

Making Change

March 2009

How Social Movements Work - and How to Support Them



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Funded by
The California Endowment

Foreword

Social movements are a hidden underpinning of the American story. Using the tools of relationship-building, community mobilization, and symbolic protest, they have helped bring us civil rights, labor protections, and even a healthier environment, sparking people's aspirations, imaginations, and actions for a better nation.

Why then has funding of these movements been difficult to obtain and sustain? Some suggest that funders often want more immediate and measurable outcomes – moving a nation to live up to its promise is important but hard to quantify. And yet in recent years, there has been renewed philanthropic interest and openness to investing in social movements, community organizing and policy change, and an understanding that this will require a new level of patience and a new set of relationships with grantees.

This document seeks to provide a guidepost to both funders and the field by detailing what makes for a successful social movement, what capacities need to be developed, and what funding opportunities might exist.

The document itself comes from a different model of funder-grantee relationships. The paper from which this Executive Summary draws was initially requested by The California Endowment as its leaders were thinking through the connection between place-based comprehensive change and state-level policy in the Golden State. Thinking that the connection between the two might be social movements and community organizing, TCE commissioned us, the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE), to do a series of interviews with leading organizers – and asked us to write something that would make sense to these activists as well as foundation leaders.

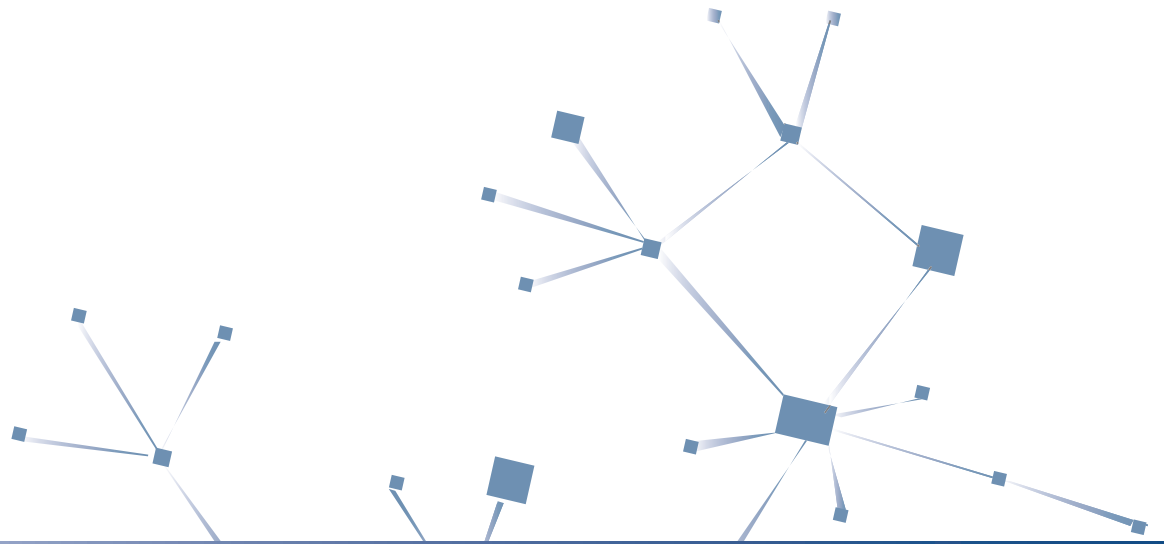
It was the sort of audience guaranteed to provoke humility – what could we say that they didn't already know? – but we presented the first draft to both program officers and community activists, both groups felt that the lessons we drew might be useful to erstwhile social movement builders and to other foundations around the country. As a result, we reworked the document away from the specific needs and strategies of The Endowment and towards a more general audience.

That said, the paper and this summary carry the legacy of their origins. For one thing, most of the examples we use are from California. Having both grown up in Los Angeles, we have the typical West Coast belief that being near the Pacific Ocean also means you're on the cutting edge – but we do realize the limits of translation and invite others to add their own examples. Another legacy of the origin may be more positively viewed by Californians and non-Californians alike: because we intended to offer a practical guide, we offer only short attention to the burgeoning academic literature and have attempted to structure the summary and utilize language in ways that maximize accessibility, utility and (we hope) readability.

