

ACORN-CHICAGO ■ ALBANY PARK NEIGHBORHOOD  
COUNCIL ■ BLOCKS TOGETHER ■ BRIGHTON PARK  
NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ■ CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER  
HEALTH CARE ■ COALITION OF AFRICAN, ASIAN, ARAB,  
EUROPEAN AND LATINO IMMIGRANTS OF ILLINOIS ■  
CHICAGO INTERFAITH COMMITTEE ON WORKER ISSUES  
■ DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES PROJECT ■ INTERFAITH  
FEDERATION OF NORTHWEST INDIANA ■ JANE ADDAMS  
SENIOR CAUCUS ■ KENWOOD OAKLAND COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATION ■ LAKE COUNTY CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT  
LIVING ■ LAWNSDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION  
■ ORGANIZATION OF THE NORTHEAST ■ SOUTH AUSTIN  
COALITION COMMUNITY COUNCIL ■ SOUTH SUBURBAN  
ACTION CONFERENCE ■ SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT  
■ TARGET AREA ■ WEST TOWN LEADERSHIP UNITED

# BUILDING CAPACITY

*The Chicago Community Organizing Capacity Building Initiative 2000-2007*

# CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Organizing in Chicago has evolved. The city of big shoulders will forever carry the legacy of Saul Alinsky, but today's organizations are a sophisticated, entrepreneurial and innovative bunch. They understand public policy and political power. They embrace the latest technology, strategically engage media and commission research. They cultivate allies in other sectors. And increasingly, they are led by women and people of color.

Once isolated and insular, organizations now seek each other out, creating powerful and effective coalitions. CCBI is proud to have contributed to this shift, by providing a space where organizers could get to know one another, develop relationships and explore opportunities. In the course of CCBI, the Developing Justice Coalition changed sentencing and treatment options for non-violent drug offenders, impacting the lives of hundreds if not thousands across the state. The Big Box Living Wage campaign mobilized organizations and neighbors across the city to speak out on the need for fair wages for low-paid retail workers. The Balanced Development Coalition expanded city-wide and won mandatory affordable housing set-asides in Chicago.

The goal of CCBI was: "to improve the capacity and effectiveness of community organizing groups to affect public policies and priorities in order to improve communities." We have achieved that goal. But no one person take credit for it. Together, we took a leap of faith. We invested our time and our money in the CCBI model. And it worked.

### LESLIE RAMYK

Director, CCBI

### JASON HEENEY

Chair, CCBI Steering Committee

Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation

## 1 The CCBI model

The Chicago Community Organizing Capacity Building Initiative, designed to increase the effectiveness of community organizing nonprofits, came to a close in 2007. In 2000, local funders responded to a Ford Foundation initiative that invested \$1.5 million in regional funders' collaboratives over three years. The project is now one of five created in Denver, Dade County, a multi-state collaborative in the Southeast, and Los Angeles. In Chicago, our goal was to provide:

- Grant funding to local community organizing groups;
- Technical assistance and capacity building for those groups, and
- Stronger philanthropic support for community-based organizing.

Participants and observers have rated the Initiative as an incredibly effective program, in which a committed group of foundations made a relatively small investment to allow 19 organizations to build their capacity to improve both the quality and quantity of their work. This funding brought the groups together and created a kind of relational "glue" that held them together over the course of two three-year cycles. By doing this, CCBI changed the face of community organizing in Chicago and created new collaborations on issues ranging from ex-offender re-entry to the closing of schools in low-income communities. In the words of one participant, "CCBI has changed the way community organizations work in Chicago."

### OUR DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING:

Community organizing is a process by which people come together in organizations to jointly act in the interests of their communities. Regardless of the methodology or geography, nonprofits engaged in organizing share three common elements: grassroots people—not the government, business, academics, the media or anyone else—set their own priorities; members and constituents develop the skills and know-how to act on these priorities; and through democratic participation community members impact public and private policies and priorities to become more responsive to the needs of the people closest to the problem. In contrast to other necessary strategies (such as direct service, advocacy, research or litigation), community organizing seeks to empower communities or constituencies to speak on their own behalf. At a basic level, whatever the issue, organizing engages people to share their experiences, identify solutions, and work together to create or attain those solutions.

