

Woods Fund of Chicago

Chicago's South Side Initiative

Increasing Organizing
Capacity on the South Side:

The First Two Years of the Woods Fund
of Chicago's South Side Initiative



The First Two Years of the Woods Fund of Chicago's South Side Initiative

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Photo on cover: Monument to the Great Northern Migration greets visitors as they enter the Gateway to Bronzeville. Between 1910 and 1920, during the peak of the "Great Migration," the population of the area increased dramatically when thousands of African-Americans fled the south to Chicago in search of industrial jobs and better quality of life. The statue, a man standing on a pile of worn out shoe soles, faces north, the direction of his journey. He also wears a suit made entirely of shoe soles and carries a suitcase filled with dreams. Statue designer, Allison Saar says "The shoe soles, worn and full of holes, symbolize the often difficult journey from the South to the North."

The Woods Fund gratefully acknowledges Sandra O'Donnell, PhD for her assistance in writing this report.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Woods Fund of Chicago is an independent foundation (approximately \$70 million in assets) with a mission of increasing opportunities for less advantaged people, including the opportunity to participate in changing the conditions and systems that affect them. Long concerned that so few grants in its core grantmaking program, community organizing, were being invested in Chicago’s lowest income communities, the Woods Fund created a special grantmaking initiative to increase organizing capacity on the South Side. This report documents their grantmaking activity and results to date. It is presented to further the work of:

- Other funders who are concerned about issues of grantmaking equity—are investments benefiting those in greatest need and are philanthropic resources distributed fairly?
- Community organizers and other allies of organizing who seek to build multi-issue organizations in communities of low income people of color; and
- Emerging or established South Side organizations who may wish to apply for Woods Fund support for their organizing work.

Origins of the South Side Initiative

Mappings of Woods Fund grants in 1995 and in 2003 found few grants in Chicago's lowest income neighborhoods, which are overwhelmingly African American communities on the South and West Sides. Finding serious challenges and new opportunities facing the South Side, and finding other foundations newly investing in increasing organizing activity on the West Side, the Woods Fund staff and board decided to develop an action strategy to increase organizing capacity on the South Side.

Grantmaking Strategies

The Woods Fund staff employed five grantmaking strategies in implementing the South Side Initiative. They are:

Strategy 1

Gain a fuller understanding of organizing successes, opportunities, challenges, and capacity on the South Side. In 2003, the Woods Fund commissioned a participatory action research organization, the Center for Impact Research, to assess organizing capacity on the South Side. The assessment found limited community organizing activity despite the many challenging issues that were begging for redress, and a nonprofit sector heavily focused on basic service delivery and lacking awareness of the importance, possibilities and ultimate power of community organizing.

Strategy 2

Develop and disseminate a Request for Proposals to identify and support emerging groups on the South Side. Staff issued a Request for Proposals and disseminated it widely, and hosted two informational forums on the South Side. The forums reaffirmed the Center for Impact Research's finding that few south side groups understood organizing and differentiated it from service delivery. These forums also provided rich opportunities for the Woods Fund to learn from local groups about the inherent challenges of organizing in their communities.

Strategy 3

Provide grant support with “strings attached”—requirements for participating in facilitated workshops and peer learning. In addition to grants for capacity building activities that ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000, grantees were required to participate in workshops and peer

learning activities, and they were encouraged to apply for separate training stipends.

Strategy 4

Obtain ongoing documentation, advice, feedback, and fine tuning. Staff asked a small group of seasoned organizers to advise the initiative; assigned an intern the task of updating maps of grant investments and their impact; and retained third parties to document first year progress and gain second year reflections from the grantees.

Strategy 5

Advocate for additional funding for South Side organizing. Staff hosted two briefings for funders, engaged funders as advisors in the selection of initial grantees, and actively shared what grantee organizations were doing and learning with other funders throughout.

Results to Date

Eight groups were awarded grants totaling \$222,000 over two years in support of capacity building activities such as developing leadership training curricula, advancing organizing campaigns, strategic planning, grants development and fundraising, and increasing membership. The diversity of the eight groups reflects the wide net that the Initiative cast, including an organization that blends service delivery and organizing, a community development corporation that incorporates organizing, and a self-help group as well as more traditional organizing groups.

All groups succeeded in building some capacity. Some of the tangible successes: a new leadership development curriculum for the Latino community; strong advances in an affordable housing campaign in a rapidly gentrifying community, wins for public housing tenants on the far South Side; legislation to increase job opportunities for former offenders through the leadership of one of the grantees; increases in participation levels in all of the organizations funded; and, for several, the ability to leverage the Woods Fund grant to attract other funding.

Four groups built capacity so successfully that they competed for and in June 2007 were awarded support totaling \$160,000 through the Woods Fund's ongoing Community Organizing grants program. They were: Alianza Leadership Institute, Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization, Inner-City Muslim Action Network, and Southside Together Organizing for Power.

Reflections and Learnings About the Grantmaking Strategy

The outreach strategy—introducing the Request For Proposals through a forum that discussed what organizing is and why it is important—identified the *need for much more awareness raising about organizing for power in communities where it was lacking*, as well as more proactive and innovative approaches to grantmaking in these communities.

The South Side Initiative worked to strengthen several promising South Side organizing groups to the point that they seem well on their way to building sustainable and effective organizations and can compete with more established groups for organizing funding.

From the perspective of all key players—the grantees, the advisors, and Woods Fund staff—the *cohort approach of the Initiative worked* to sharpen organizing, enable shared learning about building strong organizations, and create the platform and relationships for the groups to work collectively to build power and win issues across South Side communities.

