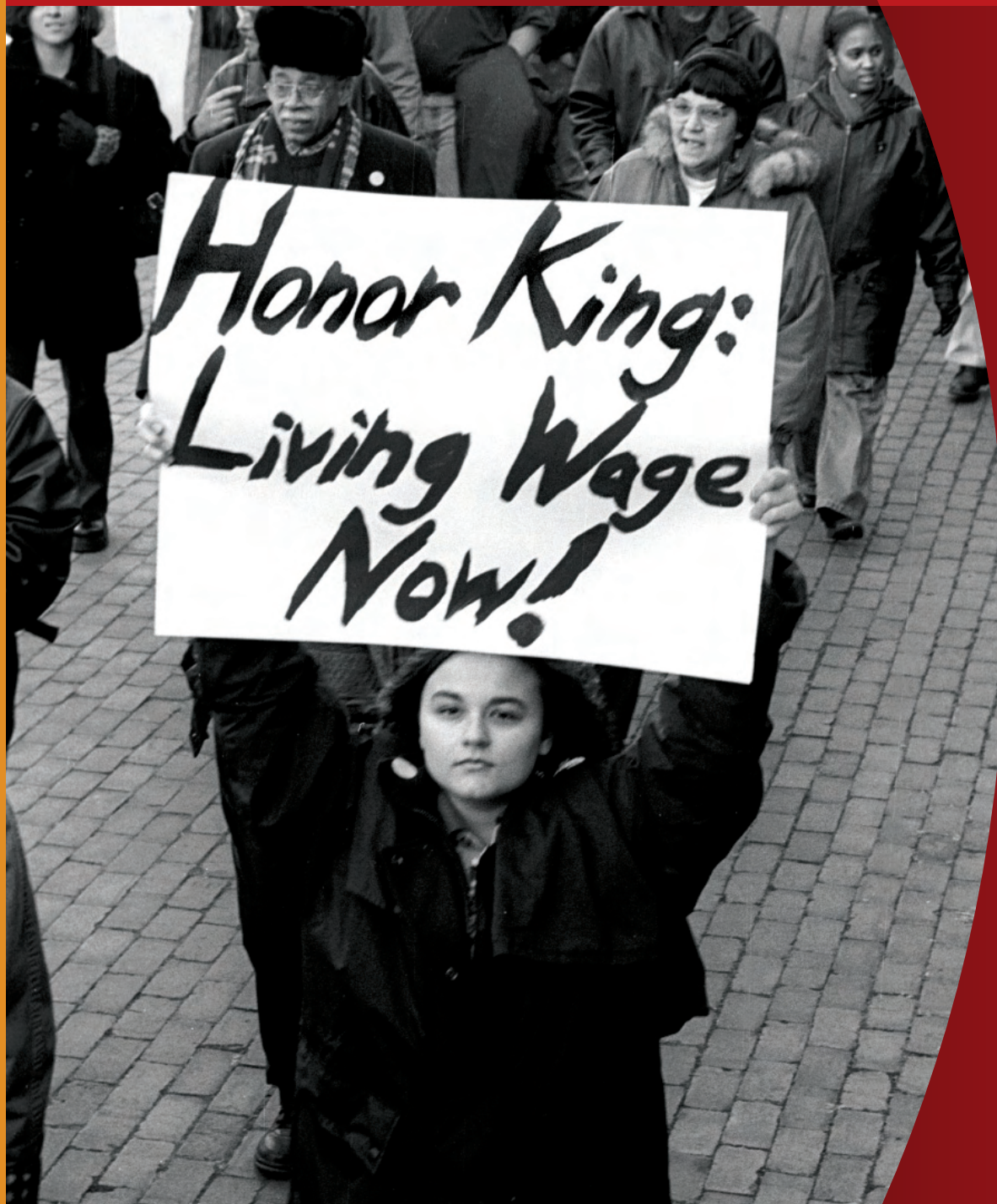


ON MESSAGE:

Using Strategic Communications to Advance
Social Change in Black and Latino Communities

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHILANTHROPY



A Philanthropic Partnership
for Black Communities

HIP Hispanics in Philanthropy

April 2008

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Foreword

DIANA CAMPOAMOR

We find ourselves at a tipping point, but one that we must propel ourselves. We can use it to move forward, to advance our common agendas and to advocate on behalf of our communities, our common community. Philanthropy can, and should, make use of this opportunity by searching for those that are thinking strategically and acting thoughtfully to affect real change. We are part of one, and although we feel stronger affinities to some communities than others, we experience similarities, and we promote alliances within our communities to break down barriers and challenges.

The Black-Brown alliances that you will find in these pages are testament to such successes. Here, organizations have stopped working in silos and have recognized the power in collaboration. Not only have they worked together to shift the debate, but they have been strategic in how they do so. The leaders depicted in these portraits are examples of those who have recognized the current challenges confronting Latino and Black communities, especially surrounding how our communities are depicted in the media, and have created positive messages that promote alliances as opposed to exposing divisions.

Strategic communications is an essential part of policy and advocacy work. Many grantees have noted the effective use of communications and media by the opposition and therefore want to control the media and the messages about their communities. Immigration has notoriously been a wedge that has divided Black and Latino communities. Recognizing this, organizations are working to produce positive messages about the effect that immigration has on our country. Such messages are in turn used to advocate for policy change for our communities rife with inequalities.

Hispanics in Philanthropy funds capacity-building initiatives. We have recently begun advocacy initiatives in three of our sites where our grantees have come together and recognized the need to organize themselves around a common goal. It is innovative work both coming from and taking into account the grassroots. Organizations that recognize communications as an essential activity to successfully accomplish their goals should have access to support that allows them to do so. As Catalina Nieto notes in this report, “More than just funding programs, grantmakers should support the building of a strong *organization* to better serve our communities.”

Just yesterday, a colleague sent me a report on a multilingual poll that exposed the tensions that exist between minority communities. Concurrently I was reading this report for the first time. Although it is important to recognize the source of our strife, I felt impacted by the negative messages of one and the positive messages of the other. I urge you to “flip the script.” Use these messages that divide us to bring us together. This partnership with the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) has pushed us beyond our own focus. At a time when media exposes the divisions within our communities, we must tip the scales the other way. We aim to bridge the gaps that divide us, confront the challenges that face us, and create alliances that bond us. We cannot do it alone though. I push you to think big, to take risks, and to invest in high-impact models that will positively affect those whom we are all fighting to support.

Diana Campoamor
President, Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP)

Introduction

Soon after the turn of the twenty-first century, America reached a demographic milestone: the nation's Latino population caught up with and began to surpass the percentage of Blacks living in the United States. The country found itself with two significant ethnic minority groups. Latinos, who had previously settled in a limited number of states for many decades, began to disperse, appearing as fast-growing minorities in states such as Tennessee, North Carolina, Iowa, and Georgia. Meanwhile, in urban areas with established Black and Latino communities, the steady influx of immigrants from Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean boosted Latino economic power, civic participation, and political influence—sometimes acting as rivals to or collaborators with the emerging priorities of Black America.

In cities and towns across the country, relationships between Blacks and Latinos have been fraught with fear, suspension, and racism—but also nurtured by camaraderie, shared experiences, and mutual struggles. While the media, talk radio, and political commentators often take the opportunity to highlight and expose the divisions between Blacks and Latinos in the United States, they seldom give ample air time and ink to the mutual interests, projects, and joint efforts led by Blacks and Latinos to improve the quality of life for their children, families, and communities.

