape. Funders then conducted interviews and reviewed applications to determine the extent, scope and nature of the organizing activities conducted by the various organizations. Similar to Chicago, Denver developed systems that gave grantees more say in decisions concerning resources, funding, and collaborative policies and procedures.

PCOC, like Chicago, included funders of varying sizes, orientations and levels of experience with community organizing. Of the nine philanthropic partners, two are community foundations, one is a family foundation and one is an operating foundation. One foundation focuses primarily on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights issues, while two others fund social justice organizing. Four of the foundations fund statewide, two fund in the seven-county metropolitan Denver area, while Piton, the fiscal agent, funds only in Denver. Seven of the foundations have had experience funding community organizing in the past with two of them funding exclusively in that area.

In contrast to the arrangements in Chicago and Florida, where consultants and/or external directors were hired to implement the FCO, and similar to Liberty Hill and the SFC, a Piton Foundation program officer acted as the lead person for the PCOC. Moreover, Piton is an operating foundation. Together, these two factors have created a greater sense of ownership within Piton that has extended to PCOC as an entity.

Another distinguishing feature of PCOC is the participation of the city of Denver in the collaborative effort. The commitment was made by the mayor's office and is implemented through Denver's Office of Economic Development.

This dimension creates both opportunities (such as attracting city dollars and buy-in) and challenges (concerns about directly challenging city policies), which PCOC has managed with an appropriate blend of caution, care and concern.

A final distinction is the inclusion in PCOC of Making Connections–Denver, a 10-year initiative funded and managed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that is targeting four neighborhoods in Denver. Piton works closely with Making Connections–Denver, which employs a community-organizing strategy and involves some of the same grantees that are funded under the FCO. This particular arrangement has allowed PCOC to build on and strengthen existing organizing initiatives and partnerships, while learning from experience and incorporating those lessons into their implementation of FCO. It also provided the local funders familiarity with the local community-organizing landscape and an understanding of the various approaches to community organizing (e.g., PICO, labor-based). Finally, Denver benefited from CCBI's experiences with the FCO; during the FCO period, CCBI and Piton developed a close relationship, holding meetings and making contact regularly to discuss ideas.

Dade Community Foundation and the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation.

These two organizations comprise the FCO's local funding partner in Florida, with Dade Community Foundation serving as the lead organization and fiscal agent. Dade Community Foundation, located in Miami, funds primarily in Dade County while Edyth Bush is located in Winter Park, just outside of Orlando, with a funding radius of 100 miles from its Orange County location. Given the scarcity of groups doing organizing in Florida, Edyth Bush was forced to expand beyond its three-county funding range to encompass a larger swath of Central Florida. With respect to the actual grant work, both foundations hired consultants to manage the majority of tasks, including the identification and subsequent review of potential grantees. These investigations uncovered 40 organizations; four in South Florida and five in Central Florida were eventually funded.

In addition to geographic diversity, the two funders embody different approaches to grant making and different understandings of community organizing as a practice. Dade Community Foundation views itself as an

intermediary, leveraging national funds and then regranteeing them locally. Hence, the FCO fit its typical pattern of operations. Moreover, Dade Community Foundation has a history of funding community-organizing initiatives as well as controversial issues such as sexuality and AIDS, both of which were viewed with dismay by some board members, but for which the foundation is now viewed as an innovator. Moreover, the president of the foundation has political experience and embraces the potential of community organizing to strengthen citizen participation and bring about policy change.

By contrast, the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation targets its funding toward human services, arts, education and volunteerism. It strongly embraces the idea of supporting and developing nonprofit management, leadership and governance, with the overall objective of helping people help themselves. Although the foundation has funded community organizing since the 1990s, it has a reputation for being a conservative foundation, both in terms of priorities and fiscal practices. Its approach to and understanding of community organizing varies markedly from that of the Dade Community Foundation. Whereas the Dade Community Foundation staff professes to view community organizing as a means of empowering ordinary people to challenge unjust practices and power imbalances, the Edyth Bush staff sees community organizing more as a strategy for empowering people to help themselves, while also providing a good return on the foundation's community investment portfolio.

Despite having two very different interpretations of community organizing, the foundations have worked very well together. In fact, the diversity of views may be a contributing factor, as each funder has been challenged in its thinking and forced to broaden its conceptions and learn different languages for different audiences, a skill that is critical to the larger objective of donor education (and one that both funders have embraced as priorities).