At the same time, it is *unclear from the grantees' perspective how useful the foundation-sponsored workshops were*, and what tangible benefit they generated. Three learnings seem to be: 1) involve the grantees—and, likely, the advisors—in developing the schedule and focus of facilitated sessions; 2) make clear expectations for participation in them; and 3) develop solid feedback mechanisms that ask, beyond general usefulness, what the grantees *did* with session learnings.

The *training stipends worked* to expose staff and leaders to various organizing schools and skills, and, in some instances, to help the grantees build their organizations.

The Initiative *seems to have helped fuel the interest of other funders* in supporting South Side organizing, evidenced by the growing number of funders supporting the Initiative groups.

Reflections and Learnings from the Grantees' Work

South Side Initiative grantees evidence creativity, eclecticism and pragmatism in their organizing models, blending successful organizing strategies and tactics with cultural roots. While some observers of organizing believe that a distinct organizing style exists or is emerging in low income communities of color, Initiative grantees represent a much more diverse experience.

Base building is a continual challenge, in low income communities of people of color that are facing, in the words of one grantee, “years and generations of exclusion, inequity, isolation, and poverty.” Still, several Initiative groups demonstrated effective, promising strategies of engaging low-income residents in public life.

Most Initiative grantees evidenced interest, commitment, and skill in participating in citywide and statewide coalitions such as the Developing Government Accountability Project, finding their organizations energized by engagement in systems change campaigns. Their successes in doing so helped build larger and stronger constituencies for policy change citywide, drawing South Siders into these campaigns while building organizing muscle at the neighborhood level.

The overall grantmaking strategy worked to build organizing capacity on the South Side. *Two elements of the strategy seem* particularly important. *The first was staff's* outreach to South Side communities, *raising awareness of organizing and of the Woods Fund's grantmaking process*. *Secondly*, bringing the grantees together as a group *to share experiences and build capacity for collective action*.

The South Side's organizing challenges will not be fixed in two years. While the original South Side Initiative grantees have come far, each has long term commitments and challenges to expand its work. More organizing is yet needed to reach under-resourced communities, build constituencies, and tackle systems issues of most importance to South Side communities.

Going Forward

Woods Fund Directors and staff are encouraged by the progress of the South Side Initiative in building community organizing capacity in communities of low income people of color. The Board has committed funds to the Initiative for a third year, and staff have fine-tuned their overall grantmaking strategy, strengthening its focus on training, mentoring, and peer learning opportunities, as well as on documentation and dissemination of learnings. The Initiative seems to be making important inroads into a longstanding challenge in community organizing—the question of whether or not, and how, community organizing can work in extremely low income communities of people of color—and the Woods Fund is eager to share its experiences.

Increasing Organizing Capacity on the South Side:
The First Two Years of the Woods Fund of Chicago's South Side Initiative

Full Report

Introduction

Chicago is home to a rich legacy of community organizing, the place where Mother Jones became an organizer, A. Philip Randolph achieved his first major organizing victory, and Saul Alinsky defined modern organizing. Community organizing and coalition building has recently won major campaigns to increase the city's affordable housing supply, reform public school governance, increase the fairness of labor practices, create a statewide diversion program for people arrested for drug convictions and rein in predatory lending. Just as important as the victories themselves, these campaigns were both the product of and the fuel for engaging residents in the democratic process—building “people's organizations” that provide a platform for residents to have a real voice in the decisions that affect them.

In 1980, the Woods Fund of Chicago made community organizing its core grantmaking program, recognizing the power of organizing in achieving this foundation's mission of increasing opportunities for disadvantaged people by involving them in changing the conditions and systems that affect them. While other programs have since been added, organizing remains a major focus of

the Woods Fund. This grantmaking program is one of a handful in the city that invests in the organizing *process* as well as in *issues campaigns* that emerge from that process.

Because of its importance to the foundation, and to the grantseeking community as well, the Woods Fund commissioned a third party evaluation of its organizing program in 1995 to assess the patterns of grants and their impact in engaging residents and in winning changes¹. While the evaluators found many positive results of the grantees' work, they also found a dearth of grants in the city's lowest income communities, which were predominantly African American communities on the South and West sides. Evaluation interviewees raised some challenging questions about this situation, wondering particularly if prevailing models of organizing unwittingly failed to tap the strengths of these communities and adequately address their issues. This evaluation spurred discussions in the organizing and grantmaking communities about strategies to encourage effective organizing in underserved communities such as drawing more people of color into organizing, and funding capacity building activities.

1 Sandra O'Donnell, Yvonne Jeffries, Frank Sanchez, and Pat Selmi, “Woods Fund of Chicago: Evaluation of the Fund's Community Organizing Grant Program,” April 1995, available from the Woods Fund.

In 2003, Woods Fund staff once again mapped their organizing grants and discovered a glaring dearth of grants and dollars invested in the South Side. The geographic distribution of 2002 Community Organizing grants:²

Community Organizing Grants by Area Woods Fund of Chicago, 2002	
Area	Dollars granted
North	\$37,303
Northwest	\$103,772
Central	\$5,672
West	\$338,982
South	\$50,471
Far South	\$73,980
South West	\$254,866
Total	\$865,000

Concerned that the pattern for the South Side held despite actions following the 1995 evaluation, staff decided to focus squarely on understanding why so few grants were being made to organizing groups on the South Side and, from these understandings, develop a grantmaking initiative to address these challenges. This report documents their grantmaking activity and results to date. It is presented with the hope that the South Side Initiative’s experiences and learnings will further the work of:

- Other funders who are concerned about issues of grantmaking equity—are dollars benefiting those who need it most, and are they distributed fairly?
- Community organizers, organizing intermediaries, and other allies of organizing who seek to build strong multi-issue

organizations in communities of low income people of color; and

- Emerging or established South Side organizations who may wish to apply for Woods Fund support for their organizing work.