Further, the mainstream media rarely tells the stories of Black and Latino nonprofit and advocacy groups that have been at the forefront of developing strategies for connection and collaboration between the two communities. These groups—often with limited resources—have sought to encourage and strengthen joint action, while creating opportunities for Blacks, Latinos, new immigrants, and other groups to face the social and economic issues that affect their well-being.

In fact, several innovative organizations are taking the lead to be effective communicators of their own messages, making strategic use of community media, ethnic press, campaigns, grassroots organizing, and a host of other tools to build support and public will for issues that matter most to Blacks and Latinos. Gone are the days when most Black

WHAT'S THE VALUE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS?

Strategic communications can provide a way for nonprofits to connect to a larger audience, provide greater visibility to issues of importance for communities of color, highlight and encourage inter-group collaboration and dialogue, and inform the general public. Strategic communications calls for nonprofits to take a comprehensive approach to connecting with their many constituencies. “Strategic communications does not consist of sending out an occasional press release or publishing an Op-Ed once a year,” observe the authors of *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits*. “It means that an organization treats media relations and communications as important, fully integrated, consistent, and ongoing functions and invests resources in it.”¹

It, according to The Strategic Press Information Network (SPIN) Project, is also about “maximizing available resources and positioning your organization to be proactive instead of reactive.”² Strategic communications is not simply about the ability to express ideas either. It is the art of expressing these ideas through the science of transmitting information in effective ways. The goal is not just to deliver messages but to motivate your target group to act on your behalf.³

Unfortunately, many nonprofits lack the resources to adequately communicate their stories to the general public, the media, key decision-makers, or their stakeholders. They are not able to shape the media portrayal of their organizations, issues, campaigns, or communities. They are unable to make known to the public their good

work in community organizing, policy advocacy, cross-cultural dialogue, and coalition building. Nonprofits often find philanthropic support to serve and to organize people, but seldom to organize and deliver their messages.

Strategic communications has been utilized to:

- ❖ Counter negative media portrayals, news coverage, and commentary on the contributions, needs, and aspirations of people of color
- ❖ Bring issues of concern to communities of color before the public
- ❖ Encourage and mobilize individuals and organizations that share those concerns
- ❖ Shift the public and media conversations around communities of color and their concerns
- ❖ Win editorial endorsement of policy stands taken by communities of color
- ❖ Bring about policy change in key areas of benefit to communities of color.

By utilizing strategic communications in collaborative efforts, Blacks and Latinos have:

- ❖ Demonstrated the value of cross-ethnic collaboration to both communities
- ❖ Instilled in participants an appreciation and sense of solidarity with the “other” group
- ❖ Shown the public, policymakers, and the media the commitment and the capacity of the two communities to work together.

and Latino advocates relied primarily on mainstream media outlets to get their concerns across, build a constituency, and inform policymakers. Not only are these innovators changing how the average American understands the art of communications, but they are also changing how the nonprofit community makes use of communications to advocate for changes in local practices and policies, raise awareness on ill-advised legislation, and influence investments in under-served neighborhoods.

Armed with strategic communications as an integral component of their social change efforts, several community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and coalitions in Black and Latino communities are experiencing noteworthy success.

This publication aims to highlight examples of efforts involving Black- and Latino-serving nonprofit organizations that utilize strategic communications to enhance their advocacy work and improve opportunities in communities of color. Strategic communications has long been used by the private sector, by government, and by special interest groups to win public and legislative support to advance their goals. In the last decade, with the growing ubiquity of the Internet, broadband communications, and user-friendly Web applications, industrious nonprofits have been able to create and transmit information through video, photos, blogs, and audio recordings in ways that have changed the landscape and power dynamics of communications culture. Their ability to successfully integrate communications into their policy, organizing, and advocacy work shines a spotlight on what it takes for nonprofits to build their influence with key decision-makers and serve as a powerful voice for under-served communities, while engaging Blacks and Latinos as important stakeholders in the process. Yet, their successes also illuminate the tremendous challenges and roadblocks that nonprofits in Black and Latino communities often face when attempting to secure the resources, time, and technical assistance to sustain strategic communications over the long term.

In lifting up the stories of promising practices, this publication seeks to engage philanthropy in a national dialogue about the role that funders can play to support the efforts of nonprofits that work to improve services and policies impacting Black, Latino, and other under-served communities. For every success story of nonprofits that have been able to leverage communications as a tool to shift opinions and change policies, there are countless other examples of

¹ Bonk, Kathy, Henry Griggs, and Emily Tynes, *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits* (New York: Jossey Bass, Inc., 1999).

² See The Spin Project, *Strategic Communications Planning* (2005), retrieved on 17 December 2007 at <http://www.spinproject.org/downloads/StrategicCommunications.pdf>.

³ For a useful discussion of strategic communications and nonprofit strategy, see Patterson, Sally J, *Generating Buzz: Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Boards* (Washington, DC: BoardSource, 2006).

nonprofits with committed leadership, quality services, and exemplary advocacy practices that remain at the margins of political and community transformation. The publication's focus on organizations that have experienced a measure of success is anchored by the complex issues at play in helping nonprofits make better use of communications in their day-to-day work and in encouraging grantmakers to prioritize the allocation of resources for the communications efforts of the nonprofits that they fund.

ON MESSAGE is informed by the findings of a nationwide scan to identify groups taking the lead to integrate strategic communications as part of their advocacy, organizing, and social change efforts in Black and Latino communities. Conducted by the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) and Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP), the scan included an analysis of emerging research in nonprofit communications; a cataloging of the notable successes of several nonprofits and coalitions across the country; an online survey of grantmakers with an interest in high-priority issues in Black and Latino communities; and follow-up interviews with nonprofit leaders and the grantmakers funding their work. The scan also included information gathered under the guidance of a national advisory committee of media practitioners, grantmakers, advocates, researchers, and nonprofit leaders who volunteered, at the request of ABFE and HIP, to provide structure and lend leadership to the research.

The nationwide scan grew out of an emerging partnership between the boards from both ABFE and HIP, whose members met together, with initial grant support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to develop an initiative to better engage Black and Latino philanthropic and nonprofit leaders in joint dialogue, planning, and civic engagement opportunities. In the course of their joint discussions, the boards of these two affinity groups identified two areas of common interest: 1) successful collaboration involving Black and Latino nonprofit organizations; and 2) the use of strategic communications as a tool to enhance community advocacy on issues of concern to both communities.

As board members from HIP and ABFE reflected on emerging trends and identified common ground for collaboration, there was compelling evidence that, despite conventional belief, a number of major challenges facing Blacks and Latinos could be best addressed by working in alliance with one another. Further, strategic communications stood out as an essential part of sustaining and fortifying the community advocacy and policy wins that were critical to the well-being of Blacks and Latinos in under-served cities and towns across the country. Increasingly, coalitions and campaigns making some headway on priorities faced by Blacks and Latinos have witnessed the impact of strategic communications on issues ranging from education to underemployment to more controversial topics like universal healthcare and immigration.

Key questions set the stage for further inquiry through the first phase of a nationwide scan:

- ❖ What are the promising practices and lessons learned from Black- and Latino-led organizations that have been able to successfully control how their messages, concerns, and policy recommendations are transmitted, shared, and absorbed by their target audiences?
- ❖ Are there organizations that have been successful at both building alliances across Black and Latino communities and demonstrating the value of cross-ethnic collaboration to shift policy and public will? How has strategic communications played a role in galvanizing Black and Latino communities, while educating mainstream decision-makers on the need for social change?
- ❖ What lessons can philanthropy learn from innovative nonprofits, advocacy groups, and coalitions that have been able to shift the public and media conversations around communities of color and their concerns?

