

Intersection of Community Organizing and Racial Justice Funding: Limited Data and Limited Dollars

by Rick Cohen

Among the thousands of possible subjects in the Foundation Center's online database of some 2.4 million grants from over 100,000 private foundation, corporate and public charity grantmakers, the terms "community organizing" and "civic engagement" do not appear as subjects or topics around which grants are organized and counted. In light of the litany of foundation-supported and published reports attesting to the importance of community organizing in social change strategies,¹ the absence of "community organizing" and "civic engagement" as official categories used by the Foundation Center is striking.

Foundations appear to increasingly recognize the importance of community organizing and mobilization as a core strategy for achieving social change goals, but actual support for building on-the-ground organizing capacities and networks has not risen to anything approaching commensurate levels. The lack of support specifically slated to racial justice organizing is even more dramatic. This, of course, gives rise to questions about a possible gap between the stated commitments of foundations to community organizing and where they actually invest their funding.

An examination of the Foundation Center's online database between 2009-12 (but mostly reflecting 2009-10) revealed 287 grants for a total of \$26.1 million to U.S. nonprofits with the use of "community organizing" as searchable keywords used in the texts of the recorded descriptions of the grants. Many foundations that engage in community organizing grantmaking might be nonplussed to see themselves omitted from this list, but that is due to how the purpose of their grants is described – not only in the descriptions generated by the Foundation Center, but also in the descriptions they generate and supply in their own materials. (See Chart A for the largest funders of community organizing during this period. See Chart B for a list of the largest grant recipients.)

Overall, the research and trends suggest that foundations by and large recognize the importance of community organizing but still seem wary about matching their grantmaking support for explicit organizing efforts. Compared to overall

grantmaking, community organizing receives a pittance of foundation grants, although some organizing entities may receive other grants not explicitly linked to organizing (with overhead payments that can help sustain organizing efforts, or as general support grants that can be used flexibly for organizing and other program activities).

Support for Racial Justice Organizing?

Some of the foundations in the identifiable, community organizing world overlap with foundations that describe some of their other grants as addressing issues of "racial equity" or "racial justice." (See Chart C for grants between 2009-12.) Focusing on foundations with large amounts of grantmaking in these fields is not meant to diminish the crucial roles played by smaller grantmakers that are mainstays in funding community organizing and racial justice. Nonetheless, six-figure grant totals for racial justice or community organizing activities do not represent significantly large amounts of support. And because the number of supporting funders and foundations championing the inclusion of a structural racism lens in organizing work is relatively small, the challenge of attracting the vast majority of larger funders into this realm remains difficult.

But there are many more foundations than the large grantmakers, and their overall patterns reveal much about where the foundation sector *writ large* stands as opposed to grantmakers with more connected racial justice orientations. These include smaller foundations (e.g., the Akonadi Foundation, the Solidago Foundation, the Liberty Hill Foundation, the Veatch Program, the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation) that devote much larger proportions of their grantmaking to civil/human rights advocacy than these million-dollar grantmakers.

Over \$3 million of these grants came from community foundations, which are re-grantmaking institutions themselves. Typically their grants went to smaller, community-based organizations. If there is an agenda for connecting foundations to a structural racism analysis,

some practical effort should be devoted to community foundations since they may be the grantmakers most likely to be supporting grassroots racial justice efforts.

Furthermore, studies of “social justice grantmaking” find the issue of race or racism submerged, making the social action or social justice subject-matter categories of limited use in an analysis of foundations’ racial justice grantmaking. While it is certainly true that some foundation staff use the language of civic engagement and civic participation to avoid potential wariness around the more politicized “organizing” term, the effect is to skew the actual picture of support (and, of course, to mask the value of organizing itself). Does the analysis change if the focus is shifted from community organizing to the broader category of civic engagement? Oddly enough, “civic engagement” also does not rank as a categorical grant subject in the Foundation Center online database. Therefore, we adopted two broad, but definitely narrower, subjects of grantmaking used by the Foundation Center: advocacy for civil and human rights, and voter education.