A brief note about the geographic area of concern.

For readers not familiar with the Chicago area, this city is comprised of neighborhoods, 77 of them according to University of Chicago sociologists, and over 100 according to local wisdom. Historically, these neighborhoods have been sharply segregated by race and ethnicity, with North Side communities of predominant white affluence, Northwest and Southwest side communities of working class white and Latino groups, and South and West side communities predominantly African American. This pattern is changing somewhat with gentrification on the near south and west sides of the city, a surge in the city’s Latino population and increases also in ethnic groups such as Palestinians, Indians, and Africans, but, according to the 2000 Census, the city’s lowest income communities remained squarely African American. (Substantial public housing demolitions in several of these communities have likely affected these 2000 poverty rates somewhat, but the overall effect, based on data showing that displaced tenants are largely relocating to other low income African American communities, will likely be lower poverty rates in demolition communities and higher rates in African American communities that receive dislocated tenants.)

2 Sean McGrath “Leave no community behind,” September 2005, Power Point presentation available from the Woods Fund. The 2002 data presented in this report were compiled by Program Officer Jeff Pinzino.

Lowest Income Chicago Communities, 2000 Census

Rank*	Community	Location	% poor	% African American
1	Riverdale	Far South	56.3	96.8
2	Oakland**	South	52.5	97.5
3	Washington Park	South	51.6	97.5
4	Grand Boulevard**	South	46.9	97.7
5	North Lawndale	West	45.2	94.2
6	Englewood	South	43.8	98.2
7	Douglas**	South	41.2	85.5
8	Woodlawn	South	39.4	94.6
9	Near West Side	West	37.5	53.2
10	West Garfield Park	West	35.9	98.4
11	East Garfield Park	West	35.2	98.1

* Ranks are of individual poverty rates, for 77 Community Areas.

**Denotes a community heavily affected by public housing demolitions.

Despite its pockets of extreme poverty, many South Side neighborhoods are experiencing significant reinvestment. A several-community area named Bronzeville is experiencing a renaissance, fueled by the demolition of public housing and an influx of middle income homeowners who are restoring the area's beautiful boulevards. Two major universities—the Illinois Institute of Technology and the University of Chicago—have made major capital reinvestments in their South Side campuses. Significant mixed income housing is being developed south of the University of Chicago, in Woodlawn. The major thoroughfare of the area, the Dan Ryan Expressway, is being redeveloped. And

Washington Park has been sited for the Olympic Village, should Chicago win the bid for the 2016 Olympics.

Observing the many challenges and the opportunities facing the South Side, and frustrated that they were investing so little in the democratic infrastructure of these communities, Woods Fund staff in 2003 developed a strategy for action.

Grantmaking Strategies to Increase and Strengthen South Side Community Organizing

The Woods Fund staff employed five grantmaking strategies in implementing the South Side Initiative. They are:

Strategy 1

Gain a fuller understanding of organizing successes, opportunities, challenges, and capacity on the South Side

In June 2003, the Woods Fund commissioned the Center for Impact Research to assess community organizing on the South Side. The Woods Fund hand-picked this research group (which has since dissolved) because it has so effectively developed a model of evaluative research that emphasized collaboration and the full participation of those being evaluated. Its model was, thus, consonant with the Woods Fund's mission and also one that staff thought would elicit accurate data and rich perceptions. They were right.

The report, issued in March 2004³ found:

- A multitude of issues begging for effective community organizing, particularly poor government services, soaring and unaddressed public health problems, ineffective and brutal policing, and too-few opportunities for youth, for job training and employment, and for former offenders.

- Limited organizing activity on the South Side, both in scale and amount, and very limited understanding among community leaders and residents of what organizing was and what its benefits were. Those who did have some awareness of organizing tended to have a reactive and service-oriented vision—organizing is something you do in response to a crisis or to get more services in your community.
- Political fragmentation and, within the nonprofit sector, intense competition for resources and limited interest in building collaborations.
- A small number of highly effective organizing groups, focused on “educating constituencies, creating collaborations . . . , and pushing the opposition to change when necessary.” These organizers “characterize their approach as different from other community organizing groups,” whose work they see as overly oppositional, and they root their organizing style, which they see as more collaborative, in the traditions of the African American community.

3 Center for Impact Research, “Community Organizing in Three South Side Chicago Communities: Leadership, Activities, and Prospects”. This report is available on the Woods Fund of Chicago website at www.woodsfund.org.

The Center for Impact Research's summary conclusion (p.6):

There is a lack of organizations on the South Side of Chicago that are doing any work that broadly falls within the parameters of community organizing. There are even fewer that have demonstrated the capacity to sustain this work . . . and still fewer that are run and staffed by African Americans. Strengthening competent African American organizations and working with them to build on their successes would be a strategic approach to establishing community organizing as a viable response to systemic social and economic injustice in these South Side neighborhoods.

Strategy 2

Develop and disseminate a Request for Proposals to identify and support emerging groups on the South Side.

When the findings of the Center for Impact Research's study were presented to the Woods Fund's Board of Directors, recalls President Deborah Harrington, a robust staff-board discussion ensued about *how* the Woods Fund might increase its grant support of organizing on the South Side. Essentially, two strategies might be emphasized: increase support of existing, effective organizing groups on the South Side (as the Center for Impact Research recommended) and/or identify promising or emerging groups and provide seed and capacity building support. Woods Fund staff and Board believed the existing grantmaking process was already working

effectively to realize the former strategy. Recalls Ms. Harrington:⁴ "Eden Martin (former board member) said 'We know there are a handful of groups out there. How about the groups we *don't* know about?' He and other board members pushed us to invest in new groups, to establish a funding criterion for the Initiative for applicants with no previous Woods grants."

