

COMMUNITY LEARNING PROJECT

A Powerful Combination

**Supporting Links Between
Community Organizing and
Community Development
Through Funding Collaboratives**

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Community Learning Project

The Community Learning Project explores ways of building a stronger infrastructure for learning in the field of community and social change. It works to expand writing, research, evaluation, teaching, training and learning opportunities which give grassroots community groups and their supporters easier access to helpful and provocative lessons from the extraordinary efforts and experience of their peers.

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The goals of the funding collaboratives are to deepen their member groups' roots in their communities and to increase their power to influence public policies.

Over the last decade three statewide and local coalitions have pioneered an important new approach to strengthening their member groups and their constituencies. Each has worked with several funders to create funding collaboratives to expand grant support for community organizing and advocacy by their members. In doing so, their twin goals have been to deepen their member groups' roots in their communities and to increase their power to influence public policies. The newest of these collaboratives received lead funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.

The success of these three funding collaboratives for community organizing is quite remarkable but little known. Their success runs counter to the conventional wisdom that community development corporations jeopardize their relationships with government and the private sector if they are involved in community organizing on controversial issues. In fact, these three pilot programs demonstrate that community organizing and advocacy on public policies can greatly increase groups' access to the resources and collaboration they need for housing and community development projects. And they show that the strongest partnerships with government and the private sector often come out of tough negotiations in which grassroots groups have sufficient power and allies as well as expertise to earn respect and a place at the bargaining table.

Experience with these collaboratives was a central focus for discussion among five Northeastern state and local coalitions in Boston in August, 2005. These groups were convened by a consultant to the Rockefeller Foundation's Working Communities Program², as part of a broader exploration of promising new opportunities for foundation initiatives on affordable housing. Although the groups are based in contiguous states from New Jersey through Massachusetts, there were surprisingly few historic ties among them. The four state coalitions are rooted in two different national networks – one on housing, the other linking

Community Development Corporations.³ The local coalition had no links to peer organizations in other cities, to state coalitions, or to either national network.

The last half day of the Boston meeting concentrated on the groups' experience with funding collaboratives for community organizing. The Massachusetts Association of CDCs initiated the first of these in 1997 -- the Ricanne Hadrian Initiative for Community Organizing, or RHICO, which was then in its ninth year. The regranting programs of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey and the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development in New York City were seven and two years old, respectively.⁴

Each established its regranting program to strengthen their members' roots in their communities and expand their capacity to tackle the housing and community issues residents care about most, including broad policy campaigns as well as purely local concerns. The Massachusetts and New Jersey coalitions were stimulated in part by an article in *Shelterforce* in 1993 by Bill Traynor, an experienced community organizer and developer. Traynor argued that CDCs must get serious about organizing their communities, becoming more responsive and accountable to them and mobilizing them to exert sufficient collective power to influence policy and increase resources for affordable housing and community economic development.

When ANHD learned about the Massachusetts and New Jersey programs, it saw an opportunity to generate new funding to rejuvenate community organizing in New York City. Its members – which include community organizing groups as well as CDCs – were concerned about the relative weakness of organizing in the City. They decided to seek foundation and bank support for a new funding collaborative which would support expanded organizing by organizing groups and CDCs. Their plan built on the relationships which

Funding collaboratives can overcome the historic divide between organizing and development by enabling large numbers of groups to combine organizing, development, and advocacy effectively.

funders, the Association and others had developed during the lifetime of a funding collaborative for CDCs, using that as precedent for proposing similar collaboration in funding CO. This exploration led to creation of the Initiative for Neighborhood and Citywide Organizing, or INCO.

Despite their shared goals and the significant influence of RHICO on HCDN and of both state programs on INCO, the three coalitions' staffs had never met to debrief upon their experience and share the lessons they were learning. That discussion was recorded and transcribed so that their experience could be shared with other interested people.

The Main Lessons from the Collaboratives

During the debriefing session on experience with the three CO funding collaboratives, there was broad consensus on many points. This consensus provides important information for other funders and coalitions wanting to learn from this experience.

