

Strong Cities Don't Just Happen

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Minnesota is a place where people and businesses tend to give generously to charities, foundations and non-profit organizations. A new report suggests that those doling out grants should pay more attention to advocacy and community organizing as a way of getting more return on the philanthropic dollar.

At the same time a survey of the Twin Cities metro area finds understandable concern about jobs and the economy, and an equally strong attachment to the region's green spaces and higher-education offerings.

The first report comes from a group known as the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a Washington-based organization that bills itself as a watchdog on foundations. Its stated mission is to promote philanthropy that is "responsive to people and communities with the least wealth and opportunity, and is held responsible to the highest standards of integrity and openness," according to the organization's web site.

We met with report authors on Tuesday. Their message, according to Lisa Ranghelli, senior research associate of the organization, is: "Advocacy and organizing are highly effective strategies for making long-term change. And, a good investment."

The group's study looked at how a cross section of Minnesota non-profit groups were devoting time, staff and money to advocacy - defined as seeking to influence public policy or opinion - and community organizing - defined as building relationships "among disenfranchised communities" and organizing them to take action.

... Some donors, for example, may not think that a hiring goal is the best way to help minorities and women. Others may be skeptical of the overall impact of a minimum wage increase. Different private foundations may see their goals in different ways. For our part, we're dubious of too much government and too much law-making - particularly law-making that picks winners

and losers or restricts freedom rather than expands it.

But every organization working toward a goal seeks a direct route. The point of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy is a fair one - that groups should focus their efforts on those who need it most, and should look for the best way to do that.

[Read the full commentary](#) .