- ❖ What is the take-away for ABFE and HIP members, as well as members of the larger philanthropic community, who are grappling with how to integrate support for strategic communications into their grantmaking portfolio?

As part of their joint dialogue and planning, the ABFE and HIP board leadership agreed on the need for philanthropy to increase support for effective joint efforts by Blacks and Latinos, advocating for an intentional emphasis on the allocation of resources for strategic communications. Through experience, however, they recognized that comprehensive communications and media strategies—which can be perceived as including “advertising, branding, or messaging” for the purpose of social change—represent challenges for some funders. While philanthropy in general sees value in effective efforts to improve life in Black, Latino, and other historically under-served communities, only a limited number of philanthropic institutions currently support approaches that have demonstrated significant impact and potential. With the release of this publication, ABFE and HIP hope they can inspire the philanthropic community to acknowledge and learn from the successes that have paved the way, as they simultaneously take note of the great deal of work that still needs to be done.

The following profiles include projects from California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, New York, Tennessee, Virginia, and at the national level. By no means does this publication seek to be a comprehensive review of the amazing work underway. There are equally impactful stories not mentioned in these pages—ones that also offer inspiration and exemplify what can be done when Blacks and Latinos work together to set their own agendas and carve a place for themselves as powerful voices in their communities. We offer this publication as part of a larger dialogue to connect grantmakers to resources and tools that can help them be more effective at sustaining the work of the nonprofit sector over the long term.

Note on Terminology: Decisions to make use of terms such as “Blacks or African Americans” and “Hispanics or Latinos” have long been fodder for good conversation and lively debate. Preferences for appropriate racial or ethnic terminology are often deeply influenced by regional backgrounds, identity politics, generational influences, and other considerations. Given this reality, in ON MESSAGE, we have chosen to use the terms Black(s) and Latino(s) throughout the publication. This usage underscores an effort to provide consistent language across the featured profiles, while acknowledging how the terms most often appear in the communications materials of ABFE and HIP, respectively.

“Disrupting the Master Narrative”: Common Challenges and Promising Practices

“It is detrimental to all of us when we are not constantly challenging the media and reframing public debates in ways that bridge racial divides in language that speaks to all races and ethnic groups,” John A. Powell writes in his foreword to the 2006 communications guide *Talking the Walk*. To craft effective social and racial justice movements we must, he says, disrupt the master narrative.

Indeed, media matters. Television, radio, print media, and the Internet are instrumental in shaping public opinion, moving public policy, and framing the public debate. The media is today’s public square; it selects the terms we use and controls, to a large degree, what gets discussed and what falls aside. As media outlets are increasingly owned by a few corporate powers, the diversity of perspectives has narrowed; only 12 percent of those who control messages in the newsroom are people of color.⁴

The organizations and campaigns profiled in the following pages have dedicated resources and attention to this challenge. They have used strategic communications to advance their advocacy and organizing work and to strengthen ties between Black and Latino communities. Most have succeeded—in ways large and small—in reframing the dominant messages and increasing the diversity of voices and perspectives in the mix.

COMMON CHALLENGES

The profiled organizations tackle a variety of social issues—from workers’ rights to housing and city planning to the depiction of young people in mainstream media. Yet, they share many similar challenges, which they address in innovative ways. In our discussions with the leaders of these movements, and with the funders who support their efforts, several common themes emerged.

Lack of Dedicated Resources. Nearly all of the organizations featured in these pages cite limited resources and funding as the single greatest challenge to their communications strategies. Few organizations receive funding specifically for strategic communications. Effective communications work requires dedicated staff members who are properly trained and supported, adequate funding, and often outside assistance—especially for small grassroots organizations with little or no communications experience. Identifying target audiences, crafting and testing effective messages, setting and assessing benchmarks, and recalibrating strategies require skills, time, and funds. So too does reaching the media, developing press lists, and telling compelling success stories.

⁴ For more information, see, for example, Cutting, Hunter, and Makani Themba-Nixon, *Talking the Walk: A Communications Guide for Racial Justice* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006).

“Strategic communication is only valuable when you have dedicated resources and can dedicate capacity,” suggests Sushma Sheth, the communications director of the Miami Workers Center. “Without this capacity, it’s difficult for organizations to integrate strategic communications work into their work or make effective use of resources from national intermediaries. So much of strategic communications is tied to context, to regional political dynamics and relationships.”

Makani Themba-Nixon, executive director of The Praxis Project, echoes this sentiment. “Organizations may hire a firm to develop a report or handout, and those are useful—but for folks who are stretched with working to literally save lives, figuring out how to incorporate these documents into the work, without staffing and support over time, is extremely difficult.”

Several organizations note that they could benefit dramatically from funding and technical assistance to measure outcomes and link them to the communications campaigns. Collecting data on output—the number of ads or news stories placed, for example—is relatively easy (although not all groups know what to capture and how), as are concrete legislative or regulatory victories. Documenting shifts in public attitude is far more challenging, and few initiatives have the funding or know-how to move beyond anecdotal information by, for example, undertaking opinion polls or focus groups at strategic points in a campaign.

Corporate Media Ownership. Media ownership is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations. As a result, the diversity of voices and locally relevant content suffers. Housing policy, urban development, education funding and access, poverty, and public supports—these are just a few of the critical social issues that are debated first in the media, then drafted into policy.

The under-representation of people of color in mainstream media is widely documented. Here is just a sampling of numbers: while Blacks make up roughly 13 percent of the population, majority Black-owned outlets (with at least 51 percent Black ownership) account for only about 4 percent of radio stations, 5 percent of television stations, and 2 percent of newspapers. Latinos comprise more than 13 percent of the overall U.S. population, but their media ownership numbers are similarly low: they have majority ownership in less than 4 percent of radio stations, 6 percent of television stations, and only about 1.5 percent of newspapers.⁵ In short, the numbers are out of line.

A History of Inequity and Bias. Organizations and funders also note that the opposition—stakeholders whose agendas seek to divide Black and Latino communities—has a far better track record of effective communications. These groups are often better at developing and delivering clear, compelling messages and sound bytes that, while they may fall short of definitely winning the hearts and minds of the public, at least earn air time or mention in the mainstream media.

The Praxis Project, a technical assistance provider to several community organizing and advocacy groups across the country, has documented a long-term lack of progressive infrastructure and funding, particularly in Black and Latino communities. Further, its research suggests that Black and Latino organizations not only share a history of common struggle, but also a history of being undermined in mainstream media and discourse.⁶

As an example of how these findings by The Praxis Project and others play out in real-time, several leaders of the featured organizations cite deliberate efforts to encourage conservative Black faith leaders to rally against immigration and immigrants. The New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice and

5 Beresteau, Arie, and Paul B. Ellickson, “Minority and Female Ownership in Media Enterprises” (Duke University, 2007); retrieved on 17 December 2007 at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-07-3470A8.pdf.

6 Visit The Praxis Project’s Information Resource Center at <http://www.thepraxisproject.org/irc/index.html>.

the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) point to evidence that Minute Men have met with Black community leaders to spread the message that undocumented immigrants are their “biggest enemy.”

“There has been an attempt to use immigration as a wedge issue to drive the communities apart and that’s what we’re trying to draw attention to and counter,” adds Jessica Baba, a former public awareness coordinator at the Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition.