Guided by this feedback from the Board, which voted at its September 2004 meeting to allocate \$100,000 to a special initiative to increase organizing on the South Side, staff developed a special Request for Proposals.⁵ The RFP sought proposals from "new and emerging" groups not previously supported by the Woods Fund "who are preparing strategically to take their organizations to a new level of effectiveness . . . to build new skills or expand existing skills in organizing". Fundable activities would include strategic planning, building memberships and constituencies, increasing systems change skills, building coalitions and collaborations, and strengthening organizations in the areas of finance, governance, technology, and research.

Staff disseminated the RFP proactively, holding two briefings on the South Side as well as distributing it electronically and via mail through a broad mailing list. Between 35 and 40 individuals attended each briefing. Recalls Ms. Harrington:⁶ "We really were deliberate about getting into the community and talking about community organizing. The briefings went far beyond the RFP itself, with staff and Board members sharing with participants the Woods Fund's concept

4 Interview, May 23, 2007.

5 The full RFP is posted on the Woods Fund's website at http://www.woodsfund.org/apply/Folder_1100750426204/File_1103059202500

6 Interviews, May 23 and June 20, 2007.

of organizing.” As the Center for Impact Research documented, staff learned at the briefings that almost all organizations there defined organizing as service delivery. Ms. Harrington: “Many participants were service providers who *thought* they were doing organizing. Participants in each of the sessions actually defined organizing as ‘bringing people together to get more government money for services!’ We explained, ‘What we’re about is building power in ways that impact large numbers of people.’”

Strategy 3

Provide grant support with “strings attached”—requirements for participating in facilitated workshops and peer learning. In addition to grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000, grantees were also encouraged to apply for separate training stipends, allowing them to participate in training and technical assistance opportunities of their choosing. With these stipends, some grantees sent staff or leaders to trainings of major organizing networks; others retained consultants to advise strategic planning, fundraising, and other organizational development tasks. The Woods Fund also planned and hosted skill building workshops and information-sharing sessions for the grantees as a group, in efforts to create a network of organizations talking and working together. Workshops offered focused on topics such as public policy advocacy skills, grantseeking, coalition building, and grassroots fundraising. Lastly, the Woods Fund strongly encouraged peer learning, convening the groups annually to share recent work and assess progress. The

Woods Fund provided continuing grant support for an emerging network of south side organizers that South Side Initiative grantees had joined.

Strategy 4

Obtain ongoing documentation, advice, feedback, and fine tuning.

To make sure that the Initiative was capturing learnings as they occurred and continually gleaning information that might minimize the risk and maximize the impact of grant dollars, staff:

- Asked a small group of veteran South Side organizers to serve as an Advisory Group to the Initiative. This group initially assisted the Initiative in site visits and grant approval recommendations. More recently, it has reconvened to review progress, advise course correcting, and brainstorm future Initiative directions.
- Assigned Intern Sean McGrath (from Loyola University’s Philanthropy and Nonprofit Sector Program) to map grant-making activity by geography pre and post first year South Side Initiative grants.
- Asked Phyllis Russell, then with the Work, Welfare, and Families coalition and involved in building organizing capacity from within human services organizations, to document and evaluate the first year progress of each grantee and of the entire initiative.
- Asked Kelly Brown, now Program Director of the Marguerite Casey Foundation and, at the time, a community consultant, to 1) convene the grantees at the end of the second year to gain *their* evaluative perspectives on the impact of the initiative and 2) to document and evaluate that discussion.

Strategy 5

Advocate for additional funding for South Side organizing

As the benefits of the Initiative investments in increasing organizational capacity began to surface, Woods Fund staff actively championed the case for additional funding for South Side organizing with their peers. Staff:

- Hosted a briefing for funders very early in the life of the initiative, shortly after the RFP dissemination outreach meetings, to “identify collaborative activities and vet proposals.”⁷
- Asked four funders to participate as Advisors in site visits and review of proposals in response to the initial RFP. Their inclusion “was deliberate; funders should be involved to put these groups on their radar . . .”⁸
- Shared the rationale and strategy of the South Side Initiative with the Crossroads Fund as they developed their own initiative to increase funding to South Side organizing; and
- Hosted a second briefing on the South Side Initiative for area funders toward the end of the Initiative’s second year, on May 3, 2007. Staff and/or board members from 11 foundations participated.

7 Minutes of the March 16, 2005 meeting of the Woods Fund of Chicago Board of Directors.

8 *Ibid.*

Results to Date

Grants awarded. Eight groups comprised the South Side Initiative and were awarded \$222,000 over two years for capacity building activities. As the following summary table suggests, most grants were awarded to organizations that had been entirely or almost entirely comprised of volunteers. Two groups—Housing Bronzeville and Washington Park Community Organizing

Initiative—were projects of larger organizations (the Lugenia Burns Hope Center and St. Edmund’s Redevelopment Corporation). Each received two year grants for capacity-building activities they proposed. Each was also, as noted earlier, asked to participate in quarterly peer group meetings, and each was invited to submit separate requests to cover organizing training expenses of staff.

Initiative Impact

All groups succeeded in building some capacity. Some of the tangible successes: a new leadership development curriculum for the Latino community, strong advances in an affordable housing campaign in a rapidly gentrifying community, wins for public housing tenants on the far South Side, legislation to increase job opportunities for former offenders advanced through the leadership of one of the grantees, increases in participation levels in all of the organizations funded, and, for several, the ability to leverage the Woods Fund grant to attract other funding.

