

COMMUNITY



ORGANIZING

TOOLBOX

A Funder's Guide to Community Organizing

Neighborhood Funders Group

COMMUNITY



ORGANIZING TOOLBOX

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THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TOOLBOX

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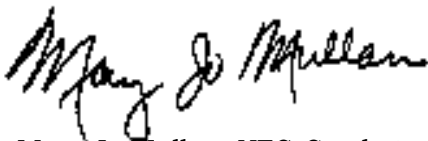
This *Community Organizing Toolbox* (the *Toolbox*) is part of the continuing program of the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) to provide information and professional development opportunities to our members. We encourage you and other grantmakers to use this framework for developing, expanding and fine-tuning funding of community organizing (CO). This educational resource for funders will be posted on our Web site, www.nfg.org, where additional background information will be available.

NFG members focus on improving the quality of life for residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities. To carry out their varied but related missions, these grantmakers fund a wide range of community-serving organizations and activities — including human services, education, community development, civic participation, and CO. For many members, NFG's work to advance CO is one of the association's most critical priorities. It's a funding strategy that directly addresses NFG's goals for supporting poor people and their communities. In a 1999 survey, 88 of NFG's 200 member organizations said they funded CO. They range from small local funders to five of the 15 largest foundations in the country.


This *Toolbox* is the second produced by NFG. Its development is the culmination of many years of attention to lessons learned in CO by NFG members — in our annual conferences, in our newsletter, *NFG Reports*, and in other programs for our members. Many thanks to committee chair Henry Allen of the Hyams Foundation, who was joined by Jeannie Appleman of Interfaith Funders, Fabio Naranjo of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Frank Sanchez of the Needmor Fund, in many months of discussion and thought that guided this publication. They particularly appreciate the time given by Hubert Dixon of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Jane Downing of the Pittsburgh Foundation, Madeline Lee of the New York Foundation and Regina McGraw of the Wieboldt Foundation to review the *Toolbox* during its development.

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INTRODUCTION

Organization means hope for people. It means making their institutions relevant. But most of all, organization means power. It means being able to do something about things they've been frustrated about all their lives.¹

— Ernesto Cortes, Industrial Areas Foundation

Community organizing explicitly seeks to build the power base of the poor so they can affect and change the public policies and private market forces that create and sustain social and economic inequality.²

— Henry Allen, Hyams Foundation

The United States enters the 21st century with a level of income inequality and wealth polarization that is now wider than at any time since World War II. Even in today's economy, wages continue to stagnate or erode for those in the bottom half of the nation's income distribution. Close to 43 million Americans are medically uninsured — and poverty remains entrenched — in inner-city and rural communities across the country. Meanwhile, the income and wealth of those at the top have grown exponentially. Those in the Forbes 400 now hold as much wealth as the 50 million households in the bottom half of the population.³

Such large-scale inequities are mirrored in other dimensions of American life as well, most notably in the realm of political participation and democratic engagement. Study after study has documented that political participation in and beyond the voting booth is skewed by class, with upper-income and more educated citizens participating more frequently and at higher rates than those with fewer financial resources and years of schooling. To paraphrase one observer of the American political landscape, the heavenly choir of American interests continues to sing with an upper-class accent.

Community organizing — or CO, as we will refer to it throughout this *Community Organizing Toolbox* — is one of the few strategies working to build grassroots leadership, community initiative and constituent influence in neighborhoods and communities that are often forgotten or ignored by those in power. The Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) considers CO an important strategy for change. We encourage grantmakers to learn more about the vital contributions that CO has made to broader community development and renewal efforts.

CO — A Key to Realizing NFG's Goals

NFG members are grantmaking institutions committed to making the promise of our democracy work for the most disadvantaged in society. Their strategies target for assistance especially those persons living in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities across the country.

NFG members are convinced that America's promise "can be achieved only when people gain the political and economic power necessary to make key decisions about their futures and the future of their communities."⁴ This is an overarching goal of CO.

Nationally, CO groups have:

- Leveraged billions of dollars in public- and private-sector investment;
- Expanded and improved city services;
- Prevented industrial plant closings;
- Secured fair-share hiring agreements from public- and private-sector employers;
- Cleaned-up toxic waste dumps in low-income communities;
- Organized public and private housing tenants;
- Improved the climate, operation and performance of neighborhood schools; and
- Built or rehabilitated thousands of affordable housing units.

CO has also nourished and supported local leadership by teaching people how to convene meetings, conduct research, analyze public policy positions, negotiate with public and private officials, register people to vote, develop a common vision for struggling or distressed communities, and implement a work plan to address and resolve important issues or problems. For a more extensive discussion of CO results go to *CO Accomplishments* section on page 33.

CO's growth, increased sophistication and impact have momentum. CO groups are now paying far greater attention to educating opinion-makers and to pursuing more thoughtful communications strategies. An increasing number of foundations with more traditional service-oriented grant-making programs are now exploring and investing in CO. This underscores CO's increased visibility and importance, and helps to spread the knowledge of CO's value to previously uninformed sectors of society, including grantmakers.

WHY A CO TOOLBOX?