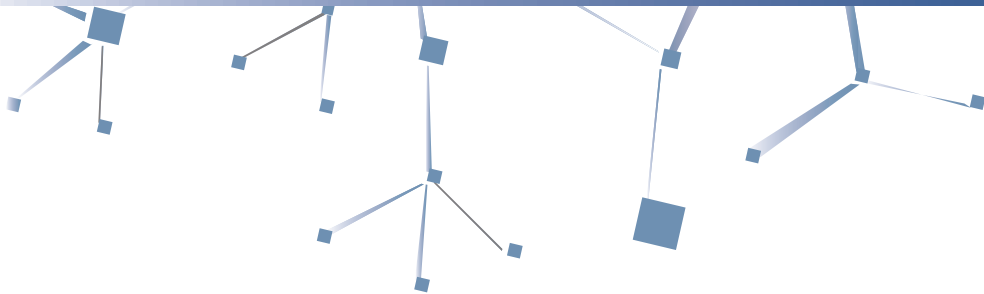
We thank The California Endowment for giving us the opportunity to do this work and we thank the various activists who read and commented on this work. Most important, we thank them for the work they do daily to help this country and its people realize their potential.

-- Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz
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For the full report, go to: <http://college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html>



The Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) is a new research unit and part of the Center for Sustainable Cities at USC. PERE conducts research and facilitates discussions on issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion and immigrant integration. PERE's work is rooted in the new three R's: rigor, relevance and reach. We conduct high-quality research in our focus areas that is relevant to public policy concerns and that reaches to those directly affected communities that most need to be engaged in the discussion. In general, we seek and support direct collaborations with community-based organizations in research and other activities, trying to forge a new model of how university and community can work together for the common good.



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Photos by Dwayne Marsh

Introduction

“Martin Luther King famously proclaimed ‘I have a dream,’ not ‘I have an issue.’”

-- Van Jones, Ella Baker Center and Green for All, Pegasus Conference, 2007

Social movements are near synonymous with images of protest, the likes of Cesar Chavez giving speeches to thousands or Rosa Parks sitting conspicuously in the front of the bus. There is therefore a tendency to think of social movements in terms of the numbers of their constituents, the size of their demonstrations, and the power of their values. But while public action is a strong and essential component of social change, such a view misses the underlying dynamics of such movements. The Montgomery bus boycott did not simply result from Rosa Parks becoming tired one day of her position in the back of the bus but also from careful and patient preparation by the organizers of the civil rights movement.

What is a social movement? The term is often used as loosely as is its counterpart “community” – for example, the “developer community” – and sometimes is used as shorthand for a set of policy preferences (such as a “movement” for reforming the inheritance tax). Social movements are, we would submit, more than particularistic interests or episodic coalitions around issues: they are sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and that build for a long-term transformation in systems of power – and occasionally produce protests, marches, and demonstrations along the way.

Most of all, social movements attempt to shift the nation’s fundamental frame of reference. The civil rights movement, for example, targeted unequal public accommodations but its fundamental premise involved the democratic promise of America and its fundamental goal was the erosion of the exclusive white power embodied in Jim Crow. The women’s movement worried about equal pay but it was focused more broadly on the full realization of personhood and the toppling of male privilege. And the environmental movement promised cleaner air but it was more deeply about a new relationship with the earth and a restored role for humans as caretakers of the planet.

Social movement organizations combine an authentic base (for example, in neighborhoods, congregations, or the workplace) with a compelling strategy for leveraging local and regional action in the service of systemic change. Such organizations are not generally the service delivery groups that have been the bulwark of most foundation investments nor are they the single-issue intermediaries that have frequently picked-up the banner of policy change. They are, rather, groups that see themselves as part of a broader fabric, groups that are conscious about building and growing power. As such, they are different than the sorts of organizations that have been the traditional province of philanthropic giving.

In our view, social movements have long been the glue of what’s best about modern American history – to wit, the advances in opportunity and human rights wrought by the civil rights, labor, and women’s movements noted above. In recent years, however, the actual experts at such

movement building have resided on the right, with conservative forces combining pro-lifers, tax-cutters, and defense-spenders, cultivating a strong base in evangelical churches and traditional communities, framing an issues agenda around values of family, faith, and liberty, and developing a supportive set of institutions that could facilitate a long march from local school boards to state legislatures to national influence.

