

Smarter Grant-Making

Foundations should invest more in advocacy and community organizing work, as Casey has done

By Aaron Dorfman

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What our nation needs more than anything else from its grant-making foundations in 2011 is an evolution in thinking and practice related to funding policy advocacy and grass-roots community organizing.

Research shows that advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement by nonprofit groups make a substantial, measurable difference in the lives of families and communities. Whether in red states or blue states, rural areas or major cities, when foundations invest in such policy engagement efforts, the return on investment is tremendous.

For example, from 2004-2008, 15 organizations in Los Angeles County won more than \$6.8 billion in benefits for underserved communities, including new public school construction, a statewide minimum wage increase and the replacement of dirty diesel trucks, reducing poor health outcomes for residents and associated public health costs. Foundations and other donors contributed \$75.5 million to these efforts, which means their investments generated a return of \$91 for every dollar spent.

"Advocacy" does not mean influencing elections, and it does not usually include lobbying. Instead, most nonprofit advocacy involves policy research and public education that help create a public-opinion climate in which the root causes of social problems get treated — not just their symptoms.

[Read the full commentary](#) .