“The voices of support are important, but frequently the voices in opposition are organized and quite loud,” says Kevin Jackson, executive director of the Chicago Rehab Network, the organization that helped launch the affordable housing campaign Housing Illinois. “To change the debate, we knew we would have to pull together a new toolkit.”

Whatever the issue—environmental justice, juvenile justice, immigration, or housing—there are also pre-existing biases against Black and Latino spokespeople that must be taken into account, according to Malkia Cyril, executive director of the The Center for Media Justice (formerly Youth Media Council). “The right has had an entire strategy of wedging many of the issues that these groups are working on and using racism and other fears.”

“Most communications strategies don’t consider how to confront structural racism and other forms of oppression, and lack clear ways to address the biases that Black and Latino institutions must confront in order to do effective communications work,” Cyril adds.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Fortunately, these common challenges are met with innovative responses and strategies that speak volumes about the impact that strategic communications can have on shaping messages and influencing policy priorities and community action.

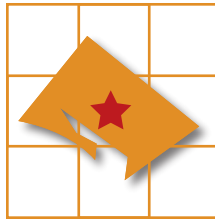
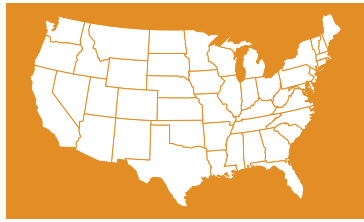
The following pages highlight promising practices from nine organizations—The Praxis Project, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Chicago Rehab Network/Housing Illinois, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, Tenants and Workers United, Miami Workers Center, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, SouthWest Organizing Project, and The Center for Media Justice. Each of these profiles shares important lessons for leveraging communications to advance social change in Black, Latino, and other under-served communities.

We begin our profiles with The Praxis Project, a DC-based communications technical assistance provider, as a way to frame both the opportunities and challenges of linking communications with community advocacy and alliance building. As a partner and consultant to several efforts mentioned in these pages, The Praxis Project offers insight on how this work can have an impact across the country.

The section continues with profiles of promising practices from eight efforts led by nonprofits, coalitions, and advocacy groups in various regional and local communities. Our goal here is to provide examples of how successful communications campaigns have played out “on the ground” and within specific cultural, political, and community contexts to offer a unique set of challenges and opportunities.

We conclude the section with a profile on The Center for Media Justice, which, as in the case of The Praxis Project, offers technical assistance and capacity supports to grassroots efforts. As a profile on a “media action center” that focuses on empowering youth, The Center for Media Justice and its work with various networks of youth suggest what lies ahead as organizations and alliances disrupt the “master” narrative and redefine how community organizing, advocacy, and communications are used to advance social change in Black and Latino communities.

NONPROFIT OR ADVOCACY GROUP	DESCRIPTION	TARGET AREA
THE PRAXIS PROJECT	A nonprofit organization that helps communities use media and policy advocacy to advance health equity and justice.	National/U.S.
CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY	A coalition of parent organizations, community school boards, and advocacy groups that works to reform New York State’s school finance system to ensure “a sound basic education” for all students in New York City and other low-income communities.	New York City, New York New York/Statewide
HOUSING ILLINOIS	A coalition of housing advocates, civic organizations, and financial institutions that uses market research to develop a communications outreach campaign to raise awareness and mobilize the public will to increase affordable housing throughout Chicago and the state of Illinois.	Chicago, Illinois/ Statewide
NEW ORLEANS WORKERS’ CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE	A community-based, multi-racial collaboration to organize workers, develop Black and Latino leadership for workers’ rights, and ensure an equitable rebuilding that creates an improved infrastructure for worker justice in New Orleans.	New Orleans, Louisiana
TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED	A grassroots coalition that works to build alliances among low-income residents in Northern Virginia—particularly Latinos/as, African Americans, tenants, immigrants, women, and youth—and to raise overall public awareness about housing, wage, and education inequities in the region.	Six Counties and Jurisdictions in Northern Virginia
MIAMI WORKERS CENTER	A community-based strategy and action center in Miami that aims to help low-income Black and Latino communities develop grassroots leadership capacity through aggressive community organizing campaigns and education programs.	Miami, Florida
TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION	A collaboration that works to give minority and low-income communities a unified voice, to combat the use of immigration as a “wedge issue” to divide communities, and to create an atmosphere where immigrants are viewed as positive contributors to the state.	Tennessee/Statewide
SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT	A statewide multi-racial, community-based organization that uses strategic communications and community education campaigns to give minority and low-income New Mexicans a voice in social, health, economic, and environmental decisions.	New Mexico/Statewide
THE CENTER FOR MEDIA JUSTICE (FORMERLY YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL)	A media strategy and action center that strengthens the media capacity and communications power of youth and communities of color. It also emphasizes national media reform to promote equity in access.	California National/U.S.



Building Progressive Infrastructure and Alliances

THE PRAXIS PROJECT

“**W**e’re not walking into a vacuum; there’s a reason so many of us are focused on Black-Brown alliances,” says Makani Themba-Nixon, executive director of The Praxis Project, a nonprofit organization that helps communities use media and policy advocacy to advance health equity and justice. “You don’t communicate just because of the present; you communicate because of a problem, something that’s gone wrong historically that you’re trying to fix.”

To Themba-Nixon’s mind, a significant problem is a decades-long strategic effort to undermine and divide communities of color through negative messages in mainstream media. Progressive, minority political infrastructure and institutions have been eroded, and this gap is compounded by the fact that Black and Latino organizations often lack dedicated communications staff for strategic communications efforts.

“Organizations may hire a firm to develop a report or handout, and those are useful—but for folks who are stretched with working to literally save lives, figuring out how to incorporate these documents into the work, without staffing and support over time, is extremely difficult,” says Themba-Nixon.

For this reason, The Praxis Project provides local organizations with both the research and the support—financial and technical—to undertake effective communications campaigns.

Its work includes:

- ❖ Serving as a coordinating hub and managing partner for the communications efforts of issue-based collaboratives
- ❖ Helping groups develop and sustain shared messages through trainings, toolkits, and technical assistance
- ❖ Keeping track of the shared vision to ensure that progressive messages at all levels reinforce one another over the long term.

The Praxis Project currently leads the communications component for the Katrina Information Network (KIN), a nationwide collaborative of organizations and individuals who aim to raise awareness about and find solutions to the situation in the U.S. Gulf states, forge alliances among low-income communities of color, and promote better policies for communities and hurricane survivors. The KIN website serves as a