## BACKGROUND

- Eight Chicago-area foundations created the Initiative in 2000 in response to a Ford Foundation request for proposals to create a national intermediary to increase the capacity of grassroots community organizing. The Chicago intermediary selected 12 local organizations through a competitive process, provided annual capacity-building grants for three years and convened the organizations for technical assistance trainings and peer sharing. The first round of grants ran through the end of 2003.
- Based partly on the first round's success, a second round of funding commenced in 2004 with 12 local and national funding partners. Serving as a steering committee, representatives from participating foundations selected 16 organizations through a competitive process, including a number that had been previously funded.
- In the second round, the CCBI steering committee emphasized the desired outcome of increased efficacy in policy impact. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation supported an initiative to demonstrate the importance of community organizing to public policy change, the CCBI Policy Project, in which cohort members were given the responsibility of selecting new or existing projects for funding. Readers are encouraged to refer to the report: *People Power & Policy Impact-A report on the Chicago Community Organizing Capacity Building Initiative's Policy Project* for more details on the outcome of this project.
- This report offers reflections on CCBI for foundation staff and others who may wish to undertake similar funding collaboratives. It offers lessons learned from the foundations and community organizations who participated in the project and recommendations to guide future work.

## 2 What we hoped to accomplish

At the outset both participating organizations and participating philanthropies perceived that capacity-building funds were hard to come by yet essential to strengthen, stabilize, and enhance the impact of community organizing nonprofits. In this regard, we theorized, these agencies would function much like any business: better equipment, stronger skills, and streamlined operations contribute to an improved bottom line, measured here in overall impact rather than profit. To this was added one additional goal: to foster collaboration among a cohort of community organizing groups not particularly known for working together in the past. Specifically, we sought to build organizational capacity in four areas:

- **Strengthen internal operations, administration and management;**
- **Strengthen community organizing skills;**
- **Increase and/or stabilize resources, and**
- **Increase effective collaborations among community organizations.**

To achieve these ends, we shaped four distinct features for the Initiative.

## 3 Distinctive features of the Initiative

### ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY

Our model focused on increasing organizations' productivity and impact. Technology was one key aspect that led to such increases, both in increased ability of staff to get their work done in less time and greater impact of their program work. Many groups used funds to upgrade internal systems through the use of organizational and fundraising consultants, or acquired new or enhanced technology such as photocopiers and computer and telephone systems.

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING VIA CONVENINGS

Participating organizers identified relationships that grew between the groups' staff at monthly convenings as the Initiative's single most significant and lasting benefit. The convenings rotated among cohort members' offices, giving

participants a chance to visit each other's communities. The host organization or CCBI director chaired the meetings. At each two-hour meeting, participants:

- **Shared information on current or upcoming campaigns and events;**
- **Shared insights and questions on key topics, including local political structures, the impact of racism on communities, and leadership development;**
- **Strategized on issues of mutual concern;**
- **Conducted workshops and trainings for and with each other, and**
- **Built relationships and networked.**

By pairing funding with convenings, CCBI essentially bought "relational glue." This glue held the organizations together during difficult periods and sustained their relationships in situations where previously they might have given up. Working together over time the members of the cohort were able to take on issues larger than the capabilities of any one organization or organizing network. This represents a significant change from the way Chicago community organizations have partnered in the past.

One result was an increase in effective coalition work in Chicago during the time period the Initiative operated. Cohort members helped to lead coalitions that included passage of a city ordinance mandating significantly more set-asides of funding or new units of housing for low- and moderate-income families ordinance, and a Living Wage ordinance that defied conventional wisdom by passing through Chicago's City Council in 2006, only to be vetoed by Chicago's mayor – his first veto since taking office in 1989.

Furthermore, in cases where staff from different groups had divergent philosophies or felt competitive with their peers in the cohort, the meetings helped to channel the competition in ways that were constructive, even in one case between two organizations operating in the same community (although this was sometimes a struggle; ultimately one of these two groups dropped out, around the same time that its director left the agency).

Another positive element of the meetings was the ability of groups to share ideas and knowledge. For example, many reported that by pooling their knowledge they gained "a deeper understanding of the political power structure in Chicago" in the words of one

participant. More experienced organizers shared their ideas about strategies to mobilize community residents with their peers.

