



To: Marjorie Fine, Seth Borgos
Fr: Kristen Grimm
Re: Final Report on Survey Results
Da: October 9th, 2007

This memo outlines the major findings of a donor survey recently conducted by Spitfire Strategies for The Linchpin Campaign (formerly known as Expanding Resources for Community Organizing) a project of the Center for Community Change. The survey was conducted online from January 9th to March 16th, 2007 and collected data from 189 individual donors. The findings reported here are based on 108 surveys that answered all questions. Following the key findings are a series of insights for community organizers to help guide their efforts to communicate successfully with major donors as well as several thinking points for donors.

Overall, the survey indicates that community organizing has grown up and come of age in the nonprofit sector, shedding many of its contentious stereotypes from the past and attracting considerable financial support. These donors are overwhelmingly supportive of community organizing, but feel that it is difficult to measure its impact. They also don't seem to be seeing the big-picture outcomes that they feel it could achieve.

A Note on Survey Participants

Most of the respondents (all private donors) were contacted through one of several organizations that helped promote the survey, including the Center for Community Change, The Women Donors Network, and the Ms. Foundation, Jewish Funds for Justice and Environmental Grantmakers Association. More than 20 organizations agreed to send the survey to their members.

Respondents came from all over the country, with the heaviest concentration in the Northeast (28 percent), Midwest (26 percent) and West (24 percent). Sixty-one percent of respondents were female and 38 percent were male. Respondents' ages ranged from under thirty to over sixty, but the largest percentage was in mid-life — 48 percent were between 45 and 60 and 26 percent were over 60. Respondents also gave at a variety of levels. Twenty-three percent gave \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year; 21 percent gave \$25,000 to \$100,000 per year; 21 percent gave between \$100,000 and \$500,000 per year; 12 percent gave between \$500,000 and \$1 million annually; and 22 percent gave more than \$1 million per year.

A wide-ranging variety of progressive causes motivate the donors who participated in this survey. More than half gave to civil rights issues and political participation/electoral campaigns and exactly half also gave to advance and benefit education. Seventy percent of respondents gave to economic justice/poverty issues and 68 percent gave to environmental issues. Respondents also have a good sense of which communities they wish to support through their giving — 70 percent said their giving supports women; 69 percent said racial, ethnic or tribal communities; 67 percent said children or youth; and 52 percent said immigrants. Just less than half of respondents said their giving benefited LGBT individuals, and around a quarter reported contributing to support people of faith.

1752 N Street NW, Suite 800 * Washington, DC 20036
tel 202-293-6200 * fax 202-293-6201
www.spitfirestrategies.com

Key Findings

1. Donors are opening their wallets to community organizing.

As we entered this research phase, one of our working assumptions was that many individual donors were simply not giving to community organizing. The survey seems to shatter that assumption, and instead indicates that very few surveyed donors are *not* giving to community organizing. Of 108 donors surveyed, 94 percent make financial contributions to community organizing.

I think [community organizing] is an essential component when it comes to creating social change, PERIOD. There is nothing that it is not well suited for.

-- survey respondent

2. Individual donors have very favorable opinions of community organizing.

The survey indicates that community organizing has come of age, maturing into a well-respected component of the progressive social movement. Ninety-two percent of surveyed donors think that community organizing can play a critical role in achieving their philanthropic goals, and few cited any of the negative stereotypes that once afflicted community organizers. In a sure sign of widespread approval, a mere 10 percent of donors feel that community organizing is too confrontational to address problems that require a cooperative solution.

Community organizing that leads to community engagement is a key factor in all the change work we need to do. It is one of the best places to make our issues real, to convert policy into practice, to give people the place and time to own the change, and to build understanding and trust for other people.

-- survey respondent

Donors tend to associate community organizing with important political activities such as creating diverse coalitions, running public policy campaigns and providing a voice in politics for disenfranchised communities. In perhaps the strongest indication of how far community organizing has come, 90 percent of donors agree that community organizing is about building a foundation of lasting relationships and trust that allows a community to mobilize on important issues.

Practically all donors surveyed agree that new technologies have not replaced community organizing. All but one donor disagreed with the statement "Technology and media have made traditional 'face-to-face' community organizing obsolete and unnecessary" – and nearly half *strongly* disagreed.