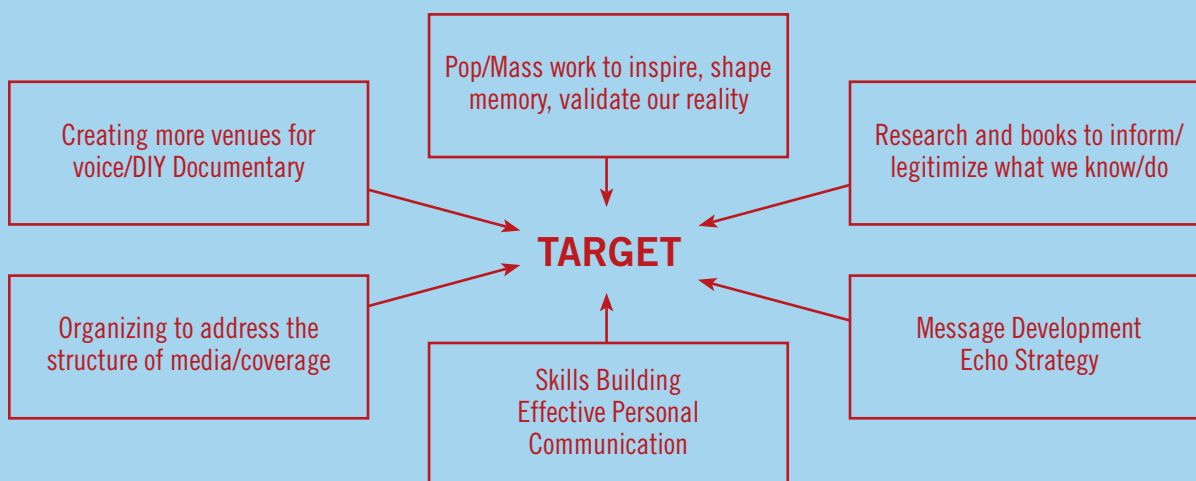
FUNDER'S TAKE

As technical assistance providers, organizations such as The Praxis Project can serve as resources for philanthropic institutions that are committed to helping their grantees be more effective at strategic communications. “I view The Praxis Project as an organization that is effective at developing infrastructure within the community for advocacy efforts,” says John Govea, a senior program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “They’re very effective at being able to work with local community advocates and train them not only on advocacy tools and media approaches, but on specific issues of interest to the funding community.”

The Praxis Project and other similar technical assistance providers, for example, generally work in partnership with grantmaking institutions in at least three ways: (1) as collaborative planners and advisors for initiatives that organizations are developing, (2) as intermediaries for supporting grassroots efforts of grantees, their partners, and community stakeholders, and (3) as trainers and consultants in various venues to shape knowledge and competencies regarding best practices in strategic communications and community organizing processes.

Govea suggests that The Praxis Project stands out because it has a proven track record of understanding how to make strategic communications work within a local context. “What excites me most about The Praxis Project is its staff’s ability to work with communities and really make them players in local policy,” he notes. “In order to achieve and maintain policy change, you really need support from the grassroots level and I think that’s where they shine.”

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: ALL LEVELS ARE KEY



Courtesy of The Praxis Project

communications hub that offers reporters, media, and nonprofit groups relevant news, analysis, legislative updates, and calls to action in support of fair and equitable policies for communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina since 2005.

With its partners, The Praxis Project has built the KIN membership list to approximately 100,000 people, each of whom has committed to sending one email a week to policymakers and other key stakeholders to raise awareness about local needs. The Praxis Project has also placed spokespeople in more than 30 national and international media outlets to help shape and, when necessary, reframe public discussions on the rebuilding of the Gulf states.

“We’re not walking into a vacuum; there’s a reason so many of us are focusing on Black-Brown alliances and not some other task. You don’t communicate just because of the present. You communicate because something historical that has gone wrong.”

MAKANI THEMBA-NIXON

*Executive Director
The Praxis Project*

Over the years, The Praxis Project has gained a reputation among grassroots leaders and funders alike for its leadership in helping the field integrate communications with grassroots organizing and community advocacy campaigns. Even prior to the launch of recent projects like the KIN Network, The Praxis Project was instrumental in providing guidance to several state and local policy campaigns, including the highly regarded Fighting Back on the Budget, a three-year effort to help groups respond to state and local budget cuts that threatened programs and community supports. With hands-on technical assistance to coalitions in 17 states, The Praxis Project created the Fighting Back on the Budget Toolkit and helped stakeholders place stories and Opinion Editorials in progressive and mainstream outlets by connecting state coalitions to the Public News Service, a nonprofit media reform group and syndicate.

Despite its success at helping groups make effective use of news and mass media outlets, however, its work is anchored in the belief that to be truly strategic, communication efforts must take into account all levels of interaction, large- and small-scale (see diagram).

“Strategic communications is about the question: How do we work with and shape institutions where people get their information and determine what it means? Schools, churches, news outlets—all of these together are saying things to the community about who people are, what they need to be concerned about, and what has value. Addressing this is part of strategic communications,” argues Themba-Nixon.

The Praxis Project has been effective in creating easy-to-use guides that help community mobilizers target smaller-scale personal interactions and has worked with faith leaders to convey messages both in sermons and less-commonly targeted interactions, such as committee meetings, forums, and personal communications.

Further, no matter what the specific issue, The Praxis Project works to “echo” progressive themes that reflect shared long-term goals across its communications efforts—which helps build and reaffirm alliances between Black and Latino community groups. The Praxis Project works to embed these themes in all messages, regardless of the specific issue, to reinforce larger goals over time.

So even as a message serves the immediate strategic needs of a local organization, it can reflect, build upon, and buttress larger themes shared across a range of issues in the long term.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

The Praxis Project is a national nonprofit organization that builds partnerships with local groups to influence policymaking to address the underlying, systemic causes of community problems. It has a special commitment to closing the health gap faced by communities of color and forging alliances to advance health equity and sustainability in those communities.

SERVICE REGION

National

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Praxis Project receives support from the Twenty-First Century Foundation, the Frances Fund of the Solidago Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, among others.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES FROM THE PRAXIS PROJECT

- ❖ Race Framing Memo
- ❖ Berkeley Media Studies Group and The Praxis Project. *Meta Messaging: Framing Your Case and Reinforcing Your Allies*, Washington, D.C.: The Praxis Project, January 2005.
- ❖ Some Words on Media and Meaning
- ❖ A Good Framing Strategy
- ❖ Getting Ready for Media Advocacy
- ❖ Defensive Framing
- ❖ Media Planning Template

*Available in the Information Resource Center at www.thepraxisproject.org.

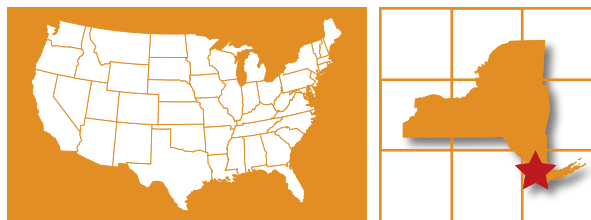
THE PRAXIS PROJECT

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LEADERSHIP AT THE PRAXIS PROJECT

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	37.5%	25%	37.5%
STAFF	50%	16.7%	33.3%



Framing (and Re-Framing) Complex Messages

CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY

In November 2006, after 13 years of litigating for school finance reform and accountability, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)—a coalition of parents, students, school boards, and education advocates—received its verdict from the New York State Court of Appeals.

Since its launch in 1993, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity had fought to challenge the state’s school funding practices on the grounds that they violated the state constitutional guarantee to a “sound basic education.” Led by a Black father, Robert Jackson—who later headed his school’s parents’ association and is now a New York City council member—the Campaign for Fiscal Equity plaintiffs represented an organic alliance of Latino and Black parents who felt that their children were not being prepared for the global economy.

The Court of Appeals affirmed the right to a sound basic education. But in the murky waters of politics and law, the line between win and lose can sometimes be hard to distinguish. Where earlier verdicts required the state to allocate \$5.6 billion over four years, the Court of Appeals set the level at \$1.93 billion and did not mandate all of the requested accountability measures.

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity knew the press would be quick to label the verdict a loss, but it had a plan at the ready. Before the ruling, it had mapped out three messages, one each for a clear win, a clear loss, and a “middle-ground decision” similar to the one handed down. The staff had also worked to get the 2006 gubernatorial candidates—including the winner, Eliot Spitzer—to publicly support CFE’s proposed funding level.

“We’d done the strategic communications work earlier, so we were able to focus on the Court’s affirmation of the right to sound education and to reframe the dollar amount as a minimum, discrediting that specific number. We had Spitzer on the record,” says Geri D. Palast, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s executive director. “In the end, people see this as a win, not a loss.”

