



# Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities:

## Impacts of Advocacy, Organizing and Civic Engagement in Minnesota

by Gita Gulati-Partee and Lisa Ranghelli



A Snapshot:

**15 organizations** and their allies

**\$16.5 million** in funding for policy engagement efforts

**\$2.28 billion** worth of benefits from their accomplishments

A return on investment at **\$138 for every dollar** spent

**And stories of community-wide benefits for Minnesotans**

# highlights

- Researchers looked at **quantifiable and non-quantifiable community-wide benefits** from advocacy and organizing activities of 15 Minnesota nonprofits during a five-year period, from 2004-2008.
- The groups received **\$16.5 million** from various sources to support the advocacy and organizing efforts. Among their supporters were **foundations, which provided 70 percent (or \$11.5 million)** of the total funding.
- Results showed that Minnesota's citizens and communities benefitted from a **return on that investment of \$138 for every dollar spent**.
- The advocacy and organizing efforts of 15 nonprofits and their allies brought **concrete improvements to the lives of all Minnesotans**. For example:
  - > **Students of color and immigrants** gained access to college.
  - > **Formerly incarcerated people** improved their job opportunities, increasing individual earning potential and economic benefits to their communities.
  - > **People living with mental illnesses and their families** received greater support and access to care thus enabling them to lead more productive and fulfilling lives.
  - > **Workers** secured increased wages and better working conditions.
  - > **Lower-income** residents accessed affordable housing and public transit.



***Nonprofits that work with Minnesota's diverse communities face increasing demands for their services and need more foundation support to continue their efforts to bring lasting solutions to systemic social issues such as civil rights, housing, education, health care and transportation.***

**The 15 Minnesota nonprofit organizations included in the report:**

- > Advocating Change Together (ACT)
- > Alliance for Metropolitan Stability
- > Centro Campesino
- > Churches United in Ministry (CHUM)
- > Council on Crime and Justice
- > Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM)
- > Indigenous Peoples Task Force (IPTF)
- > ISAIAH
- > Minnesota AIDS Project (MAP)
- > Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP)
- > Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MAOAPPP)
- > National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota
- > Range Women's Advocates
- > Somali Action Alliance
- > Three Rivers Community Action

The **Minnesota Council on Foundations** and the **Minnesota Council of Nonprofits** were partners in this project.

## our experts



**Gita Gulati-Partee** (co-author) is founder of OpenSource Leadership Strategies. She's an expert on asset-based methods of inquiry and engagement, organization and network development, and adaptive leadership. Gita has served as consultant to a number of national and state nonprofit organizations, as public policy director at the N.C. Center for Nonprofits and as program officer at The Cleveland Foundation. She holds an MBA and a certificate in public policy from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.



**Lisa Rangelhi** (co-author) is senior research associate at NCRP. She has worked with foundations and social justice nonprofits to document and evaluate social and economic change strategies. Lisa served previously as deputy director of public policy at the Center for Community Change, where she helped grassroots organizations mobilize in response to federal and state policy issues. She holds a master of regional planning degree from Cornell University.



**Aaron Dorfman** is the executive director of NCRP. He previously served for 15 years as a community organizer, including ten years as executive director of People Acting for Community Together in Miami, Fla. Aaron led dozens of successful grassroots campaigns to improve education, transportation, housing and other issues affecting low-income communities. He studied political science and grassroots social movements at Carleton College under the direction of the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Aaron holds an M.A. in philanthropic studies from Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy.

## ***How was the ROI calculated?***

The ROI was calculated with the following formula:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{aggregate dollar amount of all wins}}{\text{aggregate dollars invested in advocacy and organizing}}$$

It illustrates how the collective financial support from foundations and other sources for a set of advocacy and organizing groups in a location over time has contributed to the collective policy impacts of these groups.

## ***How were the 15 sample nonprofits identified?***

NCRP generated a list of local organizations after consultations with nonprofit, foundation and community leaders. Then researchers looked for those organizations that meet the following criteria:

- Existed for at least five years
- Had at least one full-time staff or equivalent whose work is devoted to advocacy or organizing
- Focused on a core constituency of lower-income people, people of color, or other marginalized groups, broadly defined.
- Worked on a local, regional (with-state) or state-wide level
- Had the capacity to provide data for the research

## ***Why did NCRP focus on those organizations that work primarily with marginalized communities?***

This criteria reflect NCRP's mission to promote a philanthropy that better serves the public good, supports nonprofit effectiveness and responds to the needs of those with the least wealth, opportunity and power.

## FAQs *(cont'd)*

### ***Is advocacy the same as lobbying?***

No. Advocacy is the act of promoting a cause, idea or policy to influence people's opinions or actions on matters of public policy concern. Lobbying can be part of an advocacy strategy, but advocacy doesn't necessarily have to involve lobbying.

There are other types of advocacy activities, such as public issue education, nonpartisan voter registration/education/mobilization and grassroots mobilization. Nonprofits can lobby legally, although federal laws determine how much lobbying a nonprofit organization can undertake. Each state has different additional guidelines for nonprofits operating within its jurisdiction.

There are no legal limits to the amount of non-lobbying advocacy activities a nonprofit can undertake.

Additional information is available online at [www.ncrp.org/campaigns-research-policy/communities/gcip/gcip-resources](http://www.ncrp.org/campaigns-research-policy/communities/gcip/gcip-resources). Minnesota-specific resources also are available at the Minnesota Council on Foundations ([www.mcf.org/public-trust/wegsk\\_publicpolicy.htm](http://www.mcf.org/public-trust/wegsk_publicpolicy.htm)) and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits ([www.mncn.org/policy.htm](http://www.mncn.org/policy.htm)).

### ***What specific strategies did the 15 nonprofits used to engage their constituents?***

Researchers found that these nonprofits primarily the following seven strategies:

- Self-advocacy
- Issues assemblies for constituents
- Board representation
- Leadership development
- Communicating personal stories to legislators and regulators
- Nonpartisan voter engagement and candidate forums
- Media advocacy

### ***What foundations currently support advocacy and community organizing in the state?***

The 15 nonprofits identified the following foundations as sources of funding for their policy engagement efforts from 2004-2008:

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota
- Bush Foundation
- Catholic Campaign for Human Development (Washington, D.C.)
- F.R. Bigelow Foundation
- First Universalist Foundation
- Ford Foundation (New York)
- B.C. Gamble and P.W. Skogmo Fund
- Grotto Foundation
- Headwaters Foundation for Justice
- Jay and Rose Phillips Foundation
- Joyce Foundation (Chicago)
- The McKnight Foundation
- Minneapolis Foundation
- Minnesota Women's Foundation
- Ms. Foundation for Women (New York)
- Northland Foundation
- Northern Environmental Support Trust
- Otto Bremer Foundation
- PFund
- Public Welfare Foundation (Washington, D.C.)
- Seward Community Cooperative Foundation
- Soros Foundation (New York)
- St. Paul Foundation
- Travelers Foundation
- Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock (New York)
- United Way (various locations)
- Wells Fargo Foundation

*Unless otherwise noted, these foundations are based in Minnesota.*

## contact us

For more than 30 years, NCRP has served as the only independent watchdog of institutional grantmakers, providing information and analyses on issues regarding philanthropic accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of marginalized communities.

To speak with any of our **experts, representatives from the 15 nonprofits** and **our partners**, or to receive a media copy of the report please contact:

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