With national elections approaching, the nation’s most significant barometer of foundation support for civic engagement might be foundation grantmaking addressing voting rights, voter education and registration. Given that recent state policies aimed at suppressing voter registration and voter turnout² have already resulted in perhaps a 5-7 percent decline of Latino and African American registered voters between the 2008 and 2010 elections,³ foundation support for voting rights is almost by definition a statement in support of racial justice. At the very least, it can be viewed as a potential “vote” in favor of racial justice if the grantmaker considered voting rights through a structural racism lens. (See Charts D and E for table of voter education grantmakers and recipients.)

The list of grants shows voter education support increasing for organizations working with Latinos and Asian Americans, in particular. These efforts include local organizations such as the Denver-based Latina Initiative and the San Francisco-based Chinese American Voters Education Committee. Importantly, grantmakers that do not report their grants on their 990s or supply grant lists to the Foundation Center, and grantmakers such as the Democracy Alliance that give to 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations, are not reflected on this list. Nonetheless, while grantmaking for voter education and voter registration targeted to racial and ethnic groups may be on the rise, it is surpassed by more general voter education rights’ work, and programs

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targeted to groups such as women and young people without reference to their racial or ethnic identities.

The overlapping dimensions of community organizing, civic engagement, civil rights, and voter education programs and grantmaking are intuitively obvious. The challenge for advocates of racial and ethnic justice is to deploy a structural racism lens so that the targeting of grantmaking and program development occurs in a way to help remediate the persistent racial injustices in public governance.

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¹ Examples include the Nellie Mae Educational Foundation’s “The Strengths & Challenges of Community Organizing as an Education Reform Strategy,” 2011; the French American Charitable Trust’s “Giving More, Making Change: A Journey in Progressive Grant Making,” 2011; the California Endowment’s “Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them,” 2009; the Ford Foundation’s GrantCraft report “Funding Community Organizing: Social Change Through Civic Participation,” 2009; and the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s “Sustaining Neighborhood Change: The Power of Resident Leadership, Social Networks, and Community Mobilization,” 2008, just to name a few.

² Keyes, Scott, Ian Millhiser, Tobin Van Osten, and Abraham White. “Voter Suppression 101: How Conservatives Are Conspiring to Disenfranchise Millions of Americans.” AmericanProgress.org. Center for American Progress, April 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/voter_suppression.pdf>

³ Thompson, Krissah. “Voter registration down among Hispanics, blacks.” WashingtonPost.com. The Washington Post Company, 04 May 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/voter-registration-down-among-hispanics-blacks/2012/05/04/gIQAQqEY1T_print.html>

Intersection of Community Organizing and Racial Justice Funding

Chart A

Top Foundation Grantmakers Making Grants Described as Community Organizing Grants, circa 2009-12

California Endowment (\$5,392,295)
Ford Foundation (\$4,904,000)
C.S. Mott Foundation (\$3,079,000)
Marguerite Casey Foundation (\$2,032,500)
New York Foundation (\$1,158,620)
Foundation to Promote Open Society (\$800,000)
David and Lucile Packard Foundation (\$670,000)
Annie E. Casey Foundation (\$610,000)
Surdna Foundation (\$597,500)
Minneapolis Foundation (\$560,000)
Nathan Cummings Foundation (\$415,000)
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$398,804)
San Francisco Foundation (\$354,000)
State Street Foundation (\$350,000)

Chart B

Major Recipients of Grants Described as Community Organizing Grants, circa 2009-12

Center for Community Change (\$1,660,000)
PICO National Network (\$1,126,260)
Kentucky Coalition (\$1,085,000)
Washington Interfaith Network (\$600,000)
Community Catalyst (\$350,000)
Direct Action Research Training Center (\$290,000)
Mixteco-Indigena Community Organizing Project, Oxnard, Calif. (\$278,640)
Padres Unidos, Denver, Colo. (\$275,000)
Courage Center in Minneapolis (\$250,000)
Inland Congregations United for Change, San Bernardino, Calif. (\$218,854)
People and Congregations Together for Stockton (\$211,000)
Children's Defense Fund (\$200,000)