When public policy seems to favor the monied and powerful, when citizens of many minority neighborhoods feel alienated and intimidated, we have moved backwards in time....[We] hope that we achieve the greatest possible return on our grants by training, organizing, and empowering people to learn about the policies that affect them and mobilize to be heard.⁵

— Steven D. Heyman, chair of the board, New York Foundation

Many NFG members have long recognized the value that CO brings to their grantmaking programs. They have made substantial investments in grants and other support for CO groups and efforts over a significant period of time. Other NFG members are testing the waters with initial modest funding for CO groups or projects. And still other members have made grants to groups that include CO as one of several undertakings, or for comprehensive initiatives involving CO. But this grantmaking does not directly support the organizing activities.

Still, overall funding for CO is relatively small when compared with grantmaking for other types of community activities or strategies, such as social service delivery, housing development and rehabilitation, community economic development and community building. Because it considers CO to be an important, if underutilized, strategy for change, NFG devoted its September 1998 annual conference to the subject. The conference highlighted foundation investments in the strategy, to assist funders seeking to assess for themselves the importance and viability of CO.

NFG members took a next step in educating funders about CO by contracting for the development of this *Toolbox*. Its overall goals are to encourage grantmakers to learn more about the vital contributions that CO has made to broader community development and renewal efforts, and to help grantmakers learn how to undertake CO grantmaking. The *Toolbox* is one of several publications and resources produced by NFG to provide information and support innovation among grantmakers who care deeply about making a difference for low-income and other historically disenfranchised constituencies. (For information on NFG and its programs, go to www.nfg.org.)

NFG's OBJECTIVES FOR THE TOOLBOX

The *CO Toolbox* has several objectives:

- To increase attention in the philanthropic community and the broader public to how CO makes changes that benefit low- to moderate-income people and their neighborhoods and communities;
- To explain what CO is and how to recognize it, and to show the relationship of CO to other strategies for community change;
- To illustrate and underscore the many concrete accomplishments that CO has made in galvanizing ordinary people to work for a higher quality of life in areas like housing, jobs, education, the environment, health and more;
- To encourage NFG members and other funders to consider making CO a priority in their grantmaking, and to integrate their CO support with other grantmaking investments for neighborhood and community revitalization;
- To provide advice and linkages that go well beyond this text for additional learning about the CO field;
- To highlight lessons and promising grantmaking strategies from foundations already investing in CO; and
- To share lessons on why and how some grantmakers who had not earlier supported CO decided to do so.

The *Toolbox* should be useful to a broad range of funders — from small, local foundations to larger national funders; from those beginning to think about how CO might fit with and strengthen their grantmaking to those with years of experience; from those who focus entirely on local community development to those whose grantmaking extends to broader geographic and policy arenas; from those whose grantmaking responds to unsolicited proposals to those who place priority on foundation-determined initiatives.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TOOLBOX

This *CO Toolbox* is the second produced by NFG. The first, *NFG's Jobs Toolbox*, was published in 1999. Some descriptions, data and analysis presented in *NFG's Jobs Toolbox* that are highly relevant for CO grantmaking considerations are referenced in this one.⁶

The first section of this *Toolbox* is *CO: The Basics*. It provides solid background on CO, its history, the different types of CO organizations and what CO has accomplished over the years. This section assumes that readers know little, if anything, about CO.

The second section, *Grantmakers and Community Organizing*, provides a full picture of how and why funders get involved in CO funding. Among the topics: setting a CO funding strategy, choosing groups to fund, how CO funding fits with other funding priorities and how to evaluate CO funding.

The third section, *Two In-Depth CO Case Studies*, showcases the activities of two foundations with a strong commitment to CO grantmaking: the Hyams Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Readers interested in CO's results may want to pay particular attention to the sections entitled, *CO Accomplishments* (page 33), *Why Grantmakers Prioritize CO* (page 49) and *Measuring Results: How to Evaluate CO Initiatives* (page 70). The case studies in the third section provide some highlights of CO victories and accomplishments, as well.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLBOX

The *Toolbox* can be read cover-to-cover or in sections, in hard copy or online. It is designed for easy use. You can copy sections, perhaps for board members, colleagues or grantee organizations. The electronic version is available through NFG's Web site, www.nfg.org. It contains links to the Web sites of many of the organizations mentioned in the text and an extensive resource list with links. Note: links found in the text, as well as on NFG's Web site, point to other sources of information for further study. The online version allows you to search for specific information. For example, if you want to find out about what community organizers do, you can search for "community organizer," or if you want to find out about a particular organizing group, you can search for it by name.

¹ Ernesto Cortes, Industrial Areas Foundation, as quoted in: Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980, p. 44.

² Henry Allen, "Organizing, Power, & Public Policy: One Foundation's Road to Supporting Community Organizing," *Shelterforce*, September/October 1998, p. 31.

³ Statistics from *Divided Decade: Economic Disparity at the Century's Turn*, by Chuck Collins, Chris Hartmann and Holly Sklar, United for a Fair Economy, December 15, 1999.

⁴ Neighborhood Funders Group, *Plan 2000, Three-Year Strategic Plan*, 1997.

⁵ The New York Foundation, "Message from the Chair," *1994 Annual Report*.

⁶ NFG's *Jobs Toolbox* was published in 1999 and can be accessed through NFG's Web site, www.nfg.org.