Before reviewing their main points of agreement, it is important to note that this was not a public discussion or "show and tell". It was instead a serious sharing among trusted peers and friends, with everyone trying to help their counterparts learn from their experience and avoid their mistakes. The groups were candid with each other about the problems and frustrations they had encountered and the mistakes they had made. This added greatly to value of the discussion about the implications of their rich histories for future collaboratives supporting organizing and advocacy.⁵

The Value of Funding Collaboratives for Community Organizing

During the discussion, the coalitions talked about five different benefits which result from creating funding collaboratives to expand community organizing and advocacy by a coalition's member groups –

1. It can strengthen individual member groups, enabling them to deepen their roots and constituency in their communities and

to increase their responsiveness, accountability, resources, and local impact

2. It can change the culture of the CDC world, overcoming the historic divide between organizing and development by enabling large numbers of groups to combine organizing, development, and advocacy effectively
3. It can have a major impact on policy at the local or state level, and potentially at the federal level, thereby increasing CDCs' access to financial resources, helpful policies, and cooperation from major institutions
4. It can strengthen the coalitions themselves, by creating stronger working relationships among their member groups and developing their sophistication on policy issues
5. It can attract additional philanthropic support for community organizing and core budgets, and it can educate funders on community organizing and advocacy and influence their long-run giving programs

As the three coalitions reviewed their experience with regranting, the dialogue surfaced examples of success on each of these fronts.

1. First, the three programs provide several dozen examples of how, by providing grants of \$25,000 to \$50,000 to enable groups to hire organizers, funder collaboratives have strengthened individual organizations. This

CDCs increasingly assume that they should be combining development and organizing rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive.

is particularly helpful given the scarcity of flexible funding which enable groups to hire organizers, reaching out to community residents, interviewing them one on one interviews to identify neighborhood concerns and potential leaders, bringing them together to share their concerns, and conduct carefully planned campaigns to win victories on those issues through collective action. In Massachusetts, more than a dozen CDCs have transformed themselves into being far more rooted in community constituencies, responsive to their needs, and able to mobilize them to take collective action on issues they care about. In New Jersey, there has been similar transformation in eight CDCs.

After less than two years ANHD could see this level of change already happening in fifteen of the seventeen groups which are funded.

“Neighborhood based institutions build a whole network of relationships through services... You have hundreds of people coming through your doors, sitting down with your staff, developing a relationship of trust with the organizations....And what happens is that the neighborhood based groups then let it go. They build those relationships and they do nothing with them. And so all of our TA is really about how do you take what you do, how do you take that base ... and set out specific campaigns and goals that are really organized out of that?” - ANHD

2. Second, in all three cases, the regranting program has had a broader impact on the world of CDCs. As a result of the funded groups’ success, CDCs increasingly assume that they should be combining development and organizing rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive. In Massachusetts, the regranting program has led to “a sea change”: organizing is no longer seen as controversial; instead it is taken for granted as a central strategy. MACDC reports that the many CDCs now treat their organizers better, providing comparable salaries and

status and including them on management teams for the first time.

In New Jersey, HCDN also sees a change in the culture of CDCs on issues of organizing and policy work. The result is that the Network’s members are far more active in shaping and advancing the policy agenda than previously.

In New York City, ANHD’s goal is to rebuild community organizing in the city and tie it to policy advocacy. They and their funders have been concerned about the relative weakness of organizing and the “voice” of poor people in policy arenas. They see INCO as a major initiative in reversing that situation.

“It’s really working to create a culture in the movement that pushes every group to move three or four rungs higher, to mobilize more of the groups in local campaigns, local infrastructure, and then citywide.”

3. Third, these experiences demonstrate that organizing greatly reinforces the groups’ ability to win policy changes. The two statewide coalitions have won many victories over the years, and they cite many examples of occasions in which the enhanced organizing and mobilization capacity of their members made the difference. “Good organizing wins respect.”

In pioneering this approach to increasing community organizing, MACDC chose to focus on local campaigns, local organizational issues and local organizing rather than statewide advocacy campaigns. Its goal was to build up from the local level, changing the culture of CDCs while building power to influence statewide policy eventually. It found this challenging at times but its influence and impact at the state level and with major institutions have grown substantially nevertheless.

In New Jersey, statewide victories on abandoned property legislation, a new Neighborhood Revitalization tax credit, and

Working on common campaigns, being involved in peer learning and support on organizing issues, and getting TA from a common source has reinforced the ties between member groups and their coalitions.

a host of other important issues depended in large part upon the groups which the funding collaborative's grants strengthened.

Perhaps the quickest results occurred in the first 18 months after INCO began funding New York City groups. ANHD won three major policy victories during this period, victories they could not win previously. They were victorious recently because of the new power which expanded organizing brought to ANHD's member groups and their joint policy campaigns.