## THE STEERING COMMITTEE

As a collaboration between local and national foundations, each participating philanthropy gave at least \$5,000 and received a seat on the project's Steering Committee, which provided both fiduciary and programmatic oversight. The Steering Committee met regularly to review the work of the project and approve changes in strategy. Sub-committees oversaw the work of program evaluation, staffing, and fundraising.

Committee members came to the Initiative with varying degrees of experience with and understanding of community organizing. Levels of funder satisfaction with the project were varied, and directly linked to their varied sets of expectations. While a few ultimately felt "not enough was accomplished," most reported they were encouraged by the results. Several felt the effort had helped to change decades-old patterns of behavior and interaction among Chicago community organizations. All expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to build a base of knowledge on the topic of community organizing.

## STAFF DIRECTOR

The staff director served as both grants manager and program manager. She represented the foundations, oversaw grant funds, coordinated meetings, and served as liaison to the Steering Committee. Beyond capacity building, each organization needed services and support outside the scope of funding, which the director was able to provide. These included:

1. Introducing organizations to non-profit management consultants;
2. Connecting cohort members with communications, financial and fundraising trainings;
3. Providing technical assistance on organizational development, and
4. Connecting organizations with additional resources, including funding opportunities, potential allies and data or research information.

CCBI's focus on enhancing productivity, the positive results of the convenings, oversight by the Steering Committee, and the work of the staff director kept the Initiative together and added value to the funding that the organizations received.

## 4 Lessons learned & conclusion

While organizations were disappointed to learn in 2006 that the Initiative would wrap up within a year, they appreciated the advance notice—an example of the kind of good communication fostered by the Initiative. Many of the groups have gone on to engage different relationships with the funders who participated in the Steering Committee. For example, many of the Initiative grantees are participating in new funding collaboratives, such as the Coalition for Public Education Reform.

Based on our experience, we offer the following recommendations for future funders' collaboratives and for the support of community organizing more generally:

1. We heartily recommend that national funders collaborate with local partners. These collaborations create win-win situations where national funders benefit from local expertise and local endeavors secure additional resources. In this case, the Ford Foundation tapped local knowledge to target funding. The local partnership used the process to bring new resources into Chicago in a cost-effective way for everyone.
2. Funding collaborations should buy “relational glue” similar to the glue created within this Initiative through convenings. Providing real reasons and incentives for non-profit organizations to come together over time creates the opportunity for sustained relationship building resulting in improved outcomes. Rather than develop pre-set agendas or

expectation of outcomes, effective convenings rely on participants themselves to develop the agenda and outcomes over time.

3. Perhaps due to the relative lack of similar efforts, benchmarks, goals, and outcomes for capacity-building work can be relatively opaque. With 20-20 hindsight, it would have been desirable to have the Steering Committee devote time at the project's outset to draft a statement that incorporated some potential goals and outcomes both to facilitate evaluation and to help both grantors and grantees understand the expectations and process. Likewise, foundations and grantees could work together more closely to better understand what outcomes they are tracking, how they are measured, and what they contribute to short- and longer-term change.
4. In general, we join in the call for more funding of capacity building, including technology funding, in addition to program grants. For maximum effect and to engender future rounds of such support, funded organizations must document their initial capacity and track the effect of grants and technology investments on their capacity.

For the Steering Committee and the director of the Initiative, the bottom line was firmly in the black: organizations that had not previously worked together and, in many cases, genuinely distrusted each other because of past history came together, shared information and developed partnerships that are reshaping the power balance in low-income communities.

### THE FUNDERS:

FORD FOUNDATION  
MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION  
CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST  
CROSSROADS FUND  
THE FIELD FOUNDATION OF ILLINOIS  
FOUNDATIONS OF EAST CHICAGO  
MAYER & MORRIS KAPLAN FAMILY FOUNDATION  
JOHN D. & CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION  
STEANS FAMILY FOUNDATION  
W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION  
THE WOODS FUND OF CHICAGO

Ford Foundation funding totaled \$1.5 million in the first cycle and \$725,000 in the second. Additional funding for the second cycle from local and national foundations totaled \$875,000. In addition to convenings and technical assistance, groups received approximately \$32,000 annually in the first cycle, approximately \$25,000 in the second.