FUNDER'S TAKE

“CFE was not a bull’s eye for our strategy,” acknowledges Robert Sherman, a program director at the Surdna Foundation. However, CFE’s inclusion of young people in its advocacy work fit well with Surdna’s funding priorities around youth civic participation. While CFE is not known specifically for its youth involvement, according to Sherman, “CFE actually worked hard to solicit the views of young people, and kept youth in 20 cities across New York state actively engaged around progress, setbacks, delays and prospects. In this way, communications and youth involvement fit within the Effective Citizenry portfolio at Surdna. Communications was not our leading interest, though it heartened us to see how successful it was. Youth involvement in the public deliberation was our core interest.”

As Sherman sees it, CFE’s success relied on two strategies: keeping the issues alive in the press over time to sustain public awareness and keeping the issues “front and center” for the decision-makers—judges and later lawmakers. Instead of losing interest as the process dragged on, the press continued to cover the issues because CFE turned “the delays and governmental intransigence” into “a reason [for the press] to continue focusing.”

Such smart tactics work well, but Sherman cautions that “strategic communications can only be as strong as the program being promoted and advanced. So, first look to what is being organized, what reforms or changes to public policy are being sought, and be sure that signing on to these is where a funder wishes to be.”



Next, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity launched the “100 Days to Educational Excellence” campaign in the days leading up to the 2007 State Education Budget negotiation. Working with Black, Latino, and other community groups, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity focused largely on Black and Latino press outlets to call for increased educational aid in under-funded districts across the state, along with stronger accountability standards. It also worked with Black and Latino members of the State Senate and Assembly, who held meetings in their home districts on behalf of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

The ultimate result was a record statewide increase in school funding and an accountability system that promotes smaller classes, full-day pre-kindergarten, teacher quality, after-school programs, and other reforms—which the state legislature called its Contracts for Excellence.

“When you talk about strategic communications, CFE was able to carry our brand through so that the Contracts are also known as ‘CFE,’” says Palast.

Like most organizations that focus on public policy and appropriations, CFE faced a significant challenge in turning complex funding and regulations into a message that resonated with its audiences. “You have to boil it down to key points and a clear message, so the press and the public understand how the technical and legal issues matter in people’s everyday lives,” observes Palast.

Using a simplified central message—a sound basic education for all students—the Campaign for Fiscal Equity outlined five specific purposes that should be funded in each school and encouraged its audience to demand data and measure these elements in their schools. It created multilingual tools to help them do so. The organization has also cultivated relationships with the press and has positioned itself as a credible source for answers on these complicated issues.

“You have to boil it down to key points and a clear message, so the press and the public understand how the technical and legal issues matter in people’s everyday lives.”

GERI D. PALAST

Executive Director

Campaign for Fiscal Equity

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

Founded in 1993, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, is a coalition of parent organizations, community school boards, concerned citizens, and advocacy groups. It seeks to reform New York State’s school finance system to ensure adequate resources and the opportunity for a sound basic education for all students in New York City. Its efforts also seek to help secure the same opportunity for students throughout the state who are not currently receiving a sound basic education.

SERVICE REGION

New York City, New York; State of New York

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity is funded by private philanthropies including The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Donors’ Education Collaborative, Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Tides Foundation, among others.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ As a result of the final ruling in its lawsuit against New York State, the 2007-2008 State Education Budget and Reform Act allocated “a historic increase in school funding (more than \$7 billion statewide during the next four years), created a new distribution formula based on need, and established new accountability and transparency measures in school finance.”
- ❖ In October 2007, the New York State Board of Regents called for a \$1.8 billion increase in foundation aid in the 2008 state budget.

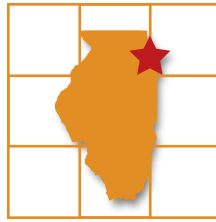
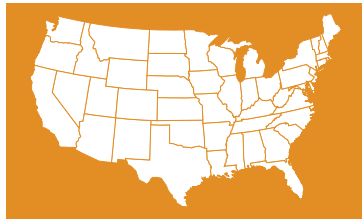
CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY

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LEADERSHIP AT CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	14%	14%	72%
STAFF	25%	25%	50%
AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	34.7%	36.7%	28.6%
(1.1 million students in NYC schools)			



Targeting a Broad Audience to “Move the Undecided”

HOUSING ILLINOIS

In a 2005 radio ad, a man and a woman discuss an affordable housing unit going up two blocks away from their home: “You know who’s going to move in don’t you?” the male voice asks. “Nurses, teachers, seniors,” answers the woman. The ad ends with a voice-over explaining that almost every Chicago community needs affordable housing, “so when they mention affordable housing where you live, say yes.”

These advertisements—variations of which appeared in television and print form—were the centerpiece of an affordable housing campaign run by Housing Illinois, a coalition of more than 45 housing advocates, civic organizations, foundations, and financial institutions that was launched in 2001 by the Chicago Rehab Network and later co-chaired by the Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI). Housing Illinois seeks to generate civic will to increase affordable housing in Chicago and across the state, which has seen one of the largest increases in housing costs in the country since 2000, and a steady decline in public and subsidized housing stock.

“It’s a broad-based coalition that from the start has worked to pull the Black and Latino communities together significantly, that’s what we’ve been about,” says Kevin Jackson, executive director of the Chicago Rehab Network. Black communities have been among the hardest hit by gentrification, and Latino communities have historically lacked access to public housing in Chicago.

The ads, however, do not specifically target a Black and Latino audience. They’re aimed at a wider audience; particularly, residents who reported being “undecided” about affordable housing in an initial survey by Housing Illinois with support from The Chicago Community Trust. The survey—the largest of its kind to date, according to Jackson—polled 1,000 residents on their attitudes and awareness of affordable housing, and was complemented by 10 focus groups representing the area’s demographics. These were part of the campaign’s initial research phase, which included knowledge-sharing meetings with funders, members, and similar campaigns, such as Housing Minnesota.

The survey found similar levels of support and opposition to affordable housing (27 and 28 percent, respectively) and that roughly 45 percent of residents were “undecided.” With advice from the firm that

FUNDER'S TAKE

When Consuella Brown, now a program director at the Woods Fund of Chicago, worked at the Grand Victoria Foundation, she supported several strategic communications projects, including those of Housing Illinois and a member organization, Housing Action Illinois. Although Housing Illinois focused its efforts on reaching the broader audience, member organizations such as Housing Action Illinois were able to coordinate their individual strategies to make sure that grassroots stakeholders had the tools and resources to leverage the work of the larger group. Hand-in-hand with Housing Illinois' communications campaign, Housing Action Illinois and similar member organizations worked on the ground to expand affordable housing options through advocacy, community organizing, and technical assistance. These coordinated strategies among multiple groups and the larger Housing Illinois network provided opportunities for funders to contribute to the effort at various levels.

As an example, in 2004 and 2005 at the same time that Housing Illinois was developing and implementing its ad campaign, Housing Action Illinois was reevaluating its image and evolving into a new organization that was “bigger and bolder,” according to Brown, than its previous incarnation as the Statewide Housing Action Coalition. To help with this transition, the Grand Victoria Foundation funded market research, media outreach, and the development of marketing materials. One of the success factors in the organization's change process was the openness between the foundation and grantee. Housing Action Illinois was not afraid to push back when, as Brown puts it, “we thought they should use a consultant with significant published media experience, but they thought it was more important that the consultant understood them and what they did. In hindsight, they were absolutely right.” Housing Action Illinois, Brown notes, was also “really clear about the target population it wanted to reach with its collateral materials” to complement the larger statewide action. “They focused on the images and language that would most resonate with this group of stakeholders,” Brown adds.