It appears that INCO's progress on policy issues was greatly enhanced by the fact that – unlike the other two programs – ANHD convinced funders to require that their INCO grantees work with ANHD on citywide campaigns. This obligation was upfront and fully transparent. That fact, and ANHD's full involvement of grantees in shaping and carrying out the campaigns, led to successes on all three fronts. All but two of the 17 grantees took part in at least one campaign.

It is also quite possible that it is easier to link neighborhood organizing with city policy than it is to state policy. MACDC's Executive Director pointed out that the training, technical assistance, policy support and funding which is needed to link local and state issues is different than is required for citywide issues.

In any case, according to the chair of New York City's Neighborhood Opportunities Fund – the funding collaborative – his bank and others are very happy about the policy impact of their grants. They are pleased with INCO's impact, contrasting it favorably with results from the other more conventional side of the Fund's support for CDCs and intermediaries.⁶

4. Fourth, working on common campaigns, being involved in peer learning and support on organizing issues, and getting TA from a common source has reinforced the ties

between member groups and their coalitions. It has strengthened relationships among key coalition members, enlivened the group as a "network of learning", and generated a strong collective spirit which goes beyond immediate policy campaigns.

"It's not just the funding and the TA, but it's really this network, this learning that happens together. We really focus on that peer learning, building that network of power, and having people share." - MACDC

5. Fifth, funder collaboratives attract additional philanthropic support. This has been true for the collaboratives which LISC, Enterprise and others have created to support CDCs, and for consortia supporting the arts, child care, and other areas of giving. It is now proving to be equally valid for these newer CO collaboratives. In Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York City, new funders have joined with long-time supporters of organizing. For funders new to an area of giving, a collaborative provides the reassurance of being linked with experienced peers from whom they can learn how to find and select grantees, what issues they will face in supporting organizing, and how best to evaluate their progress.

Over the longer run, this experience frequently has a spill-over effect, convincing donors to support organizing strategies in other issue areas. It gives them direct experience in seeing the impact which collective action can have on community issues or public policies. It also familiarizes them with the way in which organizing can build nonprofit capacity by educating and developing an organization's leadership and building their power to influence major public and private institutions.

When Wachovia Bank recently reengineered its \$100 million Regional Foundation serving New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, it applied the knowledge it had gained from participating in the New Jersey

Funder collaboratives attract additional philanthropic support.

collaborative as it developed guidelines for its giving program. It created major grant programs to support “community planning” as well as “community development”, and it included community organizing among the activities it funds. HCDN sees this as an example of how its regranting program has brought about institutional change and reduced the need for the Network to sustain its own giving program indefinitely.

Unfortunately, funding collaboratives can also have a perverse and negative impact. Despite their remarkable successes, both the MACDC and HCDN programs have drawn decreasing grant support over time, raising real questions about whether private funders are willing and able to support funding collaboratives over time. And there is a real danger that funders that once gave directly to grassroots organizing may give to a funding collaborative instead, and then cease supporting organizing once the collaborative runs its course. ANHD is developing a concerted effort to ensure that the New York funding collaborative continues to attract substantial support despite the fact that one of its lead funders (Rockefeller) went through a change in leadership and priorities and will not continue funding INCO despite its staff’s enthusiasm about the program and its impact.

Other Lessons from the Regranting Programs

The Boston meeting focused on three programs which are at different stages of development. The two older programs – Massachusetts and New Jersey – have gone through several phases, gradually shrinking because of the shortage of new funding sources to replace those whose priorities have shifted or which never provide continuing support. MACDC, for example, had sufficient funds to support 13 groups in its first year, then dropped to ten groups, and has recently been forced to reduce its grant size. New Jersey began with 8 groups, increased to 10, then went to 5, and currently has only 3 grantees.

Both state coalitions greatly value the importance of the regranting programs. They find them invaluable as sources of support for organizing, especially for groups which lack access to local funding. New Jersey has considered pursuing issue-focused grant pools which make funding available for organizing and advocacy on such priority issues as displacement and eminent domain but has reconsidered for the time being. It instead is shifting resources to build more powerful networks of its members county by county for advocacy purposes. In doing this HCDN is drawing on both the leaders and the lessons learned during its six years of experience with regranting. HCDN organizing staff continue to work with both individual CDCs and county-wide committees of CDCs to help them mobilize their constituencies to promote better policies at the state and local levels.