Chart C

Top Foundations with Racial Justice or Racial Equity in Grant Descriptions circa 2009-12

Ford Foundation (\$12,447,158)
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$11,048,000)
Atlantic Philanthropies (\$3,200,000)
Arcus Foundation (\$1,165,000)
Annie E. Casey Foundation (\$1,027,554)
Foundation to Promote Open Society (\$1,025,000)
Marguerite Casey Foundation (\$550,000)
Public Welfare Foundation (\$415,000)
Open Society Institute (\$400,000)
C.S. Mott Foundation (\$395,000)
Surdna Foundation (\$315,000)
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (\$284,400)
Proteus Fund (\$275,000)
California Endowment (\$265,900)
Minneapolis Foundation (\$260,000)

Chart D

Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2007-10

Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2007

Carnegie Corporation \$4,216,800
James Irvine Foundation \$3,060,000
Ford Foundation \$2,620,800
Open Society Institute \$2,545,000
Pew \$1,341,000
Educational Foundation of America \$846,000
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation \$784,600

Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2008

NoVo Foundation \$5,000,000 (Single grant to the New World Foundation for New Majority Fund)
Ford Foundation \$4,205,000
Open Society Institute \$3,710,808
Carnegie Corporation \$3,075,000
Cedar Tree Foundation \$2,350,000
Bauman Family Foundation \$1,940,000
Educational Foundation of America \$1,085,000

Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2009

James Irvine Foundation \$3,741,000
Foundation to Promote Open Society \$2,500,000
Open Society Institute \$1,124,880
Carnegie Corporation \$1,115,000
Tides Foundation \$1,113,757
Joyce Foundation \$1,085,000
Ford Foundation \$850,000

Top Voter Education Grantmakers 2010

Ford Foundation \$6,734,094
Vanguard Charitable Endowment \$6,154,729
Carnegie Corporation \$3,050,000
Foundation to Promote Open Society \$3,009,951
James Irvine Foundation \$1,370,000
Joyce Foundation \$1,310,000
W.K. Kellogg Foundation \$1,035,069

Chart E

Top Recipients of Voter Education Grants 2007-10

Top recipients 2007

Center for Community Change \$1,275,000
Kentucky Coalition \$1,100,000
Project Vote \$1,073,500
Women's Voices Women Vote \$1,023,332
DC Vote \$776,500
George Washington University \$753,900
SPARC \$746,350
Brennan Center \$660,000
Strategic Concepts \$650,000
California Voter Foundation \$641,000
North Carolina Center for Voter Education \$615,000
Citizenship Education Fund \$610,000

Top recipients 2008

New World Foundation \$5,000,000 (for New Majority Fund)
Project Vote \$2,070,000
Women's Voices Women Vote \$1,685,000 (plus \$420,000 for action fund)
Brennan Center \$915,000
Praxis Project \$900,000

Center for Community Change \$850,000
State Voices \$833,000
Progressive Technology Project \$825,000
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$703,000
League of Women Voters Education Fund \$696,163
Rock the Vote \$655,500
DC Vote \$639,500

Top recipients 2009

State Voices \$1,300,000
Asian Pacific Legal Center of Southern California \$880,000
University of California \$735,000
Democracy USA \$725,000
League of Women Voters of California \$676,500
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$636,000
Progressive Technology Project \$600,000
DC Vote \$573,750
Women's Voices Women Vote \$550,000
Project Vote \$522,446
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights \$521,000
Pew \$500,000

Top recipients 2010

Women's Voices Women Vote \$3,775,000
Rock the Vote \$2,070,000
State Voices \$1,893,000
Center for Community Change \$1,300,000
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation \$1,288,380
Americans for Campaign Reform \$1,000,000
League of Young Voters Education Fund \$940,795
PowerPAC \$940,000
Voto Latino \$745,000
League of Women Voters Education Fund \$680,729
Brennan Center \$600,000
Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project \$520,000