As the only organization working at the state level to expand affordable housing supply, Housing Action Illinois needed more members, more funders, and needed to be in more places. Strategic communications helped them build needed capacity to accomplish those goals. Reflecting on the need for more funding for strategic communications, Brown concludes, “I think you have to look at it in terms of return on your initial investment. For instance, how might a smart-looking brochure or a cool tagline grow operating revenue in the way of new individual donors or open the door to a meeting with a zoning commissioner to secure approval for affordable multi-family dwellings.”

OPPORTUNITY TIP FOR PHILANTHROPY

Housing Illinois developed a steering committee to host funders' briefings. Key funders were also invited to participate in strategic communications planning and convening. The willingness of the Chicago Community Trust to be the first funder to support Housing Illinois helped the initiative attract other foundation partners.

“At times, there was the question of ‘Are we portraying our communities in the right way?’ We worked with that issue, and held small focus groups to see how the messages and language played in Black, White, and Latino communities.”

KEVIN JACKSON
Executive Director
Chicago Rehab Network


conducted the survey, Housing Illinois decided to focus its energies on moving this latter group. “It was about making it clear who is being served by affordable housing—which is virtually everyone in every community, including suburbia. You’re balancing a lot of different interests because you want people to use these ads,” says Jackson.

Three 30-second television ads ran for a total of 24 weeks on the major television stations in the Chicago area. Housing Illinois spent approximately \$750,000 to produce and market the television and radio ads, posters, brochures, and print and transit ads. At the same time the ads were airing, Housing Illinois member organizations used posters and brochures to reach people throughout the state in political, faith, community development, and other neighborhood settings. Member organizations, Housing Action Illinois and the Metropolitan Planning Council, distributed materials throughout the suburbs. Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI) and Chicago Rehab Network presented research findings across a six-county area, and local organizations frequently used the materials as ways to start meetings. In addition, Housing Illinois created tools, fact sheets, and a message guide for its members and others. The materials have been picked up by other communities in Texas, Florida, California, and Washington, DC.

Housing Illinois’ decision to target a broad audience has met some criticism from individuals and groups concerned that the campaign may not do enough to reach out to communities of color and enhance alliances among Black and Latino residents in Illinois, especially in Chicago.

“At times, there was the question of ‘Are we portraying our communities in the right way?’ We worked with that issue, and held small focus groups to see how the messages and language played in Black, White, and Latino communities,” says Jackson. The steering committee had some difficult discussions about what the ads should look like and how the choice to use visual images in a television and print campaign had the potential to either reinforce racial stereotypes about Blacks and Latinos or mask historical racial biases in the housing market. Despite the campaign’s commitment to eliminating affordable housing barriers for the increasing Latino population in Illinois, for example, the campaign has not yet been translated into Spanish—in part, admits Jackson,

WE NEED THE PEOPLE WHO NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING



AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES. SO, WHEN AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS MENTIONED WHERE YOU LIVE... SAY YES!

HOUSING ILLINOIS
 For more information on affordable housing, contact:
www.HousingIllinois.org
 (312)663-3936

because of “a sense that they’re not the ones we have to convince.” The steering committee made a strategic decision to remain focused and stick to the primary goal: *moving the undecided*.

That decision, although difficult to make, seems to have had some traction across the state. In a follow-up evaluation of the campaign, Housing Illinois increased support for affordable housing; the biggest jump was among people who, prior to seeing material, said there are “drawbacks” to affordable housing. The assessor of Cook County referenced the campaign when announcing his affordable housing agenda in 2004. Housing Illinois was instrumental in the passage of the Comprehensive Housing and Planning Act and the Rental Housing Support Act by the State General Assembly in 2005.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

Housing Illinois is a coalition of housing advocates, civic organizations, and financial institutions using research, advertising, media outreach, and organizing to raise public awareness and encourage civic and political leadership on behalf of affordable housing in communities throughout the Chicago metropolitan region and statewide.

SERVICE REGION

Chicago, Illinois (Metropolitan Region); State of Illinois

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust provides major funding to Housing Illinois. Other funders include the Polk Brothers Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and Grand Victoria Foundation, among others.

HOUSING ILLINOIS C/O CHICAGO REHAB NETWORK

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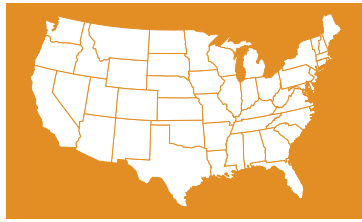
www.chicagorehab.org

www.housingillinois.org

LEADERSHIP AT CHICAGO REHAB NETWORK

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	60%	20%	20%
STAFF	33.3%	—	66.6%

AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	45%	15%	40%
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Repairing Fault Lines in the Face of a Widening Gap

TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED

Northern Virginia has some of the highest-income areas in the country. In fact, Fairfax County tops the nation in median income, according to U.S. Census data released in August 2007. Yet deep pockets of poverty and low-income persist, leading to a widening gap between rich and poor and Whites and people of color, as well as a tight housing squeeze for lower-income residents. In short, it has conditions that make for a confluence of tension and inequity.

Tenants and Workers United (TWU) is a grassroots coalition that works to build alliances among low-income residents in Northern Virginia and raise overall public awareness about housing, wage, and education inequities in the region. It was formed in the mid-1980s to oppose scheduled mass evictions of thousands of low-income renters in the Arlandria neighborhood of Alexandria. Tenants and Workers United and the tenants won a class-action lawsuit overturning the evictions, which cemented the coalition and spurred it to take on a broader range of issues affecting predominantly Black, Latino, and Asian American residents.

Tenants and Workers United has since organized alliances for education equity in Alexandria and affordable housing in Fairfax County, created the Arlandria-Chirilagua Housing Cooperative (a 282-unit cooperative owned by predominantly low-income residents), and hosted an annual music and cultural festival that brings together more than 40,000 visitors each year and gets the organization's name out in the community. It has also led several effective tenant, worker, and youth organizing campaigns.

Perhaps Tenants and Workers United's greatest strategic "wins" have been in the area of living wage legislation: it spearheaded efforts that ultimately established living wage laws in Alexandria and Arlington. Tenants and Workers United also supported the organization and unionization of hundreds of additional low-wage workers.

OPPORTUNITY TIP FOR PHILANTHROPY

Tenants and Workers United was able to access resources on strategic communications through its relationships with major supporters. TWU was partnered with The SPIN Project, a San Francisco-based communications consulting organization, as part of funding through the Bridging the Economic Divide Initiative of the Tides Foundation. SPIN provided strategic communications planning, staff training, and campaign consulting.



To accomplish these, the organization focused heavily on strategic communications, including local ethnic press and Black and Spanish-language outlets. The coalition created and distributed leaflets in neighborhoods where city council members live, pitched television stories, and placed editorials. It also targeted church and union bulletins and neighborhood newsletters.

All of this was accomplished largely without dedicated communications resources: it was not until April 2007 that Tenants and Workers United could hire a communications staff person.

“Although strategic communications is one of the five strands we see as key to building our work, our practice has lagged behind our belief because of infrastructure and resources,” observes Jon Liss, executive director of Tenants and Workers United. The organization’s communications manager is now working with all of its projects and the organization as a whole to develop a comprehensive strategic communications plan.