Even if their regranting programs continue to shrink or even end, both coalitions are convinced their impact will continue into the future. MACDC points to the dramatic way in which the “culture” of community development has changed, largely silencing the old battles of development vs. organizing, with most CDCs now assuming that organizing should be integral to their work. A key point is that RHICO provided enough funding to motivate CDCs to use other flexible sources of money to support organizing, including United Way allocations, developer fees, and housing related grants.

Similarly, HCDN in New Jersey points to Wachovia’s adoption of new priorities including organizing is a sign of longer range impact. This institutional change is especially important as the Network’s goal in creating the regranting pool was to operate it on a demonstration basis while trying to transform funders’ attitudes so they would provide direct funding for organizing in the future.

ANHD is acting early to begin seeking ways to expand support for community organizing rather than face the shrinkage which has occurred in Massachusetts and New Jersey. With its ambitious goal of reviving community organizing in New York City on other poverty issues as well as housing, the Association has

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already begun serious planning for new steps it can take to expand or replicate its regrating program. It therefore is exploring –

- Expansion of support for INCO from current institutional funders
- Recruitment of additional INCO donors by current funders
- Identification of other sources of private philanthropic support
- Development of streams of public funds for housing organizing

- Development of an individual major donor program
- Strategies for helping other coalitions and alliances in New York City learn from the INCO experience so they can replicate it on their issues
- Creation of training programs for new organizers and of opportunities for peer learning and advanced training and education for midcareer organizers and directors.

Program Operations

Grant Decision-Making

The question of who makes grant decisions is a delicate one for coalitions. How can they avoid alienating many of their own members if they are directly responsible for deciding which shall receive grant funds? If this responsibility is lodged elsewhere, how can they ensure that the grants reflect the coalitions' priorities and political considerations?

The three programs use quite similar strategies for addressing these questions. In all three the grant funds are pooled, and grant decisions are made by a committee which is not directly controlled by the coalition.

In the New York City case, grant decisions are made by a committee of the parent funding collaborative (the Neighborhood Opportunities Fund). This committee is composed of funders, ANHD members and others. Association staff trained the funders on how to fund organizing, worked with them in establishing criteria for awarding grants, conducted joint site visits to potential grantees, and gave some feedback on proposals but steered clear of having final say on the grants.

In Massachusetts, the fund is administered by LISC, with decisions actually made by a committee of ten people, six funders and four

people chosen by MACDC. The Coalition's choices include organizers who do not work for CDCs as well as other MACDC allies.

HCDN has an in-house advisory committee composed of funders and community development practitioners the Network chooses. Coalition staff established the criteria and point system which are used to evaluate proposals, and make final recommendations on the grants.

Training and Technical Assistance

All three coalitions stress that groups need training and technical assistance as well as funding as they expand their organizing and policy work.

Each emphasizes peer learning as a central strategy for helping groups expand their organizing. They find that organizations going through this major transition benefit enormously from meeting regularly with others facing similar challenges. This enables them to compare experience and lessons, brainstorm about how to handle particular problems, and elicit their peers' views on the issues they face.

In addition each provides a measure of on-site assistance geared to a local group's particular needs. In fact, the Housing and

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Community Development Network provided training and technical assistance on organizing before they created the grant pool. An experienced organizer on HCD's staff advised groups on how they could expand their organizing and combine it with their development work. He provided on-site assistance as they experienced the challenges of integrating these two very different strategies.

When HCDN saw how hard it was for CDCs to raise money for organizing, they decided to design their own program for increasing funding for organizing by CDCs. As that regranting began and the grantees hired organizers, the Network's staff provided extensive technical assistance to them. This included help integrating organizing into their ongoing planning and operations, developing organizing strategies and campaigns, and managing internal tensions as the organizations went through these significant transitions. HCDN also conducts an annual retreat for organizers, Executive Directors and volunteer leaders which helps strengthen working relationships across sometimes divisive staff/Board lines.

ANHD provides a range of training and technical assistance. Like the other coalitions it has found its members are enthusiastic about having regular opportunities for peer learning (and are less reticent to learn from peers than from any form of "training" as that seems to imply that they are inexperienced). It also has hired a person to provide on-site consultation on integrating organizing into an organization, the nuts and bolts of organizing, and designing and carrying out local campaigns. In addition, INCO's coordinator and ANHD policy staff help the groups link their organizing to the citywide ANHD campaigns.