Like others, we have been fascinated by the way in which conservative forces were able to build authentic bases, strong institutions, and agenda-setting power. In what follows, we try to

draw lessons for movement building that would be equally applicable to conservative and progressive agendas; we favor the latter but we think the discipline of thinking about what works, not what one wants, is useful. We start with a brief review of the literature on social movements, and then turn to a series of lists: ten elements of movement building, six capacities social movement organizations need to succeed, and three directions for funders interested in social movements. We close with a brief discussion of why investing in social movements may be particularly important in the current epoch.

Movement Theory, Movement Practice

Academics have long written about social movements – and the resulting production of articles and books has not always been either readable or useful. But the striking thing in contemporary America is the degree to which organizers themselves are leaning on theory, integrating it with practice, and producing their own frameworks for research, action, and change.

This point was drilled into us when we had the privilege to sit in at the founding meeting of the Right to the City Network, a new national group consisting of organizations that have been struggling to limit gentrification in their local urban areas. One might assume that the meeting, held in Los Angeles in December 2006, would have focused on debating the best strategies to organize constituents and force cities to pass protections against tenant eviction. The talk, however, was all about whether or not the various city-based groups attending should collectively

agree on a new “frame” revolving around “the right to the city” – a theory first promulgated by French intellectual Henri Lefebvre – and how they might use this “frame” to build a national movement.

It sounded like a graduate seminar – but with real consequences– and yet it was launched by grassroots organizers. And given this, we think it appropriate to give at least brief attention to the existing literature on social movements.

Social movement theories – analytical frameworks that attempt to connect people, organizations, and social change into one unified understanding – generally fall into six categories. In short, they are as follows:

- *Deprivation theory*: Social protest movements occur when rising economic and social expectations are not met with tangible material results.

- *Economic theory:* Social movements are catalyzed by economic crises and hardships that signal a conflict that cannot be resolved within the existing set of social relationships.
- *Resource mobilization theory:* Social movements are not acts of deviance or even necessarily defiance, but rather are deliberate, patterned frameworks of collective action directly related to the flow of social resources (including funder dollars).
- *Political process and opportunity theory:* Social movements occur when shifts in political power and structure change the costs of challenging authorities and create openings for social protest to have effect.
- *New social movement theory:* Social movements are based on culture and identity, in addition to economic issues, and the correspondent organizations may focus on community self help, empowerment, and independence rather than on attaining and wielding government power.
- *Framing theory:* Social movements provide ways for individuals to make sense of their experience, particularly the interpretation

and expression of grievances, and one key activity is the creation of a new shared identity through story-telling, collective action, and camaraderie.

These are not necessarily contradictory theories but some do make more space for action and practice than others. The deprivation and economic theories, for example, would seem to privilege class-based action – and would not do well explaining the emergence of, say, a gay and lesbian rights movement or a powerful coalition of evangelical Christians. Resource mobilization and political opportunity seem to explain the timing of social movements – civil rights pops up as the South’s economy is stuck in a deep crisis – but it offers less guidance as to the driving source of change.

The new social movement and framing approaches are generally more open analytically – and they more clearly fit with the organizing models, community focus, and narrative strategies of many of the organizations currently intersecting with foundations. What they need, however, is a bit more detail, particularly with regard to geographic scale and the relationship to policy change.

Scaling Up

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the scale or geography of social movements. This is partly because while movements traditionally began in the workplace, they now also evolve from grassroots community (and even internet) organizing – and so the spatial frame of reference has changed. But it is more

than a community-workplace dichotomy: while the nation-state was once the focal point for organizing, a variety of factors have combined to make local, regional, and state platforms more important.



One basic role for geography is simply the constitution of community and community interests. Place-based references help with framing common interest in new ways. The city of West Hollywood came about because of a struggle to maintain rent control, a goal that linked younger gays with elderly residents, both worried about displacement – and West Hollywood has since become an important “safe space” for gay and lesbian individuals. Organizers in New Jersey affiliated with the interfaith Gamaliel network have crafted a set of regional identities that have allowed them to link city and suburb in a fight to spread affordable housing in more equitable ways. The geographic aspect of community, in short, can allow people to cross traditional interest lines in ways that reflect the broader ambitions and transformational goals of social movements.

Of course, the choice of which geography is not purely opportunistic nor is it accidental. The last decade or so has seen the rise of regions as economic and political units, with some analysts

noting that, at a regional level, businesses may actually be “sticky” rather than “footloose” because of regionally-based workers, markets, expertise, and business relationships. Thus, we saw a wave of local living wage laws and regional labor organizing prior to any such wage hikes on the national front – change has been coming from the region “up” rather than the nation “down,” and smart organizers have taken advantage of this new causal route.