Although both funders had experience in funding community organizing, a familiarity with the organizing landscape, experience in managing large-scale grants and initiatives, and a positive relationship, implementation was delayed. Several hurricanes in Miami significantly slowed the planning and initial convening processes. Each foundation worked locally to prepare the

funded groups to collaborate across their respective regions. While most of the grantees expressed a desire to know one another better, they initially did not see a common purpose in working together. As with the Southern site, the Florida case demonstrates how geographic dispersal can be a major obstacle to collaboration, even though the effort was not even a statewide one. Despite the mutual respect and good working relations between the two funders, there was not much coordination or interaction among the grantees. Those in Dade County established some working relations, while those in Central Florida relied more on their own organizing networks.

The FCO sites highlight the value of collaboration and illustrate some of the difficulties involved with collaboration. We will now turn to some of the challenges and opportunities of collaboration as manifest in the FCO.

The Collaborative Process: Challenges and Opportunities



For funders, collaboration offers many opportunities that are particularly relevant to an initiative such as FCO. First and perhaps foremost is the learning that takes place. Therefore, educating funders about community organizing is instrumental to their support of community organizing. However, whenever more than one party is involved, there is the potential for disagreement, conflict, free riding and other problems that can compromise the quality of a project. In Chicago, early conflict stemming from different management styles almost derailed the entire initiative. Through a reorganization of leadership and the installation of a director to manage the CCBI, the initiative was put back on solid ground. In Florida, two very different applications of community organizing—network and neighborhood—needed to be reconciled.

Collaboration provided peer support for program officers. Peer groups in general are important, and they become even more so for people working in organizational climates that may not be supportive of their activities. Many of

the program officers involved in the FCO were the only ones in their foundations committed to community organizing. Having the support of peers makes the task less isolating and less daunting.

“Before, there was more fighting between the groups. Now because of their [collaborative] experience, you have unions and interfaith communities working together. Now they are working to not just to build a base but to actually change laws.”

— FCO philanthropic partner in California, focus group interview, October 2003

Working in a collaborative fashion increases the potential impact as each funder brings to the table its networks, contacts, knowledge, information and other resources. Moreover, initiatives like the FCO can garner greater visibility and significance when numerous funders actively support an effort. Relationships are the heart of collaboration

in community organizing and are vital to the kind of work involved in changing policy.

Building Relationships

We asked all participants to define community organizing, and the terminology used by organizations to describe it was consistent whether we spoke to grantee organizations or funders. Respondents stressed “building organizations for purposes of building relationships” that would lead to broadening networks and collaborations (interview, October 2003). Community organizing in their practice, they explained, includes research; knowledge and use of the media; expansion of membership; and strengthening internal organization. They emphasized strengthening relationships, defining these relationships as the product of organizing tactics as well as stronger connections with local political and economic elites and with other groups. These could result in stronger bases for negotiation with those in power to affect social and policy changes. In the South, organizations noted that confrontation, in some cases, might engender resistance instead of change. Therefore, relationship-building, networking and persuasion were more likely than direct confrontation to lead to change. However, confrontation and direct action, or threats of such action, remain viable strategic options.

Groups in each of the sites were aware of the importance of building and maintaining relationships. In Los Angeles, a worker organizing group that focuses on direct worker organizing and policy advocacy described collaborating with a variety of union and immigrant rights groups as well as with Legal Aid organizations. They take on a variety of policy issues and do leadership training on these issues with members. This broad-based, collaborative approach is necessary to fill “a void because the traditional union model does not fit” (interview, October 2003). Another community group in Los Angeles told us that it builds off the model championed by Saul Alinsky to organize the poor and the powerless but that it is more “willing to compromise” (interview, October 2003). The group works to develop leadership and to promote change through “direct action” and simultaneously negotiates with key officials and works collaboratively with other organizations. While working to fight state budget cuts in education, organization members quickly realized that “to be more effective they needed to collaborate” (interview, October 2003). They also learned that antagonizing school officials had limited effect. Therefore, they “reached out to the United Teachers of L.A. union as well as to the regional school superintendent ... then established an Education Action Team comprised of residents, teachers and principals. When [we] finally had our own town hall [meeting] regarding budget cuts ... over 450 people attended” (interview, October 2003). As one community organizer from the group told us, building relationships and working collaboratively is at the core of its efforts because, “in order to increase the depth and breadth of our power we have to network ... now [my] work in organizing is all about relationship-building. This is a new model that is emerging” (interview, October 2003).