Organizational Development Help

One challenge which the coalitions face is the great need which many grantees – as well as other member groups – have for intensive organizational development, or OD, help.

Many need far more than organizing advice. They face serious internal issues of leadership transition, rapid growth or shrinkage, the challenges of fiscal management or fundraising, and the like. And they need help tackling these issues.

The coalitions find these challenges to be at least as critical among organizing groups as among CDCs, but they lack sufficient funding to support robust programs of organizational development assistance. Furthermore, they see a shortage of OD practitioners who understand community organizing and advocacy campaigns. There are even fewer who have a strong understanding of communities of color, even in such centers of talent as New York City and Boston.

MACDC, for example, found that it must supplement its training and peer support with organizational development TA. It has used different consultants to fill this gap. New Jersey's Associate Director pitched in to help staff provide OD help, but this overloaded already very busy staff. ANHD's TA is supposed to be limited to help on organizing issues, including the integration of organizing into the parent organization. However, the staff finds that many groups need extensive organizational development help, well beyond their organization's current capacity to provide such assistance.

An additional complication is the difficulty of combining organizational development and funding roles. To obtain substantial help on its most serious internal issues, a group must be able to trust an outside coach or consultant fully and be willing to discuss its weaknesses candidly. It must share its most intimate secrets in full confidence that the outsider will use that information only to help them.

How can they have this level of confidence in a technical assistance provider if that person also influences, directly or indirectly,

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whether they will receive funding which is vital to their future? The three coalitions wrestle with this issue all the time.

"We could get in trouble. We are in this odd situation because we're the funders, we had access to their sensitive information." - ANHD

"If you're on their side from the beginning it helps.... We've got to keep this stuff confidential, and there's got to be this firewall.... It's a little artificial." - NJ

Even though the coalitions are somewhat separated from decisions on grants, they are working in partnership with funders who look to them for information about how well particular groups are doing. In response, they attempt to erect internal systems to separate training and technical assistance staff from the grant-making or grant-influencing side.

Despite these challenges, coalitions find great advantages in having the additional clout of having real or perceived influence on who gets funded. "We sort of leverage the fact that we're funders to get ourselves into their internal organizing discussion to help them to think more aggressively."

Keeping Rejected Groups Involved in the Coalitions

MACDC has found great advantages in enlarging the peer learning process to include groups which were not funded. They find this to be helpful in keeping people engaged in the coalition who otherwise might be angry about not being funded. It also proves to be effective in broadening their impact in increasing organizing and advocacy by member groups. Finally, they find this approach reminds groups that they share interests beyond the money – an important lesson to keep reinforcing when there is a danger that money will overshadow the main reasons why the groups came together to form the coalition.

To influence the field more broadly, MACDC created *The Journal of Community Power-Building*. Through that publication, the coalition tells the stories of how groups have built power and what this has enabled them to achieve. The Power Journal is part of a larger RHICO effort to document what MACDC and the local groups have done and provide quantitative and qualitative data which helps with evaluation of the program. Furthermore, "It's a way for us to also contribute to the field and kind of take in the lessons from organizers, executive directors, leaders, and have them kind of reflect on their work and use that as something to share and to have a dialogue with the field".

MACDC involves nongrantees as well as grantees in providing the stories and developing the lessons for the "Power Journal" – another way of keeping them involved on an equal footing with the groups receiving grant support.

"It's not just the funding and the TA, but it's really this network, this learning that happens together. We really focus on that peer learning, building that network of power, and having people share.... People really need those connections, and when the don't get funded, they're less likely to want to come to your events and really share their lessons learned or their challenges, and then we all lose because they have a lot to offer."

Requiring Groups to Work Together on Policy

While the two older programs did not require their grantees to work with them on policy issues, they hoped that this would be a by-product of expanded organizing. ANHD modified their approach and made explicit the grantees' commitment to working with the Association on at least one citywide campaign. This emphasis was incorporated in the title of the regranting program – the Initiative for Neighborhood and Citywide Organizing. It also

"This local organizing can be linked to citywide organizing and, to some degree, to our statewide effort, but it really needs a lot of constant nurturing, and it has to be really explicit or else it doesn't happen."

was integral to the proposal guidelines and grant decisions. And it is central to the training and technical assistance which is provided to grantees.