Some of the most influential movements in recent years – the labor-community alliances associated with the Partnerships for Working Families, the interfaith organizers of the Gamaliel Foundation or PICO, the community-based groupings seeking to reduce the prevalence of asthma or ameliorate the disparities in environmental exposures, the activist organizations seeking to shift transportation dollars and resources to better serve the poor – have often had an explicit focus on organizing at a regional scale and networking those regions for change.

Do we stress geography too much? We think not. Those who were watching at the local and regional level would have noticed how the conservative movement worked city by city, school board by school board, church by church, to achieve the sort of refashioning of the American consensus that redefined politics in the 1980s and 1990s. And those who are surprised today at the emergence of an Obama victory and the striking shift in the tone of the country were not paying attention in 2004 when the Democratic national candidate lost, but minimum wage hikes were passed in some of the most conservative states in the country. To hear the rumble of the train coming, one needs to get a bit closer to the ground.

Keeping It Real

Movements may focus on a broad vision but in this often hard-nosed and highly pragmatic country, both social movement theory and social movement practice must answer a critical American question: What have you done for me lately?

The civil rights movement had a compelling moral narrative – but it also had a Voting Rights Act. The labor movement had a vision of economic justice – but it also had a Wagner Act. The immigrant movement has an emotionally appealing logic – but it is aimed at creating a designated path to legalization. Social movements, in short, must produce practical policy ideas and wins, changing material circumstances in ways that indicate that the movement is gaining momentum and can secure its broader and more lofty aims.

At the same time, social movements are not defined by specific issues or policy victories. Says Gihan Perrera, Executive Director of the Miami Workers Center, “The difference between a movement and a coalition is that when an issue changes, a movement doesn’t have an identity crisis – its ‘frame’ holds a story and has an explicative value even as times evolve.” Thus, social movements need the dexterity to connect the issues of the day with a viable policy platform while not having themselves defined simply by a series of policy planks.

Social movements also require a different sense of timing. Rev. Alexia Salvatierra of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice California says that, “. . . with immigrant organizing we are 10 years away from a humane policy, that’s what it is like to work federally. It is 3 to 5 years on the state level.

There are fewer people to go through. To pass a good ordinance in L.A. can be done in 6 months.” And even the 6 month strategy must be done with an eye to the 10 year goal: in the recent presidential elections, for example, the Obama campaign eschewed the usual approach of “helicoptering” in a campaign staff and instead built up offices and began to organize a base that they would be able to come back to. You need to not just keep your eyes on the prize but also to maintain an eye on the road to success.

To grow a base and manage a strategy over a long time horizon, social movement organizations need to be complex in functions and rich in skills. Many of the victories that are now celebrated as landmarks in recent progressive politics – especially community benefits agreements, living wage ordinances, and other economic changes – were won by relatively large and sophisticated organizations that often have internal capacities for research, framing, communication, and policy development, as well as organizing and mobilization. The conservative movement as well has not shied away from growing full-service and large-scale institutions and organizations, all the while keeping a base in community (including faith-oriented) roots.

And this suggests that another part of “keeping it real” is rejecting the tendency of some funders to think that the smaller and more boutique an organization is, the more authentic it must be. Smaller groups do have special insights on particular issues and particular communities but the scale of the challenge is large and the need for “anchor” organizations is great. Moreover, such anchor organizations need to network together



if their various activities are to feed into a broader stream of change, and this too requires a size sufficient to sustain sometimes messy but ultimately productive partnerships.

Funders also need to avoid the temptation to think of themselves as organizers – although many program officers increasingly carry that background. They cannot do the organizing – but they can strengthen those organizations that do. At the same time, an emphasis on the separate roles of foundations and movement builders does not imply a lack of engagement. We would, for example, urge some in the social movement community to stop holding program officers and others at such a distance. They did, after all, just

fund you – and because they fund a lot of others like you, they may have something useful to add to your own conversations and planning.

Of course, foundations cannot force groups to network – but they can provide the convening opportunities to make this possible. They cannot force organizations to accept the role of anchors – but they can recognize in their operational support that such anchors are important. And they cannot force social movements to have programmatic policies – but they can facilitate more productive conversations between think tanks generating disconnected policy thoughts and community-based groups seeking to effect change.