“Another funder in a 2003 focus group interview describes the ‘unique’ situation in Los Angeles where immigrants and unions have begun to work together. There is a lot of crossing boundaries. Organizing is happening across sectors.”

— ECO Philanthropic Partner,
focus group interview, October 2003

Respondents in the South made a similar analysis. One leader in Tennessee described negotiations with city council leaders about building an access road to a local swimming pool primarily used by minority children. When several efforts failed to get the council to take action, the leader told the council, “O.K., if you don’t build the access road, I guess we’ll have to bring all

our members down to city hall” (interview, 2003). On the day the ultimatum was delivered, construction began. This outcome is tied to the organization’s having the capacity to mobilize members when necessary, as well as its ability to network and communicate to achieve its ends, leaving confrontation and direct action as wild cards to be played as needed.

Southern leaders stressed the idea that building relationships takes time. A key part of the process, in their view, was the need to alter deeply held views about reform and social change. This was sometimes expressed as a need to “meet people where they are,” which requires an understanding of history and cultural norms with regard to race, class, gender, religion and sexuality, among other things. One group that addresses education and juvenile justice issues found that entrenched skepticism and pessimism about the possibility of reform sometimes hampered its efforts. As a result, the organization devoted a considerable amount of time to winning over members one by one. Quantitatively, the growth in membership in this organization is unimpressive, however, once we consider the local context—rural Mississippi—small gains in membership become impressive achievements. Many parents and teachers who were at first suspicious or dismissive have become members and supporters of the organization. This type of relationship-building is a necessary precursor to institutional and policy change.

The designation of local philanthropic partners that understand the local scene and support more eclectic definitions of organizing was instrumental, we believe, in encouraging grantee organizations to pursue their own definitions and tactics for organizing. The FCO rewarded organization-building, collaboration and community capacity-building that respond to local determination. In the South, relationship-building has become a key component of organizing strategies. Southern leaders distinguish between what they see as old-style—narrowly defined community organizing that is negatively associated with confrontational and destabilizing organizing efforts—and newer, broad and inclusive strategies that resonate with notions of self-help and self-determination. Among the groups we interviewed in the South, we found that activism aimed at empowering and building communities is implicitly understood as organizing, even if it is not always given that name. This may partially be a function of how few community organizers in the South, and the grantees in

particular, are trained in particular schools of organizing; instead, they learn “the work” through experience and practice. In the South, all of the community-organization grantees were involved in organizing and community-building efforts that involved alliances and collaborations that attempted to bridge race and class. Some organizations developed this orientation prior to FCO, using it to augment ongoing work, while others took advantage of the initiative as an opportunity to develop new collaborative projects.

“I think we should be building relationships between rural and urban, and between Latinos and African Americans. They have similar issues in the rural areas . . . housing, low wages . . . you scratch my back and I scratch your back, that is what we must do.”

— Florida community leader,
field interview, December 2006

Groups in Los Angeles identified an emphasis on linking local community efforts as part of a struggle for “social justice.” One group cited the influx of Central American refugees to the city as an important factor because many had previously participated in social justice movements in

their home country. It was, therefore, a “natural evolution for many of these refugees to become involved politically in the U.S. because of their previous social justice work” (interview, October 2003). Members of another community group in Los Angeles told us that they began to build relationships with an eye toward developing an understanding of social justice from the start: “We bring people in by offering various services, but then we try to show them the bigger picture. For example, when someone comes in to complain about an immigration issue, we show how it is connected to the wider struggle of justice” (interview, October 2003). Members of a group in Los Angeles that works with Korean workers told us that they see themselves “as an important bridge [between groups and communities] because Korean service organizations tend to stay away from other communities. We work in solidarity with other groups in order to achieve social justice” (interview, October 2003). They added that in Los Angeles, “community organizations dig deeply into their own communities and they also see the importance of collaboration. In our own community [we have] tried to raise the importance of working with others” (interview, October 2003). The need to work with others has been embraced by union and worker organizing groups, many of which have come together to work collaboratively on issues.