3. Donors see the benefits of short-term community organizing, but are not seeing the bigger picture.

Eighty-five percent of respondents feel that community organizing is effective at increasing voter turnout, and donors tend to associate organizing with images of concrete activities, such as creating coalitions and campaigning. However, there is widespread concern among donors (75 percent) that community organizing is not being used enough to build a true popular base for the progressive movement.

In contrast to their highly favorable views on most aspects of community organizing, donors did report significant doubts and ambivalence on the efficacy of community organizing for broader social impacts. While 50 percent of the respondents agreed that “community organizing is the most effective way to change institutional or community values over the long term,” nearly as many (41 percent) simply answered “neutral” – a significant deviation in this survey, as most respondents agreed or disagreed with most of the other statements we presented to them. For most questions, fewer than 12 percent replied “neutral”.

Examples of community organizing successes cited by donors in the survey:

- Beyond Ground Zero coalition campaign to get Bellevue hospital in New York to set up screening and treatment for low-income sub-contractors who worked on post-9/11 cleanup.
- LAANE getting a living wage ordinance in Los Angeles.
- Immigrant (especially Latino) get-out-the-vote efforts.
- Colorado Progressive Coalition and their allies’ passage of minimum wage increase in Colorado (2006).

4. Donors believe that it is difficult to measure the effects of community organizing.

Many donors also feel that it is very difficult to measure the impact of community organizing; 41 percent agreed with the statement “It is very difficult to measure the impact of community organizing” and nearly 21 percent replied “neutral.” This opinion no doubt undermines their ability to see the “bigger picture” and the more abstract social benefits of organizing.

Measurement tools exist; we don’t always have access to them.

-- survey respondent

5. Donors are motivated to give by outcomes – they want to make the world a better place.

A majority of respondents answered the open-ended question about what motivates them to give with some variation on the idea that they want to make the world a better place or make a difference in their communities. They are more focused on the end result achieved than the process for achieving it. This point was reinforced by the kinds of examples of successful organizing that respondents cited, which were often “wins” like living wage agreements, minimum wage victories, other policy changes, etc.

I grew up in a family which prides itself on giving back to the community. I want to help to correct social, environmental and economic injustices at home and abroad.

-- survey respondent

6. Donors want more direct contact with community organizers.

Consistent with the notion that donors are most likely to give to organizations or programs they are personally familiar with, 50 percent of surveyed donors reported that would prefer site visits and 64 percent would like donor briefings with other donors in order to learn more about community organizing. Methods such as Web sites and videos were selected by very few donors (27 percent and 19 percent, respectively) and are unlikely to be highly effective for engaging these donors.

Recommendations for Organizers

1. Reach out to donors already giving at low levels; they are most likely to give more.

More than nine in 10 respondents believe community organizing can play a critical role in achieving their goals for their giving, but nearly half of respondents (42 percent) give less than 25 percent of their annual donations to community organizing.

Community organizers should focus their donor outreach activities on this segment of current donors, with a compelling request to current donors to increase their giving. These donors have already shown that they value community organizing and have proven their ability and willingness to make financial contributions.

2. Talk to donors about their values and goals.

Donors, motivated to give by outcomes, must be able to easily align community organizing with the specific issues that drive their giving. This insight is reinforced by direct feedback from donors; 45 percent reported that “a story about a successful organizing effort related to an issue or population I care about” would be the best way to influence their giving. Twenty-five percent of the surveyed donors said that “receiving facts and statistics about the impact of community organizing” would influence them to give more.

When reaching out to donors, community organizers need to explain why and how community organizing is important to *the donor's* top three outcome areas, such as:

- Economic justice/poverty (78 percent).
- Environment (68 percent).
- Political participation/electoral campaigns (59 percent).
- Education (52 percent).

Organizers can address donor goals by using language that evokes a tipping point or a big social breakthrough. When you mention desegregation, the clean-up of America's skies and rivers, public access for the disabled, programs for the homeless, decreased tolerance for child abuse and domestic violence, increases in the minimum wage, or civil rights protections for gays and lesbians, you evoke the kind of big social changes donors want to support. So use examples.