### THE ORGANIZATIONS:

ACORN-Chicago  
Albany Park Neighborhood Council  
Blocks Together  
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council  
Campaign for Better Health Care  
Coalition of African, Asian, Arab, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois  
Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues  
Developing Communities Project  
Interfaith Federation of Northwest Indiana  
Jane Addams Senior Caucus  
Kenwood Oakland Community Organization  
Lake County Center for Independent Living  
Lawndale Neighborhood Organization  
Organization of the NorthEast  
South Austin Coalition Community Council  
South Suburban Action Conference  
SouthWest Organizing Project  
TARGET Area  
West Town Leadership United

### BUILDING CAPACITY, CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**MEASURING IMPROVEMENT:  
ORGANIZATIONAL SELF  
ASSESSMENTS**

In the second CCBI cycle, we made an attempt to measure improvement. The Steering Committee’s theory of change was expanded to identify specific “capacity elements” that could be described at varying levels of accomplishment, from Level 1 basic to Level 4 advanced. Every organization completed the Assessment at the beginning and end of the 3-year cycle.

The data allowed us to compare results for individual organizations as well for the aggregated group of organizations. Four of the fifteen organizations experienced a net loss of capacity. Two had transitioned to independent nonprofits in the course of CCBI, leaving long-time fiscal agents. All four experienced turbulence at the executive director level: one had an interim director for an extended period, while the others had three different executive directors in fewer than three years.

The chart at right tracks the improvement and regression of organizations in the aggregate. The bar diagrams illustrate the degree to which organizations moved forward or back in each capacity element. This analysis allowed us to see which capacity elements experienced the most growth: **Communications, Community Presence & Standing, Organizers and Grassroots Fundraising**. While disappointing, it was useful to discover that **Reflection, Learning & Analysis and Financial Operations Management** showed decreases in capacity.

We were most surprised to see the results in the final capacity area, **Participation in Collaborations**. In their written reports, the organizations overwhelmingly reported increases in both the number and effectiveness of collaborations and coalitions. Yet the measures tracked on the Assessment saw little to no improvement.

Overall, we found the **Organizational Assessments** to be useful and revealing, if imperfect. The challenge of measuring capacity continues, and we hope that our contribution moves it forward. A copy of the full rubric is available at [www.woodsfund.org](http://www.woodsfund.org).

**I. INTERNAL OPERATIONS, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT**

CAPACITY ELEMENTS	JUMPED 3 LEVELS	JUMPED 2 LEVELS	JUMPED 1 LEVEL	NO CHANGE	FELL 1 LEVEL	FELL 2 LEVELS	FELL 3 LEVELS
Leadership Structure & Accountability							
Technology & Equipment							
Staffing: Stability & Support							
Communications							
Internal Policies & Procedures							

**II. COMMUNITY ORGANIZING SKILLS**

CAPACITY ELEMENTS	JUMPED 3 LEVELS	JUMPED 2 LEVELS	JUMPED 1 LEVEL	NO CHANGE	FELL 1 LEVEL	FELL 2 LEVELS	FELL 3 LEVELS
Theory of Change							
Community Presence & Standing							
Leadership Development							
Organizers							
Issue & Strategy Development							
Reflection, Learning & Analysis							
Mobilization/Turn-out							
External Relationships							

**III. FUNDRAISING & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

CAPACITY ELEMENTS	JUMPED 3 LEVELS	JUMPED 2 LEVELS	JUMPED 1 LEVEL	NO CHANGE	FELL 1 LEVEL	FELL 2 LEVELS	FELL 3 LEVELS
Financial Operations Management							
Funding Sources							
Fundraising Plan							
Grant Writing							
Grassroots Fundraising							
Board Role in Fundraising							

**IV. PARTICIPATION IN COLLABORATIONS**

CAPACITY ELEMENTS	JUMPED 3 LEVELS	JUMPED 2 LEVELS	JUMPED 1 LEVEL	NO CHANGE	FELL 1 LEVEL	FELL 2 LEVELS	FELL 3 LEVELS
Complementary Self-Interest							
Leadership Involvement							
Balance with Local Work							