ANHD adopted this approach because their members wanted to multiply their power to influence policy decisions in the city. The funders who eventually supported INCO shared this concern. They too were worried that the voice of poor people and the neighborhoods was not being heard when city officials and others made major policy decisions. While they recognized the Housing First campaign's success in convincing the Mayor to devote more funding to housing generally, they could see little progress on housing for lower income people and their neighborhoods.

ANHD convinced funders that expanding grassroots organizing on housing issues would help rectify this situation. This process was greatly helped when foundations and banks which shared ANHD's concern about the need for expanded organizing and advocacy stepped forward and became the lead funders for INCO.

The Association stressed the *quid pro quo* of collaborating on citywide policy campaigns from the beginning. They feel that their transparency on this issue has been important as it has given everyone a clear understanding of expectations and obligations.

Each grantee is free to choose which ANHD citywide campaigns it wants to join. This flexibility enables each group to concentrate on issues which are important to their constituency and neighborhood. Some are far more concerned about reforming the code enforcement program so they can increase their influence on bad buildings and particular landlords, while others are most concerned about increasing funding for community-based development through the new Battery Park City trust fund, or influencing the pace of gentrification by adopting inclusionary zoning.

In its third round of funding MACDC added a similar requirement. All those new grantees must collaborate on advocacy campaigns. "We do that in the last round, and I've seen every single one of the funded groups active in MACDC policy work." However, MACDC points to a common problem:

"We continue to have significant challenges linking local organizing campaigns with statewide ones for many reasons. Sometimes local campaigns for a particular CDC do not closely align with the current statewide issues; other times there is simply competing time pressure; other times there is a philosophical divide between statewide policy advocates and local organizers who find state policy work to be too much 'inside baseball' and promoting incremental rather than real meaningful change."

HCDN's experience in New Jersey is similar.

"This local organizing can be linked to citywide organizing and, to some degree, to our statewide effort, but it really needs a lot of constant nurturing, and it has to be really explicit or else it doesn't happen.... We need to be more explicit about the reason the statewide network in New Jersey is promoting this is, yes, to strengthen individual communities. But it's also to see that direct link because that's how we're going to help the communities. I mean it is a circle, the link with the statewide, the clout at the state level."

One constraint on tying funding with an obligation to collaborate on issues is that "When you're giving out the money directly, you've got the leverage on issues. When it's coming from this other party, how are you finessing that?" The bottom line is that no one – not even a trade association or funder – can force a group to do good organizing on an issue if they are not determined to do it themselves."

There has been tension between making grants where capacity is weak and the need is greatest, or channeling the funds to the groups which will have the greatest impact and rates of success.

Tensions in Grant Decisions

All three coalitions have experienced tensions as they have developed criteria and priorities for their grant-making. In particular, there has been tension between making grants where capacity is weak and the need is greatest, or channeling the funds to the groups which will have the greatest impact and rates of success.

“We want to spread the gospel as we want to fund new groups who are just starting out. And there’s other people like, no, of course you’ve got to fund the best groups because best wins.... You can’t penalize them for being good and you’ve got to demonstrate results... And yet then you just keep funding the same old groups.”

This issue often has important geographic or racial consequences.

Focusing on groups with some existing capacity may mean that whole parts of a city or state are left without organizing funds because no local organizations are doing organizing. This situation is further complicated when state and local political considerations are taken into account. There are fewer resources in rural areas and smaller cities, and those are often areas where it is particularly important to have political allies. Should grant funds be concentrated in parts of a state where key legislators live but where there’s little grassroots capacity to advocate for affordable housing?

Focusing on stronger groups may leave the least organized neighborhoods – which are often the poorest and most heavily minority – at a competitive disadvantage. This can leave those neighborhoods without effective representation when citywide or state policy decisions are made, allowing them to fall even farther behind. Some are concerned that low-income African American communities are especially at risk for these reasons as their nonprofits frequently stress the delivery of

essential social services rather than organizing collective power. One director expressed concern that –

“‘good’ organizing is often defined through a white middle class lens, without recognizing that organizing does and should differ in different kinds of communities – Black, Latino, Asian, poor, working class, suburban, etc. There is no one simple model and yet if we say that ‘anything goes’ it weakens accountability.”

