

A New Chapter for NCRP

Dear Friends, Supporters,
Members, and Critics of NCRP,

I consider it an honor and a privilege to be writing to you as NCRP's new executive director, only the third in the organization's history. Robert Bothwell and Rick Cohen, NCRP's directors during its first 30 years, helped NCRP become the nation's premier philanthropic watchdog organization—one that advocates for accountability, transparency, and responsiveness so that organized philanthropy will benefit the disadvantaged and those in greatest need. I am grateful for their invaluable contributions to this important organization, and I am excited to build on the solid foundation they left in place.

We are now poised for a new chapter in NCRP's history, and much is at stake. There are nearly \$1 trillion in charitable assets controlled by the nation's major foundations and other philanthropic institutions. These tax-exempt resources are meant to serve a public purpose. If marshaled effectively and responsively, the nation's vast philanthropic assets will reinvigorate and help ensure the ongoing success of our democracy and will address some of this country's glaring and urgent social needs. If marshaled ineffectively or unresponsively, those resources will do little to meet the needs of people and communities and will simply deprive the public of criti-



Aaron Dorfman with his mentor, the late Senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), looking on from a framed photograph. Wellstone inspired Dorfman to pursue grassroots advocacy.

cal tax dollars that could have been used to address pressing issues.

I come to NCRP after spending the past 15 years as a community organizer, leading grassroots efforts in the urban areas of Minneapolis/St. Paul and Miami. I became a community organizer because I fundamentally believe in people. Everybody matters, and everybody has something to contribute to solving the problems of his or her community. Nonprofit organizations, especially grassroots organizations, are vehicles through which many Americans like you and me contribute richly to the social fabric of our democracy.

Like many people who work in the nonprofit sector, I was strongly influenced by family. My family shaped my

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core values and played a large role in my decision to dedicate my life to nonprofit work. From an early age, my family instilled in me a commitment to fairness and justice, motivated by love. My mother, Carrie, is an ordained minister who served for many years as the chaplain at the women's prison in Minnesota. My father, Tom, was a public school teacher who served as president of the local teachers' union for several years. When I was 6 years old, I remember helping make picket signs in our garage because he was preparing to lead the union on a strike for better wages. My father also headed the local chapter of Amnesty International and took regular trips to local Native American Indian reservations to assist with various projects. I was raised with a vision for a better world and with a recognition that we all have to do our part to bring that world into existence. In more recent years, my partnership with my wife, Geneen D. Massey, has strengthened and sustained my work while my faith has become a major source of inspiration for my efforts to bring about a more just society.

I think most people who become notable leaders in the nonprofit sector or who are strong voices for fairness and justice in this country also had mentors who profoundly influenced their lives. For me, that mentor was the late Senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), whose life and works still inspire me today. It was he who, as a professor at Carleton College, educated, inspired, and ultimately challenged me in front of my peers to become a community organizer.

Readers of *Responsive Philanthropy* may also be interested in how I think the work of NCRP fits into the context of the current needs of nonprofits. There is incredible work being done by grassroots nonprofits in thousands of urban and rural communities throughout the United States. In our society, these organizations are the places where people without power and privilege give voice to their hopes and dreams, develop new skills, find assistance when there is

nowhere else to turn, and help shape our democratic discussions. Most of these nonprofit organizations are starving for funding—they don't even come close to having the resources they need to effectively carry out their missions. This is why NCRP is so important.

The work of grassroots nonprofits is consistently underfunded by foundations. While there are a handful of foundations that provide extensive funding to grassroots organizations, my observation is that most funders prefer to make "safer" grants that fund services rather than grants that fund efforts to overcome the reasons those services are needed in the first place. Decision makers at too many of our nation's grantmaking institutions are completely isolated from the day-to-day challenges faced by poor and working class families in this country. For too long, leaders of philanthropic organizations have believed they know best what poor people need, and they have not listened to or have not truly heard the voices emanating from the nonprofits whose constituencies struggle from paycheck to paycheck.

Many foundations claim they want to serve the public good by addressing the issues affecting disadvantaged communities. Yet they often employ grantmaking strategies that undermine the effectiveness of the

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organizations they rely on to achieve their goals. NCRP recently released *A Call to Action: Organizing to Increase the Effectiveness and Impact of Foundation Grantmaking*, a report through which nonprofit leaders are able to share stories—in their own words—about how the lack of core operating support is crippling their effectiveness.



A Call to Action: Organizing to Increase the Effectiveness and Impact of Foundation Grantmaking

by Rick Cohen
March 2007

This report features commentaries from over 120 nonprofits to illustrate the need to transform traditional foundation grantmaking strategies.

DOWNLOAD FOR FREE AT WWW.NCRP.ORG
Hard copies of *A Call to Action* are available to NCRP members for \$5 (\$10 for nonmembers).

To become a member, complete and return the form on page 11, or visit our website, www.ncrp.org.

Having led grassroots organizations, I can attest to the brutal truth told in *A Call To Action*. The most significant organizational accomplishments from my work with People Acting for Community Together in Miami were never funded with a single project grant from a foundation. Those accomplishments were paid for with funding that was cobbled together from the few general support grants we did receive and from dues paid by members. Don't get me wrong; project funding is important. But without stable core operating support, grassroots organizations lack the ability to effectively address many of the most pressing issues facing their communities.

If you haven't seen it already, please take the time to visit the NCRP Web site (www.ncrp.org), where you can download a free copy of *A Call to Action*. The stories make a compelling case for why foundations must increase their general support grantmaking if they hope to unleash the full power of the very nonprofit organizations that help them achieve their philanthropic purpose.

In the coming months, NCRP will also issue several other reports that will address important philanthropic issues. Watch for our work examining the impact of recent bank mega-mergers on charitable giving, for an extensive examination of rural philanthropy, and for a report looking at how conservative foundations are influencing the debate on education issues.

And don't miss the terrific pieces in this edition of *Responsive Philanthropy*. Rachael Swierzewski previews her findings on rural philanthropy; Rick Cohen lays out a policy agenda for the 110th Congress; and NCRP's chairman of the Board, David R. Jones, shares his compelling thoughts regarding the most pressing issues facing nonprofits and foundations.

In the months ahead, as I get settled into this new position, I will be working with NCRP's staff and Board of Directors to create a strategic plan for the organization that will build on its solid history. In this process, a new vision for NCRP will emerge; we will combine that new vision with sharp strategic focus and disciplined action to help us achieve our mission of making organized philanthropy more responsive to the needs of low-income and disadvantaged populations, and more accountable to the public at large. So stay tuned. This is just the opening page of a new chapter in NCRP's history. I can't wait to see what will happen next.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "A. Dorfman", written in a cursive style.

Aaron Dorfman
Executive Director, NCRP