

# FUNDING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

How can a grantmaker support grassroots solutions and build stronger communities? What are the unique demands of supporting community organizing?

## IN THIS GUIDE

Foundations and community organizing groups may differ in culture. But they often share the goals of finding durable solutions to social problems, and getting those most affected to be more involved in the process. In this guide, learn how community organizing works and what it can achieve, ways to assess a prospective grantee's capacity and context, and how to manage relationships and use complementary strategies to achieve program goals. Contributors also reflect on power, the grantmaker's role, and where to look for the impact of organizing.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Benefits and methods of community organizing
- Four cases of how grantmakers got involved
- Mapping resources and power
- Making the most of site visits



“You can fund experts or grassroots folks working to build their own objectives — or you can fund both because both play a role in getting change that communities really own.”

—A veteran grantmaker on a hybrid approach to making change

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# A sample from the guide:

## The Organizer's Lingo: A Quick Glossary

**Yes, organizers have their jargon, too. Grantmakers can expect to hear at least some of these terms from community organizers as they describe their plans and tactics.**

**Accountability:** Internally, the term applies to things an organization might count, like "turnout" at meetings, member dues, or "one-on-ones" (see below), because they correlate with power to win on issues. Externally, it refers to things like follow-through by a public official on promises made to the community.

**Base building:** Membership building for the organization.

**Cutting an issue:** The process by which the organization and its members decide whether an issue is important to them, how to approach it, and their strategy for carrying out and winning a campaign.

**Direct action:** Rallies, picketing, and large-audience events, with people in authority invited as guests from whom "asks" or "demands" are made. The purpose is to increase momentum, visibility, power, and "wins" (major accomplishments) for the organization. Good organizing groups use controversial tactics only when quiet diplomacy has failed to get them into relationships with authorities. If a relationship has developed, the public meeting may sometimes be "scripted" in advance. Sometimes a public meeting is used to demonstrate "people power" and at the same time build a relationship with an official.

**Leaders:** Key people who emerge from an organization's membership; distinct from paid organizers and staff. Leaders usually get recognized by showing that others will follow them – for example, by demonstrating that they can turn out 10 people for a meeting or event. Once identified, they may get training in techniques, such as data analysis or public speaking, that build effectiveness and confidence.

**Network:** A large association of affiliated organizations. Some networks raise dues from member organizations, such as groups based in religious congregations, schools, or neighborhoods. Others have been formed by intermediary organizations around a common interest or identity, such as human rights or immigrant rights. Networks often hold training workshops for members and leaders, where they share information, strategies, and campaign progress.

**One-on-one meeting:** An intentional conversation, usually between an organizer and a prospective member of the organization, in which a relationship is begun and the organizer listens for and brings to the surface issues of importance to the prospective member. Some organizations begin with house meetings of potential members.

**Organizer:** The job of an organizer is to build a group of people to address a common problem. Paid or unpaid, an organizer serves as a convenor, listener, motivator, and coach. Organizers pull people together, urge them to question their ideas, and support them as they produce and carry out a plan of action.

**Power mapping:** A process for creating a "map" showing who has authority in a particular area and must be converted in order to make an improvement, along with strategies on how to get to them. It also shows where the organizing group stands and where its influence and alliances can promote change.

**Turnout:** The number of members and other constituents the organization "turns out" to rallies or other direct action events.