There was consensus on the difficulty of building an organizing effort from scratch or helping a group with no experience in organizing to make this transition. It requires a major cultural shift, a whole new way of thinking, as well as a major reallocation of staff time, openness to new leadership, willingness to shift issues to respond to the priorities of increasingly organized and vocal community residents, and other fundamental changes. In the words of one ANHD coalition staff-member,

“You’ve got to have existing capacity. We can’t start with nothing. We fund good groups to get better, whether you’re the most prominent group or a younger group.”

In a related point, an HCD Network staff person said that “a lot of the lessons that we learned ... overlap, the vision and commitment of the executive and the board.... If they weren’t really solidly ready to follow this organizing through, it won’t happen.”

To further complicate matters, it is particularly difficult for a coalition which is controlled by its members to intervene heavily with any of its member groups, surfacing new issue priorities and leadership and thus creating great internal tensions within those organizations. “How can we tell the CDC they’re not eligible?”

Another source of tension – whether to continue supporting groups indefinitely or instead to shift funding to another set of organizations, spreading the wealth but perhaps forcing

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the early grantees to reduce their organizing because of the reduction in their funding. Like the other tensions, there are no easy answers to this dilemma.

Lack of National Funders for Organizing in a Community Development Context

The five coalitions share a deep concern about the fact that national funders give little priority to supporting increased organizing and advocacy by state and local coalitions. This increases the difficulty of raising sufficient funds for these funding collaboratives, especially when relatively small local funders decide they cannot sustain their level of support and should instead shift their funding to other priorities.

National funding has played a critical role in each of these collaboratives. In Massachusetts, 85% of the initial funding was from national sources but that percentage is now down to 50%. LISC's contribution of NCDI funds, for example, has been crucial to RHICO's success and survival. Support from LISC and Enterprise has been important to the Housing and Community Development Network's program as well, but there is no sign of an ongoing commitment by these intermediaries to expanding resources for state or local coalitions.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation also played an important role in Massachusetts and New Jersey, but that funding disappeared as Casey focused its grantmaking on its own initiative "Making Connections". This is part of a broader philanthropic trend which concerns leaders of all five Northeastern coalitions – the shift by an increasing number of foundations to designing and managing their own initiatives. They see this shift in funding patterns as detrimental to the initiatives and priorities which emerge from grassroots groups and the coalitions which partner with them to meet locally defined needs.

Are Other State and Local Coalitions Interested in Expanding Organizing?

MACDC and HCDN have tried to convince their peers in other states to replicate or adapt their initiatives, but had little success. They have found other coalitions within the NCCED network lack either the resources or the will to press their member groups to concentrate on building their constituencies and power to influence government or private sector policies.

However, the discussion made it clear that there are other coalitions – including the Connecticut Housing Coalition – which would be very interested in initiating a similar program if they could identify potential funding sources. In California, Oregon and Washington State, for example, several of the groups which met in Oakland twice and then formed the Pacific Coast Advocacy Network clearly would be very interested in launching regranting programs, as would similar groups in many other parts of the country if the resources were there.⁷

These Initiatives Should Be Seen as Part of a Broader Series of Experiments in Funding Organizing Collaboratively

These three funding collaboratives have had little national visibility or recognition. They are largely unknown despite their success in challenging the conventional wisdom about the incompatibility between community development projects and sometimes controversial organizing and advocacy. Few know of their remarkable effectiveness in helping local grassroots groups influence local, citywide and statewide policies and increase resources for community development.

This isolation also has meant that their efforts are seldom seen as being the possible precursors of a funding approach which others should emulate. Few funders interested in CDCs or organizing have even heard of anyone

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creating a funding collaborative to support organizing as so many support CDCs, or day care centers, or the arts. This severely limits the impact of this approach in other parts of the country.

It is also noteworthy that these efforts have been isolated from several other initiatives to create collaboratives to support increased organizing and advocacy. The Ford Foundation, for example, has provided five matching grants to catalyze the creation of local CO funding collaboratives. These are located in Los Angeles, Denver, Miami, the Southern states, and Chicago, with a local private or community foundation receiving Ford funds and convening local funders to pool resources and support increased community organizing. Similarly, Baltimore's Neighborhood Collaborative – which has been in existence since 1995, funding organizing and development groups in several neighborhoods – is isolated from other CO funding collaboratives.