Ten Key Elements for Social Movement Builders

Theoretical guidance is one thing, practical guidance is another. Below we try to distill our review of the literature, our interviews with social movement leaders, and our own experience working with various community organizations over the last few decades to offer what we think are the ten most pertinent elements for building strong and lasting movements.

In deriving this top ten list – our nod to David Letterman in particular, and short attention spans in general – we have sought to meet the following constraints: that the elements be clear and identifiable, that they be equally true of movements from the left and the right, and that they have meaning to those in the field with whom we talked and thus can provide some particular guidance to foundations as they decide on investments.

The ten elements come in three “buckets.” The first bucket includes fundamental elements: strong movements need a clear vision or frame, a solid membership base, and the commitment to be in it for the long-haul. The second bucket involves what we think is necessary to implement and make the movement real: a viable economic model, a clear understanding of governance and what it should look like, research and communication to change the story, and a clear policy package to push the desired change. The third bucket is all about scale: to go from a single problem to a movement on a broader scale, there must be a willingness to grow as an organization or set of organizations, a strategy for scaling up from the region to the state or from the national level downward, and a program for networking amongst various movements to build streams of organizational development that come together into a single river of change.

So what are the elements essential for movement building?

1. A vision and a frame

Social movements are based on visions, frames, and values rather than just policy. The resulting emphasis on ideas and narrative helps to explain the predicament that a group is trying to correct, often in the sort of broad terms that create the space for allies to find their “best selves” by standing in solidarity. A reliance on frames – conversational constructs that help to set the terms of the debate – allows individuals of multiple ideologies to stay in the game. And a sense of urgency, that is, a notion that we need to correct these problems now, helps to create vibrancy for moving forward.

2. An authentic base in key constituencies

Social movements are distinguished by their base of members and adherents. One view of change suggests that “policy entrepreneurs” can write persuasive policy papers, corner interested legislators, and enact reform. While research and lobbying have an important place, the key mark of a social movement is its attention to community, workplace, or congregant organizing, and its focus on generating grassroots leaders. Because of this, one key element of a social movement is its commitment to organizing – the on-the-ground, one-on-one work that is part science, part art, and all important to organizational sustainability. Social movements make sure to directly involve those with “skin in the game” and make sure that the frames and values are

derived from them and not from focus groups conducted by distant intermediaries.

3. A commitment to the long-haul

Social movements have a long-term perspective – they believe that the problems that their members face are due to misalignments in power and they understand that it takes time to right that ship. Such organizations take the time to train leaders and craft relationships, understanding that “you don’t build relationships in the middle of a fight – you have to create deliberate space to understand each others’ interests,” in the words of Working Partnerships founder Amy Dean. This continuity allows them to persist even as issues and times change, for example, protecting community residents against both gentrification and bank foreclosures under the banner of community stability.

4. An underlying and viable economic model

Social movements have an underlying economic model that is viewed as being sensible and viable. This is critical because social movements are essentially about the redistribution of resources; if economic collapse is soon to follow from a group’s policy recommendations, few community members and even fewer decision-makers will be supportive. Conservative forces thus had to explain why reducing the government role would actually expand the overall pie; progressive forces need to stress why living wage laws, community benefits regulations, and expansions in health care will not just share but actually grow (or at least, not shrink)

the wealth. Such arguments cannot simply be assertions – they must be made with research backing and with appropriate modesty and qualifications.

5. A vision of government and governance

Social movements have a vision of what the government ought to do, not simply in terms of issues but in terms of its basic relationship to social forces. Generally, social movements of whatever stripe wave the flag of democracy in terms of governance. Conservative forces argue against state intrusion in the economy but hold that certain moral precepts should be set by majority or democratic rule; progressive forces suggest that democracy requires certain economic and social protections to level the playing field. Progressives have had a tougher time in the governance arena, partly because of widespread (and often justified) mistrust of government bureaucracy; they have had some success with concepts like “community benefits” (in which subsidies to firms are conditioned on performance standards) but there is a long way to go in terms of crafting a positive vision of government.

6. A scaffold of solid research

Social movements always have an intellectual side in which problems are identified and strategies are explored. The conservative movement elevated this aspect of movement building to a new level with a series of think-tanks that provided research, framing, and policy development alongside the organizing and mobilization on the ground. Recent social movement groups in the U.S. have become

even more conscious about the power of using research as a scaffold to support and weave together the personal stories generated by base constituencies; they have dealt with this by both building in-house research capacities and forging effective alliances with academics and intermediaries, to wit, careful studies of Living Wage ordinances or framework studies about environmental injustice.

