

PICO National Network

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ABOUT

Founded in 1972 by Father John Baumann, PICO National Network began as a regional training institute to help support neighborhood organizations in California. The organization since has implemented a congregation–community model, with guidance from Dr. Jose Carrasco and Scott Reed, in which congregations of all denominations and faiths serve as the institutional base for community organizations. Rather than common issues, the faith-based or broad-based model regards values and relationships as the “glue that holds organizations together.”

PICO’s innovations have led to its large network of community organizations, which now has 53 affiliated federations in 150 cities and 17 states, involving more than one million families and one thousand congregations from 40 different denominations and faiths. The network employs more than 160 professional community organizers.



Demonstrators during the Health Care Affordability Lobby Day and rally on September 15, 2009 at the U.S. Capitol. Photo courtesy of PICO.



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REFORM

While the organization typically works on community-level issues, PICO currently is undertaking a national campaign for health care reform after “thousands and thousands of visits that took place in local communities around the country where people identified concerns that it was affecting the quality of life for them and their families,” according to PICO executive director Scott Reed.

Previous experience with the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), taught the organization how to “aggressively move national policy and contribute to it in a meaningful way,” according to Reed. SCHIP was vetoed twice by President Bush despite its strong support among members of Congress before being signed by President Obama in February 2009.

PICO now is focused on “moving the middle” on health care reform by collaborating with other organizations, having strong clergy engagement and engaging local strategies that will propel the debate into local communities to ensure that health care will become affordable to all working families.

Reed says, “We believe that you can develop organizing efforts that have integrity, do strong local development of leaders, have a powerful presence and work on issues that are local, state and national.”

Meredith Brodbeck, communications assistant of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, prepared this member spotlight.

PROGRESS

The issue of health care has become an “action-reaction rollercoaster” for PICO, and it is doing what it can to be flexible. Its efforts have seen great success thus far. In addition to presenting at President Obama’s health care summit in February, the organization has engaged 300,000 people of faith in a national call with the president and brought together 12,000 people at more than 100 pro-reform events reaching more than 100 members of Congress.

PICO sees many positives in the momentum of the health care debate, particularly the discussions about expanding Medicaid, increasing the number of people that will be insured, and eliminating discriminatory practices by insurance companies. The organization would like affordability to become a larger priority, but is pleased by the issue’s progress and remains confident going forward.

Reed says, “At the end of the day, we’re going to win. We’re going to win in part because of the good work we’re doing, the work that so many others are doing, and we have a president who is committed to doing something on health reform. If successful, it will be a significant piece of legislation that shifts the paradigm that public institutions, like government, play an important role in delivering needed services and protecting the marketplace for working families.”