This new focus on building relationships and collaboration is present in Chicago. One leader who has been involved with community organizing for 11 years told us in a focus group interview in October 2003 that when she started, she was looking for a mentor but that most of the community organizations defined community organizing in terms of turf and

... were very paranoid. There were a few mentors who said, “We have to practice what we preach—If we are about social justice, we can’t be so territorial and exclusive.” Over the past 10 to 12 years, the walls have been coming down. There is more coalition-building, networking, more sophisticated folks, less paranoia. More trust. More of a need to collaborate.

In this context, building relationships and working collaboratively is seen as a strategy to be pursued rather than something to be suspicious about.

Policy Change

We found that emphasis on collaboration, especially in Los Angeles, Chicago and Denver, resulted in community-based groups becoming more engaged in citywide policy issues. In the South as well, the grantee organizations offered many examples of how collaboration informed their work at the county, city and state levels. The emphasis on networking encouraged the community-based organizations to work with a more diverse group of local participants. We believe that increased networking and collaboration can contribute to changing the local political infrastructure. More of the organizations’ decision making is responsive to their political and social environment, and it evolves from their own experiences and deliberations.

One leader in Chicago described how there has been an increased “recognition that the power necessary to win puts [groups] in arenas and relations that we were not in in the past” (interview, October 2003). As a result, organizations are “working more closely together” and are “crossing networks” (interview, October 2003). Another organization in Los Angeles was described as “showing vision” because it had changed over the past three years, “from a classic confrontational ‘fight city hall’ organization” to one that “is engaged in working with people

“Sharing how we do things is not the typical MO for community organizers.”

— Chicago community leader,
interview, October 2003

in power and influencing those people” (interview, October 2003). In Chicago, the Balanced Development Coalition brought organizations together to work collectively on is-

ssues and led to the realization that citywide policies on a number of issues were increasingly necessary. Collaboration among groups from different neighborhoods and different sectors had more potential to affect citywide policy. One community leader told us in an interview in October 2003 that:

“We would not have joined the Balanced Development Coalition if not for the Community Capacity Building Initiative [CCBI] because of the different organizing networks that we all come from. CCBI meetings allowed for the development of trust and relationship building, which in turn created the ability to work together.”

Such recognition can lead to effective city- and statewide campaigns on policy issues. CCBI was credited with facilitating this because it convened organizations that probably would not have allied previously because they participated in different networks.

In Los Angeles, a broad range of groups worked together as part of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice to influence major city developments and ensure that locally subsidized development projects resulted in jobs and other benefits for residents in the communities where the projects are located. The Figueroa Corridor Coalition was able to persuade Los Angeles City Council members to negotiate with downtown residents (including the homeless) and community organizations on redevelopment plans approved by the council. Another group working on homeless and hunger issues in L.A. issued its own policy plan—its work is described as a “completely different organizing tactic” that has “really changed the debate” (interview, October 2003). It was a key shift from “confrontation to engagement” (interview, October 2003). This shift from overreliance on confrontation to willingness to engage was evident in all the sites and is an important strategic and tactical change.

Local groups have been criticized as provincial in their approach to issues. However, the groups participating in the FCO showed a willingness to work to build support for broader citywide or statewide policy agendas, in collaboration with diverse networks and in negotiation with decision makers. In their early study of consensus organizing, Gittell and Vidal noted that “in the traditional conflict organizing there is little value and energy placed in the development of weak ties, or bridging social capital, as strong ties are thought to empower actors and affect change.”⁴ Creating weak ties, or bridging social capital, involves networking with groups in power. The objection to weak ties by more traditional organizers was and is that leaders or groups may be co-opted. We observed that the contrary was true in the sites we studied.

Prior Relationships

Support of collaborative community-organizing work requires an understanding of prior relationships. In the FCO, we identified prior relationships along three axes: those among funders; those among organizations; and those among funders and grantees. As a major funder of community organizing in Los Angeles, Liberty Hill had developed very good relationships with many of the organizations it funded through the FCO. Its regular practice of encouraging and fostering collaboration

also created strong relationships both among grantees and between grantees and Liberty Hill. In Chicago, a subset of the original eight funders had been meeting informally prior to the FCO to discuss community organizing in that city. With respect to the grantees, those that had received prior funding for community organizing had relations with one or more of the eight original funders. Given the

extreme territoriality that characterized community organizing in Chicago, none of the grantees had much in the way of prior relations. Denver benefited from the Making Connections—Denver project that involved some PCOC members and several of the grantees. Having worked together for several

“I think there is promise for this now [labor-community collaboration] . . . [unions in South Florida] understand now that there is an entry point for them, behind the community groups. . . . They don’t have the union base to count on, and this establishes, in a weird way, political clout equity for the community-based organizations.”