7. A pragmatic policy package

Developing policy is particularly important because Americans are a practical lot: if something is bad but there is no viable solution, it is often accepted that this is “just the way things are.” To convince the public that the poor may not be with us always (at least in their current situation of poverty), one needs a policy package that looks like it might actually work at alleviating poverty. An old axiom from famed community organizer Saul Alinsky is that people are more motivated when they win. While some progressive forces seem to have preferred the moral high ground of frequent defeat, most new social movement organizations are at the ready with practical programs to rework job training, use public bonds to build parks, and/or remake health care to better serve the poor.

8. A recognition of the need for scale

We noted earlier that there is a tendency to think that small must mean authentic – but the scale of the social problems we face, and the extent of power on the other side, often requires a scale of organizational capacity to match. We do not mean to dismiss small groups, many of which are doing excellent work and are critical

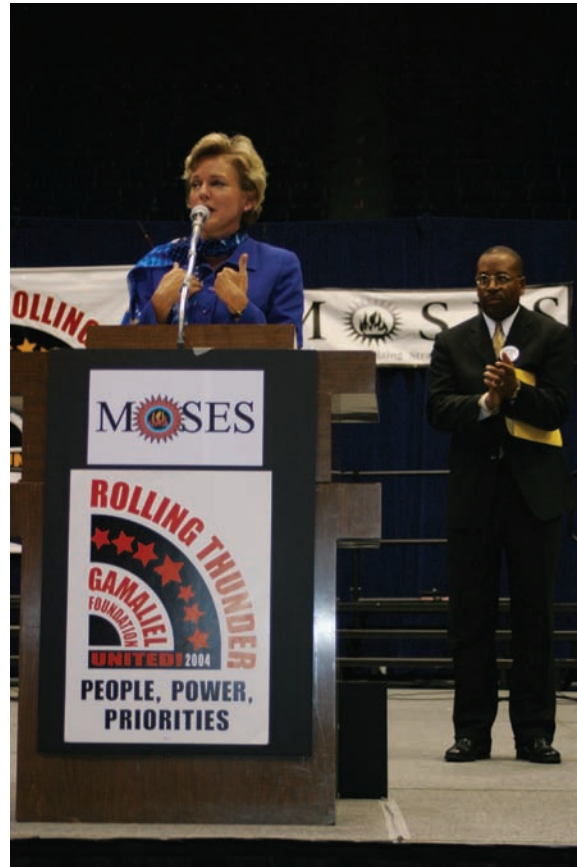


Photo by Otis Massey and MOSES

in the social ecology of change. Rather we agree with the New World Foundation in their emphasis on anchor organizations, those with the scope, sophistication and reach to be able to challenge power and policy. Determining how to select and support large groups that can nonetheless lead with humility is a central challenge for funders.

9. A strategy for scaling up

Social movements are often seen in retrospect as having arrived on the scene fully formed: Martin Luther King appears on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with 200,000 supporters and an eloquent frame, conservatives show up to the 1980s elections with vibrant national support

and a complete ideology. The truth instead involved a geography of power: conservative organizing was built up from local bases, and most social justice organizations are working hard to move from the local to the regional to the state to the national. Such scaling is the stuff of success and is a new arena for research and investment.

10. A willingness to network with other movements

No one wins alone. It is critical that social movements that may be focused on particular issues and particular constituencies are able

to find their way to potential allies in other movements. Too much diversity can be negative – a cacophony of interest groups produces a laundry list of demands rather than a narrative of commonality – but the success of the right was largely due to welcoming a broader range of interests than many realize. Social movement organizations that are too exclusive or too focused on building their own group may fail to build the movement; the goal is to find those who seem to view their own activities as streams flowing into a broader current of social change.

Six Key Capacities for Social Movement Organizations

Of course, presenting ten elements all lined up in a row may make it seem easy; it isn't. Social movements are marked by tensions and tightropes, with organizations trying to strike a balance between scale and base, organizing and advocacy, vision and research. Foundations need to be patient with this balancing act and also accept that the ten elements are not likely to characterize a single organization that they may fund but rather will characterize a movement that they can support.

If there are ten elements that mark successful social movements, what are the capacities that will allow groups and networks to put them in place? In our view, there are six – and they each represent areas in which foundations and organizations can come together with their respective investments of money, time and energy.