Four groups – Alianza Leadership Institute, Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization (MAGIC), Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), and Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) – built enough capacity that they *competed successfully for grant support totaling \$160,000 through the Woods Fund’s ongoing Community Organizing grants program in June 2007.*

Sketches of the eight groups and their impact:⁹

9 Results summaries and quotes are from grant reports.

South Side Initiative Grantees

Organization	Pre-grant annual budget	Amount awarded	Grant purposes
Alianza Leadership Institute (group focused on Southeast Side Latino communities)	\$610	\$15,000 Y1 \$20,000 Y2	Develop a curriculum for Latino organizing; make this curriculum a tool in organizing throughout the Southeast side.
Housing Bronzeville (group in a rapidly gentrifying community)	n/a	\$5,000 Y1 \$5,000 Y2	Organize community support to increase affordable home ownership.
IMAN (Inner-city Muslim Action Network, a group that marries services and organizing)	\$175,000	\$15,000 Y1 \$20,000 Y2	Identify, develop, and engage citywide cadres of Muslim leaders in systems actions; develop fundable proposals.
MAGIC (Woodlawn based youth organizing group)	\$22,700	\$15,000 Y1 \$20,000 Y2	Develop grassroots leadership, build membership, increase staff and funding.
People for Community Recovery (Riverdale environmental justice group)	\$47,039	\$20,000 Y1 \$10,000 Y2	Increase resident participation in land use, housing, economic development, jobs & job training public decision making.
Prison Reform Inc. (group of former offenders)	0	\$12,000 Y1 \$10,000 Y2	Identify, develop, engage former offenders to lead jobs, housing, and justice campaigns.
STOP (Southside Together Organizing for Power), based in Woodlawn)	\$20,000	\$10,000 Y1 \$15,000 Y2	Increase tenant organizing, perform action research, organize housing co-op, raise funds.
Washington Park Community Organizing Initiative	n/a	\$15,000 Y1 \$15,000 Y2	Salary support for staff organizer; train residents on systems change; host community forums

Grantee Profile

Alianza Leadership Institute

“If it were not for this initiative, we would not have been able to develop the leadership curriculum...”

About the group:

This leadership institute started as a project of a conventional community organizing network, but wished to draw more on Latino organizing traditions such as liberation theology and popular education. Its mission is “to build the capacity of Latino leaders, organizers and associations to foment community and social change”. They seek to create an organizing “pedagogy tailored to Latinos”. Alianza’s core action partner is Centro Comunitario Juan Diego, a community based group that has recently renewed its interest in organizing and action.

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- They hired a consultant who worked with the group in developing, piloting, and refining a 7 week leadership training curriculum.
- 28 leaders—including 19 students—from nine area community organizations, parishes, and schools completed the training. Requests for it are coming in from Latino groups citywide, including Pilsen and Little Village.
- They hired their former board chair, Rey Lopez-Calderon, to organize on a part time basis. He is reaching out to community organizations, parishes, and schools across the Southeast Side, laying the foundation for a cross-community organizing project.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“As a fledgling group, we had very few resources to put into practice the ideas we had come up with for organizing the Latino community. If it were not for this initiative, we would not have been able to develop the leadership curriculum, and therefore would not have a specific product distinguishing us from other organizations. That programmatic capacity in turn has helped us enter conversations with potential new funders.”

Grantee Profile

Housing Bronzeville

About the group:

Housing Bronzeville is a recently created collaborative, organized by the Lugenia Burns Hope Center, a South Side leadership and organizing group, and the Institute for Community Empowerment to address the community’s escalating affordable housing needs. Housing Bronzeville placed an advisory referendum on the November 2004 ballot—to create a housing trust fund—that was approved by 85% of voters. Considerable education and action is needed to move that advisory referendum to a policy and community reality.

“Through this initiative we have given voice to those who want to have a say in how their community will change.”

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Produced a video on the community’s affordable housing crisis.
- Performed community outreach and provided education on the housing trust fund idea, including meetings in several churches attended by 150 and an open forum attended by 100.
- Involved leaders in action research related to vacant land plots; the stonewalling of leaders’ requests for information by elected and appointed officials has fueled participation and leadership in Housing Bronzeville.
- Hosted an aldermanic candidate briefing on Housing Bronzeville that was attended by over 200 residents.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“Housing Bronzeville has allowed a voice for real organizing that seeks to empower people to emerge. Through this initiative we have given voice to those who want to have a say in how their community will change.”

Grantee Profile

IMAN

Inner-City Muslim Action Network

“The Woods Fund provided the critical initial support and even more important recognition of IMAN’s role as an organization with leadership potential.”

About the group:

This community organization was formed in 1995, driven by the Islamic ideals of community service, social justice and human compassion.

Its three major program areas are 1) social and medical services for the community, 2) awareness and outreach around Muslims and Islam, and 3) networking and organizing. IMAN seeks creative ways of breaking through racial, ethnic and class-based divides, and in so doing participates actively in citywide and statewide change coalitions.

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Identified, developed and engaged 20 additional leaders to mobilize around incarceration alternatives for nonviolent offenders. They provided advanced training for their initial 9 leaders as well as these new ones. These leaders played key roles in criminal justice reform coalitions such as the Developing Justice Coalition.
- Involved over 100 volunteers in criminal justice issues campaigns at the city, county, and state levels; provided public testimony and public education in support of the new criminal justice code; and opposed County budget cuts. This work culminated in a highly successful Springfield visit, the first IMAN has led.
- Expanded outreach to former offenders, held community forums, and printed newsletters to increase public engagement on issues of concern.
- Received a three-year grant from the Marguerite Casey Foundation and were invited to submit full proposals to the Chicago Community Trust and the Wieboldt Foundation.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“The Woods Fund provided the critical initial support and even more important recognition of IMAN’s role as an organization with leadership potential. It’s no small part that the funds, resources, and association with this initiative led to many other great capacity building opportunities. From mobilizing for community forums and public hearings to proactively engaging in the legislative process, the South Side Initiative has been instrumental in supporting IMAN’s acquisition of these critical skills.”