— Miami community leader,
field visit, December 2006

years on this community-organizing initiative, Denver had a strong foundation of relationships on which to implement the FCO. In fact, the proposal was written with significant input from Metro Organizations for People, a grantee of the Making Connections–Denver project and, subsequently, a grantee of the FCO. In the South, the three funds had financed or already knew about the grantees selected for the FCO. However, initially many of the grantees knew very little about one another because of the geographic distance that separated them. A similar situation existed in Florida. The Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation and Miami-Dade Community Foundation had developed relationships or were aware of the grantees funded by the FCO prior to that time. However, the groups knew little to nothing about those groups outside of their region. In the case of the South and Florida, extra time and resources needed to be focused on building and cementing relationships where no solid prior relationships existed.

Conclusion

The FCO provided a framework that allowed local philanthropic partners and community-organizing groups to create space or enhance existing space for learning, sharing and building trust. Community organizations had an opportunity to learn from and work with other organizations, and funders had the opportunity to support the generation of more equitable and informed relations with their community-organizing grantees. The FCO facilitated learning and listening within and across sites, and it influenced how funders conceive of community organizing as a part of their programs. The FCO presented the staff of funding organizations an opportunity to learn how to collaborate with local community-organizing organizations, how community organizing works, and how to educate board members and donors on the effectiveness of community organizing as a grant-making and social justice focus. Some staff of the local philanthropic partners of the FCO participated in organizer training programs, and, as a result, felt better equipped to communicate with and assist their organizing grantees, as well as to explain the value of community organizing to skeptical donors and board members.

The FCO itself showed that, given adequate funding and time, collaboration can lead to greater scale and scope. For example, by June 2005, the local philanthropic partners in the five sites had begun talking about the possibility of working on the same issue in their localities, which would have led to an effort of national scope focused on immigration, affordable housing or education reform. Community organizing can be scaled up beyond daunting geographic boundaries. Other examples of scaling up community organizing include some of the community-union partnerships we saw in Los Angeles, Denver and South Florida.

To summarize, community organizing is a strategy for solving problems and addressing issues. Community organizing has many praiseworthy elements. However, it is not a panacea and there are limitations. We should appreciate, though, how community organizing has evolved to a level of sophistication that includes advocacy, leadership development, service provision, community development, community-building and policy reform. Community organizing provides a flexible framework for citizens to cooperatively tackle and solve problems, serving as a fulcrum for citizens to initiate and sustain social change and social justice. It is a means of mobilizing and connecting citizens, providing them with the capability to be agents of change rather than passive recipients of service or idle observers. Through community organizing, citizens are able to challenge the unyielding nature and impudence of developers, corporations, government and their own fellow residents, as well as to redress the deteriorating public good. Community organizing can contribute to that small “d” democracy that citizens can feel and wield. Through effective community organizing, citizens can learn that they have the power to change things as they become skilled at identifying and solving problems, creating new relationships and exercising their authority as citizens.

The FCO helped strengthen the field of community organizing. It brought together established funders of community organizing with funders new to the practice. The collaboration of local philanthropies infused new, essential funds into community-organizing organizations, and the multiyear funding allowed organizations enough security to engage in planning with longer-term orientations than might be permitted with one- or two-year funding streams. The FCO brought together organizations that might never have tried cooperating on a joint venture, and it opened the door to dialogue across philosophical, racial, economic and cultural differences.

Recommendations



In our earlier reports to the Ford Foundation, we recommended that it take the next appropriate step to encourage local communities throughout the country to form funder collaboratives in partnership with national foundations to promote community organizing responsive to local community interests (see, for example, *Assessing Community Change*, volumes I and II). We want to reiterate those recommendations here, as well as encourage other funders to learn from the FCO experience and form collaborations between funders and community organizers. We suggest the following recommendations as guidelines for this next step:

- Given the eclectic and sophisticated practices of contemporary community organizing, funders should identify and encourage local definitions of and approaches to community organizing.
- In concert with one of the major conclusions of the November 2006 convening of the Ford Foundation's Fund for Community Organizing in New York City (which most grantees and local funders of the five sites attended), we agree that creating a space for community-organizing organizations to meet to deliberate and discuss issues is the most important contribution of the FCO.