The six capacities are:

1. The ability to organize a base constituency

Organizing is tough, taxing, and time-consuming. Not every organization has the capacity to do this but those that do are able to cultivate new leadership and represent members effectively. While organizing is an art, it can be taught, and building this organizational skill and culture is crucial. Base building leads to an informed constituency with the necessary education to push policies and know who to push. Long-term investments in base building allows for organic growth to take place in a community to sustain change and avoid the episodic involvement that fizzles out with either wins *or* losses. Organizing also helps to identify new leaders from within the



Photo by Dwayne Marsh

movement. To improve these capacities implies addressing both infrastructural issues as well as engagement strategies. Therefore, funding is necessary to hire organizers, create strategic short-term and long-term plans, provide training, build tracking systems, and allow for peer guidance opportunities from other organizations.

2. The capacity to research, frame and communicate

Since research capacity, viable economic strategies, and messaging are key to success, organizations must embody this ability. While there is a tendency to think that this can be provided externally, it is important for groups to have their own capacities. It is also important that the “frame” be derived from grassroots leaders rather than transplanted in by messaging experts who depend on focus groups rather than on the groups themselves. Research, it should also be stressed, is not simply about

gathering and presenting data. It is also about analyzing that data to understand the processes causing the conditions people experience in their lives. When done effectively, research can empower a community by offering an explanation of what ails or sustains them, helping to reveal the actors and forces shaping the process of inequality or empowerment.

3. The ability to strategically assess power

Power analysis helps organizations assess who is on the other side, who can be moved, and what it will take to win. Since movements are about transforming systems rather than simply changing policy, the capability to take an honest and realistic pulse of the situation is critical. Likewise, organizations and movements need to become comfortable with taking and exercising power, recognizing that this may come in many different forms. Assessing power is not simply about

determining who has the most resources, or how many people can be mobilized in favor of particular policies or actions. It is a more subtle analysis of the ways that agendas get formulated, decisions get framed, consultation processes are set in place, deals are struck, and resources are allocated. It is thus vital that organizations have the ability to strategically assess the power dynamics of their own movement, their community, their region, and beyond.

4. The capacity to manage large and growing organizations

Since scale is important – both the size of the organization and its plans to go up geographic levels to make broader change – organizations must be able to effectively manage their resources and collaborate with others. While some of this is dispositional (can you really play well with others?), some of it is managerial and investments in improving organizational effectiveness, including training of top leaders, is important. Different sized organizations each fill critical roles in movement work. Smaller organizations often are able to maneuver in ways that larger organizations cannot, and can be more efficient than their counterparts in building a base. Larger, more established organizations, however, can often work in concert with larger efforts, legislations, and policy projects, while providing the resources and infrastructural support to efforts bigger in scope. A mix of different types and sizes of organizations, even at different stages of development, is crucial – and all need management skills.

5. The capability to engage and network with others

Social movements pull together disparate elements under a broad umbrella. The most effective movements are wide-ranging in their

constituencies and organizational types, bringing together not simply like groups with common interests but diverse groups with common destinies. Understanding one's role in the broader ecology, and working effectively to support other strands of the movement, is a key capability. This requires building relationships and engaging in networks beyond an organization's immediate constituencies. Foundations can support movement efforts by offering formal network support to build these relationships and the shared language necessary for working together effectively. This could be in the form of organizational development experts, facilitators, and convenings of multi-sector partners, including some of the usual and not-so-usual suspects.

6. The ability to refresh organizational vision and organizational leadership

Building social movements is difficult and demanding work. Movements need to make their vision clear, their values apparent, and their fire visible – and they need to keep that fire alive over time. Too little thought is given to spiritual and intellectual renewal. Since organizations and movements can stagnate or dissipate, it is crucial to bring leadership back to the well of inspiration. This involves creating time for reflection by leaders as well as a commitment to training a new generation of leadership. Organizations, in particular, need to refresh their tried-and-true organizing techniques to reach a new “millennial” generation that seems to have been motivated by the Obama campaign but whose technology is new and whose allegiance remains up for grabs. A wide variety of programs can help with the task of renewal and with charting a direction in touch with the times; supporting existing and new leadership to garner new skills and refresh their frameworks will build the capacity for groups to stay with it over the long road ahead.

Three Key Directions for Social Movement Funders



Photo by Alanna Avant

How then can foundations help? We think it useful to start with three things they should not do: think that they are the movement, shy from confronting power, and let the urgent dictate the agenda.