Grantee Profile

MAGIC

Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization

About the group:

MAGIC was founded “to organize residents of Woodlawn and the surrounding areas to stimulate social change.” They specifically seek to engage low and moderate income families and individuals to counteract dominance in local decision-making by upper income and institutional stakeholders. They have been especially successful in engaging young people as community activists, and they have become recognized as an effective bridge between the University of Chicago and the Woodlawn community.

“At this point we feel our work is building towards some significant public policy for youth.”

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Supported leaders in gaining in recognition and effectiveness. One parent leader is achieving recognition for her work on police harassment issues; another in local school governance. MAGIC youth leaders are recognized citywide leaders in HIV Teen Awareness and Teen Dating Violence projects.
- Built their organization. During the months of the Initiative they added 6 part time staff positions, two of them youth, built Board fundraising capacity, and gained funding relationships through their advisory committee. MAGIC’s budget grew from \$22,700 pre-Initiative to \$91,500 in FY 2006.
- Led a coalition of youth and parents to establish Woodlawn as the community for the University of Chicago Charter High School which opened in September 2006, gaining a quality learning institution for the community.
- Partnered with Kenwood Oakland Community Organization in organizing a campaign to increase city and state investment in youth summer employment; continued to partner with several South Side youth serving organizations toward developing a policy campaign to improve life outcomes of Black males.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“We believe that we would not have been able to sustain our organization and our work if it had not been for the Woods Fund’s Southside Capacity Building grants we received. One of the benefits of working closely with the staff of the Woods Fund under the capacity building initiative was that we were able to challenge ourselves to look at public policy implications. At this point we feel our work is building towards some significant public policy for youth.”

Grantee Profile

People for Community Recovery

“The initiative gave us the ability to coordinate and develop community leaders...”

About the group:

People for Community Recovery (PCR) is a 25-year-old community organization that was a pioneer in environmental justice organizing. PCR’s membership base is largely comprised of Altgeld Gardens and Murray Homes public housing tenants; both developments were built on contaminated land on Chicago’s far southeast side. Beyond its environmental advocacy, the group provides legal and economic services in the area. Through the South Side Initiative, PCR seeks to become a genuine multi-issue community organization.

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Involved residents in organizing a grievance campaign challenging the policies of the Altgeld Local Advisory Council, East Lake Management and the Chicago Housing Authority around the Transformation Plan, which will temporarily relocate residents while the development is renovated.
- Mobilized residents—one meeting had 400 participants—to press the Chicago Housing Authority to honor its commitment to install laundry facilities in the renovated units; the campaign garnered front page attention in the Tribune.
- Partnered with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists to provide job trainings for area residents.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“The initiative gave us the ability to coordinate and develop community leaders which, in turn, gives People for Community Recovery a working, walking army of community residents.”

Grantee Profile

Prison Reform Inc.

About the group:

Prison Reform Inc. (PRI) was founded in 2003 by Minister Abdullah Muhammad, National Director of the Nation of Islam’s Prison Reform Ministry, as a community-based extension of the work conducted by the Ministry. The group is comprised entirely of former offenders; its six volunteer staff members, for instance, have all successfully completed parole and have found jobs or started their own businesses. Prison Reform Inc. seeks to involve former offenders in shaping and implementing policy campaigns to reduce recidivism.

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Reached out to former prisoners, individually and via other grassroots groups, to begin to organize and collaborate to advance targeted issues and policies.
- Hosted a public forum attended by over 150 people on the “school to prison pipeline,” discussing how zero tolerance policies in schools generate felony records for youth.
- Convened a forum in which over 200 former offenders provided practitioners, legislators, and community leaders their view of prison re-entry.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“This initiative was useful in helping us define our role as an organization and our roles and responsibilities within the organization. It was very useful to be able to make connections with groups who were at or near the same stage we were in our development. As a result of this initiative, we have a better understanding of community organizing as a tool and how we can utilize community organizing in our immediate work of empowering ex-offenders and in our long-term goals of affecting public policy.”

“As a result of this initiative, we have a better understanding of community organizing as a tool and how we can utilize community organizing in our immediate work of empowering ex-offenders...”

Grantee Profile

STOP

Southside Together Organizing for Power

“...helped us expand our vision of organizing and develop an understanding of the importance of identifying and clarifying the values we bring to our work...”

About the group:

STOP is a Woodlawn based group that organizes and provides action research around issues of affordable housing, particularly affordable rental housing, in a community facing gentrification pressures. The group, led by a resident/student coordinating team, develops organizers and action researchers among University of Chicago students and residents in Woodlawn, particularly tenants in threatened properties. Campaigns focus on preserving rental buildings at risk of condo conversion or Section 8 certificate expiration as affordable housing.

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Organized tenants associations in two project based Section 8 complexes, winning improvements in both buildings through organized action; organized a tenants association in a major complex at risk of foreclosure; and helped sustain an already- organized association in another complex.
- In collaboration with a communitywide action research group, STOP is fine tuning its earlier research on gentrification pressures to focus squarely on the University of Chicago’s adverse impacts on the community. This research, conducted by tenants and students together, will inform an action campaign targeted at holding the University accountable to the surrounding community.
- Built their organization, initiated grassroots fundraising, strengthened their Board’s governing knowledge and skills, and involved youth in multimedia outreach to increase organizing reach and organizational visibility.
- Co-organized the region-wide Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign; participated in a citywide immigration rights march; organized a clinic on HUD policies.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

The Initiative has supported monthly consultations with the Applied Research Center, which has “helped us expand our vision of organizing and develop an understanding of the importance of identifying and clarifying the values we bring to our work so as to be strategic in the long term advancement of a racial and economic justice agenda.”