Foundations should fund efforts to create consistently available spaces for local community-organizing dialogue and learning. Further, this should be a long-term obligation involved in providing incentives for interaction among local organizations and to fund collaborative work of local foundations, grantees and community-based organizations.

- Ford's commitment has catalyzed communication, networking and capacity-building within and among the five sites, factors that contributed to sustaining grass-roots networks that fuel civic participation and social capital development. Ford and other foundations can continue to be supportive of such efforts by using their leverage to persuade major and local funders to increase their investment in community organizing; by providing support for grantees to tell and share their stories of community organizing; and by proactively sharing their stories of community organizing with other national funders.
- Long-term programmatic efforts like the FCO require that foundation staff be available for contact with local funders and their grantees and that they work closely with them, especially in the case of a national initiative like the FCO. We have learned from the FCO that providing such support greatly facilitates collaborative work.
- Efforts such as the FCO can result in significant policy gains, while ongoing documentation of both its successes and challenges can inform the development and subsequent implementation of new models for a more democratic approach to policymaking at the local, state and national levels.
- Technical assistance can serve as an effective incentive for coalition building. Joint meetings of grantees allowed time and space for networking and engaging in talk about common issues. Ford and other foundations should encourage technical-assistance programs that encourage the use of electronic media, power mapping and training in social theory and social movement history, among other options.
- Given the instrumental and catalytic role of the philanthropic partners in fostering collaboration, networking and the development of social capital

among funders and community groups, the Ford Foundation should continue its partnership with local funders, including family, community and corporate foundations, as well as cities and communities, to collaborate in local efforts. The work of the local funders in the five sites was evolving toward a national collaboration that remained firmly rooted in the local context. Effective collaboration is rare and difficult to sustain, and the philanthropic partners' openness to collaboration illustrates the viability of working across diverse community-organizing styles, foundation structures and local contexts, while providing an organic framework for bottom-up collaboration.

- Given the trend toward collaboration and its role in securing policy victories and increasing diversity in participation, Ford and other foundations should support practices that reinforce and expand networking activities. Cross-site efforts offer an opportunity to consider commonalities and differences in effective organizing practices as well as the possibilities for creating policy-reform synergies that ripple outward from specific local communities to a broader regional and national collaborative model.
- Ford and other foundations should study how long it takes to accomplish particular change efforts, reconcile the time frame with its own internal operation and adequately fund the venture. Based on our experience with the FCO and other social-change efforts by community groups, we believe that funders need to commit to specific organizing efforts for a minimum of five years. This period should include time for groups to plan and build relationships for the implementation of activities.

Endnotes

1. In Los Angeles, 25 organizations received funding, followed by 17 in Chicago, 11 in the Southern region, 9 in Florida and 10 in Denver.
2. Action research is a strategy compatible with assessing community organizing. Action research uses the experience of participants to systematically inform flexible research and programmatic efforts.
3. To see the data tables for each indicator, consult our report, *Assessing Community Change, Volume II, 2004-2007*, pp. 192-215 at <http://www.howardsamuelscenter.org/research.html>.
4. Gittell, Ross J. and Vidal, Avis. 1998. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Photography

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“Community organizing is one among several strategies for influencing public policy and building social capital. It is the only strategy that can simultaneously develop local assets, strengthen relationships between diverse groups, and empower people to actively and effectively participate in the civic life of the larger society.”

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Promoting Community Organizing

In 2000, the Ford Foundation established the Ford Fund for Community Organizing Initiative, a program that employed a strategy of promoting a collaborative of local funders to act as partners with the Ford Foundation to support grassroots community organizations. Initial funding went to three sites, Los Angeles, Chicago and the South. Two additional sites, Denver and Florida, were added in 2005.

This discussion of the initiative is based on an evaluation of the Fund for Community Organizing. The evaluation was conducted over the course of the entire program, from 2000 to 2007, by two research teams led by Marilyn Gittell, professor of political science at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and director of the Howard Samuels Center. This report describes the successes and limitations of Ford’s initiative, offers recommendations for future programs that seek to support community organizing, and provides historical context on community organizing and insight into recent trends in the practice of community organizing. In addition, this report confirms the value of locally responsive community organizing, strengthened by the support of local funder collaboratives working in partnership with the Ford Foundation. We hope these findings will encourage other national funders to engage in similar programs that support community organizing on the local level.