

Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities

IMPACTS OF ADVOCACY, ORGANIZING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LOS ANGELES

Executive Summary

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When foundations and other institutional grantmakers invest in policy advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement by nonprofit organizations, does it make a difference for local residents?

This report describes, measures and, where possible, monetizes the policy impacts 15 community organizations in Los Angeles County achieved with foundation support. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy analyzed data on the organizing, advocacy and civic engagement these groups undertook during a five year period (2004–2008).

The research found impressive impacts. Collectively, the groups garnered more than \$6.88 billion for marginalized communities and achieved many equally significant nonmonetary benefits.

L.A. County nonprofits and funders seeking long-term change for local communities face many obstacles because of the complex local and state political environments, sheer size of the region, incredibly diverse population and longstanding disparities. The innovative organizing and advocacy strategies that grassroots organizations have developed and impacts they have achieved thus are all the more impressive. In fact, L.A. community groups have pioneered many successful policy models, such as community benefits agreements, which ensure that development projects involving public subsidies benefit affected neighborhoods. They have led the country in organizing youth, engaging voters, building multiethnic organizations and creating broad coalitions that bring together lower-income communities, faith leaders, organized labor and environmental groups.

Using these strategies and others, the groups had significant accomplishments:

> For impacts that could be monetized, the aggregate

benefit over five years was \$6,886,534,758.

- > For every dollar invested in their advocacy, organizing and civic engagement (\$75.5 million total), the groups garnered \$91 in benefits for L.A. communities.
- > Nonmonetary impacts also benefited thousands of underserved Angelenos. Examples include cleaner air, better working conditions, more balanced immigration enforcement, greater student access to college-prep classes and more responsive services for LGBTQ and limited English proficient residents.
- > Foundations and other institutional grantmakers provided critical monetary, capacity building and convening support to these efforts. Funders contributed \$58 million, or 77 percent of all advocacy and organizing funding over five years.

The organizations creatively engaged affected constituencies across the county. This engagement was valuable in its own right, helping marginalized groups find a voice in the democratic process. It also marshaled the people power needed to make change happen. Data from 13 groups demonstrated the depth and breath of engagement: collectively, they trained more than 14,000 leaders, grew their membership by almost 40,000 individuals and turned out close to 55,000 people at public actions.

NCRP found that both the quantity and the quality of civic commitment were distinctive. Designing tailored leadership development programs; organizing across race, ethnicity and language; using participatory research to organize youth; coordinating nonpartisan voter outreach and strategically responding to ballot initiatives were some of the innovative strategies the groups employed.

NCRP also learned that coalitions were central to many of the advocacy and organizing impacts. Building

effective coalitions often is necessary but not easy to do. The groups in the research sample shared what works for them: building from organic and trusting relationships, developing clearly articulated goals and strategies, fostering inclusive leadership and a process for handling disagreement and identifying clear roles for each member of the coalition.

Grantmakers were critical to the success of these organizations, helping them build their capacity over many years to get to the point where they could work on the geographically dispersed local level, as well as statewide and even nationally. A small proportion of local philanthropies supported these groups, as well as many national and state level funders.

The findings suggest that if more local foundations were to support advocacy and organizing, communities could achieve even greater impact. The region continues to face many urgent issues in areas such as immigrant rights, education, health, housing, low-wage work, LGBTQ rights and environmental justice. There is much to be done. NCRP encourages nonprofits and funders to use this report to educate others about the ways philanthropists can leverage their grant dollars for significant community benefit.

For foundations to maximize their impact, NCRP recommends that funders:

- 1. Increase the percentage of grant dollars devoted to advocacy, organizing and civic engagement.** Some funders already recognize the significant return offered by investing in policy advocacy and organizing, and devote a substantial percentage of their grant dollars to this work. If other funders increase the proportion of their grant dollars devoted to these strategies, they will increase the capacity of underserved communities to engage in participatory democracy and contribute to solving the region's pressing problems.
- 2. Engage the board and donors in dialogue about how advocacy and organizing can help achieve long-term goals.** Sharing concrete examples from this report with trustees and/or major donors can help demystify
- 3. Support collaboration that strengthens advocacy and organizing.** Exemplary grantmakers can help build the case for policy change by lending their expertise and resources to collaboration that strengthens the advocacy and organizing work of their nonprofit partners.
- 4. Work together to foster philanthropic cooperation and shared learning.** Los Angeles-based funders will see better results if they communicate with each other and with statewide and national funders to leverage their resources effectively to address the pressing issues facing L.A. County.
- 5. Invest in organizational capacity and a nonprofit advocacy infrastructure for Southern California.** This report features a cross-section of highly sophisticated advocacy and grassroots groups in L.A. County. None of the groups in the sample achieved their current size and scope overnight; it took time, experience and investments in organizational capacity. L.A. County is home to many nascent organizations with great potential, and foundations would be wise to help develop those organizations by investing in their capacity and in a nonprofit advocacy infrastructure for Southern California.
- 6. Provide general operating support and multi-year grants.** As nonprofits balance the immediate basic needs of their constituents with their advocacy and organizing work, their funding partners can be of greatest help by investing in a way that enables them to achieve the highest possible impact.



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