Grantee Profile

Washington Park Neighborhood Association

About the group:

The Washington Park Neighborhood Association (WPNA) is an emerging group of residents coming together around issues of safety and quality-of-life in one of the lowest income and most neglected communities in the city —until Chicago centered its 2016 Olympics bid on Washington Park. The group is sponsored and co-funded by St. Edmund’s Redevelopment Corporation, a community development corporation. WPNA’s plan includes outreach and leadership development work with local residents, in addition to identifying key issues of concern to residents to begin the organizing process.

“The initiative gave residents the opportunity to receive training that ...increased knowledge of public policy ...to enhance the quality of life for all...”

What they accomplished through the South Side Initiative:

- Developed and implemented a resident leadership training institute focused on systems change.
- In addition to one-on-one outreach, the group hosted several Unity in the Community rallies that drew over 400 residents into discussion and action planning around issues affecting their community.
- Involved residents in local, winnable actions including shutting down two businesses of questionable repute and getting the city to improve safety via street lighting and cameras, enforce building codes, and make cosmetic improvements such as curb repair and tree trimming.

What they say about the impact of the initiative:

“The initiative allowed the Washington Park Neighborhood Association to expand its outreach efforts and identify and train emerging leaders. The initiative gave residents the opportunity to receive training that enhanced their organizing skills, increased knowledge of public policy and provided them with tools to enhance the quality of life for all who live, work or play in the Washington Park community.”

Reflections and Learnings About the Initiative's Grantmaking Strategy

The outreach strategy—introducing the Request For Proposals through a forum that discussed what organizing is and why it is important—demonstrated the need for much more awareness-raising about organizing in communities that lack it, as well as more proactive approaches to grantmaking in these communities. Ms. Harrington believes that the social services emphasis has become so entrenched in extremely low income communities that it will take multiple efforts to find and build organizations that are truly committed to principles of empowerment and civic engagement.

The South Side Initiative indeed worked to strengthen several promising South Side organizing groups to the point that they seem well on their way to building sustainable and effective organizations and can compete with more established groups for organizing funding. Before the Initiative began, not one of the funded groups was seen as savvy enough in their organizing or strong enough organizationally to win major grant support for their organizing (IMAN and People for Community Recovery had grant support for services; other groups had very small grants to support part time staff or cover expenses). Two years later, at least half of the groups had established organizing and organizational development track records that enabled them to compete with established organizing

groups for grant dollars. But we should note that the other four grants were not failures: these grants were important experiments in developing organizing capacity out of self-help, social services, and community development traditions.

From the perspective of all key players—the grantees, the advisors, and Woods Fund staff—the cohort approach of the Initiative worked. Meeting, learning, and challenging one another as a group sharpened organizing strategies within each respective funded group, enabled shared learning about building strong organizations, and created the platform and relationships for the groups to work together as a group to build power and win issues across South Side communities. *Every* grantee spoke to the benefits of this grantmaker-created collaboration, recommending to the Woods Fund that continuing collaboration be supported through the South Side Organizers Summit, a recently created peer group.

At the same time, it is unclear from the grantees' perspective how useful the foundation-sponsored workshops were, and what tangible benefit they generated. While progress reports asked grantees how useful these sessions were, few replied, and many reported that they did not attend. First year evaluator Phyllis Russell, on the other hand, found the facili-

tated sessions were “useful and often had unintended multiplier benefits”. When asked to give suggestions for the initiative, one grantee urged additional attention to base building; another, to power analysis; and another, to more intensive, hands-on training in grants development. Three learnings seem to be: 1) involve the grantees—and, likely, the advisors—in developing the schedule and focus of facilitated sessions; 2) make clear expectations for participation in them; and 3) develop solid feedback mechanisms that ask, beyond general usefulness, what the grantees *did* with session learnings.

The training stipends worked to expose staff and leaders to various organizing schools and skills, and, in some instances, to help the grantees build their organizations. In addition to their basic grants from the Woods Fund to support proposed capacity building objectives, grantees were encouraged to apply for small stipends to support specific organizing and organizational development needs. The stipends purchased, for example, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) training, strategic planning, board development, and fundraising training. Grantees reported that these stipends significantly helped build organizing and leadership skill, win grants, sharpen organizational directions, and strengthen their governing boards.

The Initiative seems to have helped fuel the interest of other funders in supporting South Side organizing. The Crossroads Fund in 2006 awarded grants to Initiative participants People for Community Recovery, STOP, and MAGIC. The Kaplan Family Foundation, which had started providing organizing training grants to the South Side before the South Side Initiative was created, sought from Woods Fund staff names of Initiative groups that might be funded through their organizing program. Program Officer Jeff Pinzino observes that the Community Capacity Building Initiative, a citywide organizing capacity building collaborative comprised of more established organizing groups than participated in the South Side Initiative, made an explicit effort midway to include more organizations with African American leadership. Says Mr. Pinzino,¹⁰ “This could be evidence of a rising awareness among funders of the issues involved.”

¹⁰ E-mail communication, June 12, 2007.