3. Create aspirational moments of envy. Show them what is possible by reminding them of past victories.

Every donor wants to know that their dollars led to substantial social change. Remind them of key moments in history where organizing led to that kind of change: the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Clean Air Act, the Community Reinvestment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the freeing of Nelson Mandela. The victories don't have to be confined to a specific issue area.

4. Talk with donors about measurable impacts.

Across all levels of support, donors expressed surprising agreement with the statement “it is very difficult to measure the impact of community organizing.” Donors are often hesitant to

support programs or organizations that do not talk about results and measurements, and organizers need to overcome this misconception if they want to move donors up the giving ladder.

Organizers should communicate confidently about outcomes and offer measurements when talking about impact. Donors don't expect perfect measurement tools – but they do want to support organizations driven by results, with leaders that regularly assess and refine their efforts to achieve great impacts.

Organizers should create their own measuring stick if needed, and be prepared to tell donors why it is relevant. Community organizers can't afford to shy away from discussing how to measure success. Donors want to know if community organizing is effective, and that's an easy request for community organizers to fulfill!

5. Develop “experiential” ways to connect with donors.

Many successful communication activities are passive, designed to deliver information and messages in ways that require little of the audience (think of banner ads or most Web sites or magazine ads). This survey indicates that these common, technology-driven campaigns will be less effective at moving donors. Nearly half of the respondents said they want to make site visits to see for themselves what community organizers are doing; and 64 percent said they would like to attend briefings designed specifically for donors. Contrast that with a mere 27 percent who said they would like to get information from a Web site on community organizing (and fewer than 20 percent who would like to receive videos) and the limitations of using technology become clear.

Community organizers already know the value of personal meetings and face-to-face contact. Although it takes more time and effort, organizers should be sure to invite donors on site visits, showcasing the human impact of their programs in action. While the Internet has expanded the reach of fundraising appeals, organizers still need creative ways to personally connect with major donors as often as possible. In addition to conducting donor workshops, briefings and site visits, speaking roles at local, regional and national donor conferences and forums allow organizers to broaden their reach without becoming a faceless solicitation.

Recommendations for Donors

1. Community organizing is the backbone of all successful social movements, and indeed the only way they are sustained over time. As an active donor, you can bring the same momentum to your causes that [customize for target] brought to the [customize for target] movement.

The donors in this survey overwhelmingly agree that community organizing can help them achieve their philanthropic goals. From health care to social justice, community organizing holds the power to build a lasting foundation for change. Without this foundation, important changes are subject to passing opinions and favor. Community organizers build the social networks and train the community leaders needed for lasting, sustainable change. But building this foundation takes time, commitment and money.

To achieve the kind of big social outcomes that motivate our survey respondents, all donors should adopt a giving strategy to provide consistent funding to community organizations, an essential but often overlooked component of all progressive social change.

2. Visit community organizers to see for yourself how you can create lasting change when you dedicate at least a third of your giving to community organizing.

The donors we surveyed reported that directly seeing the benefits and activities of community organizing would be the best way to convince them to increase their support. Like so many nonprofit advocates, it is likely that many community organizations do not have the resources to regularly conduct donor briefings and donor site visits. This shouldn't keep donors away, however. National groups like the Center for Community Change can provide donors with a list of local community organizations working in regions and neighborhoods across the country. We encourage donors to take the initiative and go out and experience community organizing to truly understand the lasting value being created by organizers in communities all over the United States...

3. The issues you care about today can become enduring movements in the years to come — like Earth Day, the Voting Rights Act and a Living Wage — when you make community organizing a focal point of your portfolio.

While almost unanimous in their belief that community organizing can achieve big outcomes, donors expressed concerns about efficacy and measurement. However, community organizing is about long-term commitment, and must be measured and evaluated accordingly. So, whether you are motivated by a desire to change our health care system or increase educational opportunities or improve the environment, you should create a portfolio that allocates funding for organizing across all of your priority sectors. Community organizing is the backbone of all sustainable social movements, and the best way for you to support these lasting social movements is to focus your giving on projects and programs that include community organizing.