Foundations may find movements attractive but they should play the role of supporters not partners, partly because they arrive with so much power and partly to retain an objective stance. If they do choose to pursue the social movement route, they need to be aware that they are backing groups likely to pick a fight – it might be a good fight, it might be the right fight, but it is always likely to involve struggle against entrenched interests. Finally, while there is a tendency for the

most recent new event or policy fad to dominate interest, it is important to be in this for as long a haul as are the movements themselves.

With these admonitions in place, we suggest three basic directions for philanthropic investment, the first of which is crucial to building success, the second to maintaining success, and the third to judging success. In that order, they are:

1. Provide operational and long-term funding

We have provided a list of elements and capacities above – and the trick is that the priorities of each shift over time. While community organizing and communications

are always crucial, organizational and networking needs evolve with each stage. Thus, funders should consider general operating support (particularly for organizing and constituency development), specific investments in leadership training and renewal, and significant resources for research, communications, and advocacy. It is essential to remember that movement building is a long-term process, and requires substantial investment of sustained time and effort, often with outcomes that may not be visible or measurable for some time.

2. Support network building and expansion

The geography of change is important and will be especially so in place-based approaches. Supporting efforts to scale up is important and this will involve both building networks of like organizations and connecting networks of seemingly disparate forces. Thus, funders should consider providing resources for network creation and convenings as well as peer-to-peer learning, should encourage

and structure incentives for groups to work together organically, and should build alliances of funders small and large to pool resources and boost strategies by working together.

3. Develop metrics to judge and publicize movement success

Movement success can be a difficult thing to gauge: the passage of a living wage may benefit few people directly but it can signal a shift in power that eventually translates into widespread improvements in living standards. Metrics that focus on process and that take into account stages of development are important for organizations to learn from their work as well as to both justify one foundation's investment and to encourage others to jump in. Thus, funders should consider including evaluation capacity from the beginning, utilizing evaluation strategies that provide immediate feedback, and basing evaluation on a model that recognizes phases of development.

Conclusion

"Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

-- Martin Luther King, "Where do we go from here?," speech to Tenth Anniversary Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, August 16, 1967

Our nation is at a critical crossroads. With a financial system in crisis, an economy adrift, and

an environment at risk, the American people are looking for a broader frame and a broader solution than traditional politics can offer. To be sure, they acknowledge that new policies are needed, and have elected a new President to do that job. But they also seem to be reaching for just a bit more, for structures to be overhauled, for power to be redistributed, for a new narrative to be created and shared.

We have seen these moments of crisis and reinvention before. The Great Depression brought a shift in the relationship of government to the economy and saw the birth of a vibrant labor movement and the idea of a “New Deal.” The economic abundance of the postwar period triggered demands to be let in on the action, with civil rights and women’s struggles among the results and the “Great Society” among the philosophical hallmarks. The stagflation of the late 1970s set the stage for government to once again step away from the economy, for conservative and evangelical forces to find a new and important voice in public policy, and for a profound change in ideas and ideology that was later labeled the “Reagan Revolution.”

We do not know what the current epoch will bring at a national, state or regional level. But we do know that the country has chosen an unlikely candidate to provide Presidential guidance, one who was trained as a community organizer, one whose campaign brought the techniques of movement building to the electoral arena, and one whose power base will need to stay mobilized should they wish to achieve their aims.

The current possibilities may be exciting but they are not just the luck of the draw. Moments of transformation and mental remapping – think about the collapse of Jim Crow, the shift in attitudes toward HIV/AIDS, the embrace of

climate change as a serious crisis – often seem spontaneous. But they are generally the products of long and intentional processes, including serious investments in the capacities, talents, and networking strategies of social movement builders.

We think such investments in social movements have always been useful – and we have stressed throughout that effective movement building is not the province of one political view or another, one ideological frame or another, one political party or another. Still, it is easy to contend that such investments may be more important now than ever, partly because of the new political and social terrain but also because the ideas, relationships, and policies built in the coming years may, as in earlier periods of crisis, set the groundwork for decades to come.

In this document, we have emphasized the key elements of movement building, the critical capacities movement organizations need, and the funding opportunities the philanthropic community might support. We trust that this analysis will be useful to those active in building social movements and to those looking to support them – and we hope that with it, we can contribute, as do social movement organizations themselves, to the broader river of change that will help us rethink and refashion our American future.

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