Most recently, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the City of Hartford, and the local United Way took the initiative in creating another such initiative – the Hartford Collaborative for Community Organizing. Following recommendations from a consultant team, and taking into consideration the experience of the earlier collaboratives supporting organizing, HCCO involves a dozen funders, including local government, and a grant budget of almost \$800,000/year in that relatively small city. Together the funders have adopted a concentrated strategy for strengthening multi-issue, multi-neighborhood organizing in key sectors of the city. HCCO is unusually proactive in having identified the city's North End as an area in which the Collaborative is funding an organizing process which will, they hope, result in creation of a powerful new community organization. Their shared goal is to create a new center of power and voice for the

residents of the poorest, most heavily African American and least-organized parts of town so that they can argue for the resources and policies which their neglected community desperately needs.

In addition to these ten joint efforts there may be other isolated CO funding collaboratives, and there certainly are individual foundations which work together informally to increase their impact in promoting strong organizing and advocacy.

There are thus at least ten funding collaboratives for community organizing nationwide with more than three dozen funders. This is a significant development which, with focused attention and support, could have a massive impact on the state of community organizing in the US today.

The afternoon which the five Northeastern coalitions devoted to debriefing on their experience with funding collaboratives, focusing on the lessons they are learning and the challenges they face, demonstrated the great value of bringing people together who share this set of concerns. Similarly, there is great potential in bringing at least the ten CO funding collaboratives together to learn from each other and to discuss possible strategies for expanding their programs and inspiring the creation of similar programs elsewhere.

It appears that no national organization is currently planning to take this initiative. This provides a great opportunity for the funders of these now disparate efforts to collaborate in taking the initiative, structuring a serious dialogue among funders, statewide coalitions, community organizers and local CDCs on developing a joint strategy for expanding this highly successful strategy for changing policies and rechanneling public and private funds to foster better housing and neighborhood revitalization.

Endnotes

¹This report was prepared by Andrew Mott under a consultancy for the Rockefeller Foundation's Working Communities Program. It has been reviewed and edited with great help from the Executive Directors of the three coalitions whose programs are discussed in the paper – Joe Kriesberg of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Centers, Diane Sterner of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, and Irene Baldwin of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development.

² Andrew Mott, Director of the Community Learning Project and Senior Fellow at the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

³ These networks have grown up around two national coalitions -- the National Low Income Housing Coalition and the National Congress for Community Economic Development – both of which are focused nationally rather than stressing peer learning among state and local coalitions or the linking of those groups on a regional basis. NCCED recently closed down but its former members continue to collaborate with each other.

⁴ The Rockefeller Foundation is one of the lead funders for the New York City program. It is not a donor to the Massachusetts or New Jersey programs.

⁵ In accordance with agreement among the participants, this report does not include quotations from sensitive portions of the dialogue which could injure one of the local groups or coalitions.

⁶ The three policy victories were –

- Battery Park City – creation of a \$135 million housing trust fund. This was a particularly good issue: BPC was seen as an historic injustice because the promises made 20 years ago about creation of affordable housing were broken
- CE – Code enforcement reform based on the deep knowledge of CE which the organizing groups have developed. ANHD decided a new law was needed. Its: policy committee drafted it; kept bringing it up at every meeting, then had large public meeting. Organizers went to city council meetings with delegations, lined up enough council-people to override any veto by the Mayor; Major demonstration of 500, press coverage, got support from Speaker of City Council; then they knew they could get legislation; won whole building inspection and cyclical inspections -- more than they asked for, thanks to new HPD commissioner.
- Inclusionary zoning citywide, including a set-aside for CDCs

⁷The Oakland meetings resulted from an initiative from leaders of two coalitions in California who invited other coalitions on the West Coast to join them for a two day peer learning meeting, focusing on important practical issues which they all shared and which were missing from the agendas of national meetings. They talked about their own work, what they could learn from each other, the unique challenges they faced, and the new approaches they were considering. The meeting was also facilitated by Andrew Mott.

This dialogue among eleven state and local coalitions from Washington State and Oregon as well as California proved so valuable that the groups jumped ahead of the peer learning agenda and began discussing actions they might take together. To the conveners' surprise they also decided on the spot to meet again in three rather than twelve months. Two factors galvanized this decision – the great practical value of the discussion they were having, and their vehement frustration about how national organizations design their advocacy work in Washington in a top down manner, ignoring the needs, priorities, experience, and knowledge of state and local coalitions and missing opportunities to build strong, mutually useful strategic alliances with those “partners”. These coalitions are now meeting regularly with facilitation by Jan Breidenbach, formerly Executive Director of one of the lead member groups.