Reflections and Learnings from the South Side Initiative's Grantees' Work

Initiative grantees evidence creativity, eclecticism and pragmatism in their organizing models, demonstrating interest and ability in blending successful organizing strategies and tactics with cultural roots. While the Center for Impact Research report found a distinct style of organizing in African American communities that is centered in collaboration, many of the South Side Initiative grantees readily blended Alinsky style concepts, strategies, and tactics with culturally centered traditions. Alianza, for instance, which seeks a distinctly Latino leadership and organizing model, sent a leader-trainer to Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the Alinsky-founded organizing institute) training and collaborated with groups from various organizing traditions on campaigns and projects. IMAN staff and leaders have participated in IAF and Community Renewal Society training, engaged a veteran IAF organizer as strategic planner, and trained intensively with a well-known Muslim community activist, whom they succeeded in securing to chair their Board. Both MAGIC and STOP have worked with the National Training and Information Center (NTIC), but both have found their unique organizing voices and styles, with STOP crediting the Applied Research Center for assistance in developing theirs. While the funded projects evidenced enormous willingness and ability to collaborate, none eschewed direct confrontation as

one necessary organizing tool. And the experiences of this group of grantees are too diverse to conclude that a distinct organizing style exists or is emerging.

Base building is a continual challenge, especially in extremely low income communities, but several Initiative groups evidenced effective strategies of engaging residents in public life.

Says one veteran organizer: "We've learned that people have grown immune to being disrespected, marginalized, and taken for granted, so that they will not challenge anyone's authority. Even in the face of glaring disparities, people still find it difficult to call the question." Nevertheless, Initiative grantees successfully organized bases from the ranks of community youth (MAGIC), tenants (STOP), and service recipients (IMAN). Many people the Center for Impact Research interviewed spoke to the mandate of finding synergy between organizing and social services on the South Side; IMAN seems to be illustrating the potential of this idea.

Most Initiative grantees evidenced interest, commitment, and skill in participating in citywide and statewide coalitions, finding their organizations energized by engagement in systems change campaigns. Historically, community organizing has focused locally out of fears that broader alliances will not accrue real

participation opportunities to local residents and wins that the local organizing group can claim. This situation seems to be changing around the nation as local organizing recognizes the systemic roots of local community problems, but often newer groups will focus locally initially and then build systems change capacity. But that characterization does not hold true for the South Side Initiative grantees, and Initiative activities themselves—the cohort approach, training mentors, and the facilitated sessions—seem to have contributed to groups’ abilities to participate effectively in systems change coalitions. Alianza joined the Steering Committee of the Developing Government Accountability Project; the Hope Center is co-organizer of the South Side Organizers Summit and a leader in the Developing Government Accountability Project; IMAN is a leader in the Developing Justice Coalition and is getting involved in citywide campaigns on former offender and immigration issues; MAGIC is helping build a South Side-wide collaboration of youth organizing to tackle systems issues; STOP is helping build the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign. In the course of the Woods Fund’s 1995 evaluation, then board member, Senator Barack Obama had complained about an organizing culture that was “keeping me local”; this is certainly not the case in 2007!

The South Side’s organizing challenges will not be fixed in two years. Late in the second year of the South Side Initiative, consultant Kelly Brown (now Chief Operating Officer of the Marguerite Casey Foundation) facilitated a meeting of Initiative participants to debrief the

experience. Their summary reflection is that much had been achieved in two years, particularly in the area of supporting organizing issues and styles that emanate out of communities of people of color. Writes Ms. Brown: “The Initiative validated south side organizing approaches and connected them to the larger field of organizing.” But more time is needed to realize the potential of funded groups and reach others. In particular, enduring challenges include:

- *Base building*, as just noted, is not only difficult, it is also particularly time-consuming and slow to build in these communities because residents have faced, in the words of one organizer, “years and generations of exclusion, inequity, isolation, and poverty, <which> can produce significant levels of mistrust, discomfort, and a fear of ‘rocking the boat’ that are not easily assuaged.”
- *Collaboration* also is time consuming and slow to realize. Writes Ms. Brown, “Few <grantees> lack an understanding of the importance of collaboration, but all stress the need to be cognizant of the time, effort, and resources required to build authentic and mutually respectful collaborative efforts and relationships.”
- *Skill building*. Grantees wish for “more directed and specific training, in organizing and fundraising,” as well as “access to some type of mentoring support.”
- *Persistent organizing gaps*. Some communities still lack an organizing presence. Many issues of highest concern to communities of people of color remain

unaddressed. For example, observes Ms. Harrington, while affordable housing surfaced as a fundamental challenge to the vitality of the communities of all grantees, public school reform—arguably at least as serious a challenge to the community—was not a central issue of funded groups. Several grantees identified the need for more seed support to truly nascent groups

or issue campaigns. *Much* more awareness raising and capacity building activity remains needed to re-infuse the organizing tradition (once known as “social protest” in the African American community, in contrast to self-help or “social betterment”) into communities that have suffered disinvestment and impoverishment for decades.

Going Forward

Woods Fund Directors and staff are encouraged by the progress of the South Side Initiative in building community organizing capacity in communities of low income people of color. The Board has committed funds to the Initiative for a third year, and staff have fine-tuned their overall grantmaking strategy, strengthening its focus on training, mentoring, and peer learning opportunities, as well as on documentation and dissemination of learnings. The Initiative seems to be making important inroads into a longstanding challenge in community organizing—the question of whether or not, and how, community organizing can work in extremely low

income communities of people of color—and the Woods Fund is eager to share its experiences.

Summarizes Ms. Harrington: “The Woods Fund views this project as mission central. We are firmly committed to the partnership. As we learn more from residents and organizers about promising strategies to build power at the grassroots level and to change systems informed and fueled by grassroots leadership, we are just as firmly committed to share what we have learned with organizers, funders, and allies of organizing.”

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