A GREATER EMPHASIS ON ALLIANCE BUILDING

In retrospect, according to Liss, the messages that were successful in winning the living wage laws and housing gains could have done more to address racial and gender equity directly. “To move our mission, we talked narrowly in class terms and did not talk in terms of gender or race as strongly as we felt we should have,” he says. Efforts underway will include messages designed to bring these issues to the fore, no matter what the immediate goal.

The timing is right for this approach. Across the Northern Virginia region, growing fault lines between Black and Latino communities are emerging; TWU is working to raise awareness and lessen these tensions. For example, in a 2007 effort to fight an anti-immigrant ordinance in Prince William County—a belt surrounding the outer suburbs, where working-class Whites and a burgeoning Latino population are sometimes at odds—one community group called for a boycott of all but Latino businesses.

“We pushed back, saying we want to build a broad, united front against racist legislation, so let’s bring in Black and small White-owned businesses and develop a slogan saying, ‘We serve all Prince William county residents’ that they can put in their windows in support of overturning this legislation,” says Liss. After a month of messaging work, this was adopted as the public position.

Tenants and Workers United, like many grassroots coalitions, is torn between local campaign work, for which it receives funding, and larger-scale strategic communications and investments in knowledge-sharing and learning—building to a scale that can bring about real change and a visible social movement. “You can make the argument that funders should find those two to three dozen mid-size organizations that play a critical role in their regions and then fund the heck out of them to work more broadly,” suggests Liss.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

Tenants and Workers United is a democratically controlled, grassroots organization committed to winning social and economic justice and building the power of low-income people of Northern Virginia—Latinos/as, African Americans, tenants, immigrants, workers, women, and youth.

SERVICE REGION

Six counties and jurisdictions in Northern Virginia

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

Tenants and Workers United is funded by national foundations such as the Public Welfare Foundation and Hill-Snowdon Foundation, as well as regional foundations such as The Trellis Fund and Meyer Foundation in Washington, D.C.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ Because of the efforts of Tenants and Workers United and its partners, the region has benefited from more than \$75 million in community benefits since 2000, including new affordable housing subsidies, living wage jobs, medical discounts for the uninsured, and public investment in community programs.
- ❖ Enacted living wage laws in Northern Virginia have increased the wages of over 1,000 municipal workers by \$1,400,000 annually.
- ❖ Over \$1,000,000 annually was added to Alexandria’s child care system by raising childcare provider reimbursement rates and expanding access to subsidized child care.
- ❖ Following a successful campaign to reform Alexandria taxi industry regulations, TWU worked with taxi cab drivers to create a worker-owned and controlled taxi cab company, Alexandria Union Cab, with an estimated market value of \$2 million.

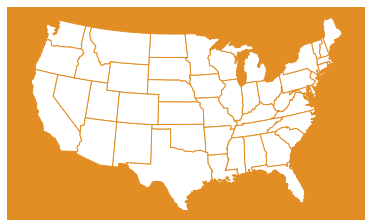
TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED

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LEADERSHIP AT TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	30%	70%	—
STAFF	6.7%	66.7%	26.6%
AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	33%	60%	7%



Katrina Recovery: Building Alliances to Counter Exclusion and Exploitation

NEW ORLEANS WORKERS' CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Before the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina had receded, a troubling situation was emerging in New Orleans. City employers were petitioning the federal government for certification to offer H-2B “guest worker” visas to fill vacant jobs, even as thousands of local residents were living in temporary shelters and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers, seeking work and ways to rebuild their lives.

Not surprisingly, tensions between the residents and the largely Latino immigrant workers dominated headlines. Few articles noted, however, that between September 6 and 8, 2005, the federal government suspended several employment regulations—including the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires employers to pay prevailing wages to construction workers on federal contracts—affirmative action rules, and sanctions for employers that fail to verify workers’ documentation.

Done to speed the recovery process, the changes had the effect of creating a “wild west” of employment law, according to Marielena Hincapié, director of programs and staff attorney with the National Immigration Law Center (NILC). Shortly after the storm, NILC helped establish the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition and the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice to advocate for all workers. NILC remains the fiscal sponsor of the Workers’ Center.

“One of our first communications efforts was to take the narrative that was being talked about in the press and give it context, highlighting the government actions and inactions that were creating these tensions,” says Hincapié.

OPPORTUNITY TIP FOR PHILANTHROPY

Because of a lack of infrastructure and the transient and sometimes displaced realities of their core stakeholders, the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice and similar organizations often require a funding base that sustains organizing over time and supports research, communications, and litigation as part of organizing strategy. Since most funders do not support work that connects Black and immigrant organizing, according to the Center's director, the organization has been most successful with grantmaking institutions that take the opportunity to invest in innovation and experimentation in the field of racial justice organizing. This includes investments that go beyond support for advocacy to include grassroots leadership development and action, which is often resource intensive. Further, it requires an understanding that strategic communications has to happen at all levels—even with the very constituents that groups are trying to organize. Through lifting up shared experiences and encouraging dialogue between Blacks and Latinos, the Center has been able to build trust and common ground that translates into joint action.

With funds from the Advancement Project, NILC and the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition drafted a comprehensive report, *And Injustice for All: Workers' Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans*. Based on information from over 700 interviews and oral histories, as well as a survey of the employment landscape, the report examined the conditions faced by immigrants and residents alike and offered advocates, policymakers, and funders tools to understand and reframe the message. The ultimate goal: countering structural racism and inequity, while forging alliances between Black and Latino communities.

“The stories were shocking. Black workers were commuting three hours for poverty paychecks. The U.S. government suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, allowing contractors to hire the cheapest workers and thus take advantage of immigrants and day laborers in search of economic security,” says Saket Soni, director of the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice. “But these were not just tales of individual calamities. They illuminated a structure of racism.” The Center then set out to organize across the color line to engage workers in dismantling this structure.

In 2005 and 2006, armed with drafts of the report, NILC and the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice conducted briefings and town meetings to bring together members of the Black and immigrant communities—at both the leadership and grassroots levels.

“What has been very powerful is that in these meetings, both the workers and survivors say, ‘Wow, we're in the same boat, so to speak, and we are both being exploited in different ways,’” says Hincapié. “A lot of what immigrant workers are facing is very much like slavery, which resonates with people in the South, where the repercussions and discussion of slavery are still alive and well.”

In community meetings, Blacks and Latinos built unity not only by talking but also by acting together. An example of this joint action is the community organizing among Black and Latino workers against the hotel giant Decatur Hotels. At a time when hundreds of unemployed Black residents were living in these very hotels on FEMA vouchers, the owner told the Department of Labor that he could not find a single U.S. worker willing or able to be a housekeeper. The Department of Labor gave Decatur Hotels a certificate to

A STRATEGIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE MAY DAY MARCHES

In February 2007, 17 Latino day laborers were arrested as they gathered for work in a New Orleans suburb. The Workers’ Center spread the word, and within hours, the New Orleans Survivor Council—an African-American group based in the Lower Ninth Ward—raised bail money for these workers they had never met. Unable to repay the bail but eager to show their gratitude, the laborers mobilized a volunteer crew to rebuild the devastated house of Ora Green, an elderly Council member who had been scammed by contractors.

On May 1, 2007, as immigrants around the country held marches and May Day rallies, members of the Survivor Council, the laborers and residents held a party at Mrs. Green’s house to spotlight the newly formed alliance between the communities. As the organizers had hoped, the story made local and national news—including coverage in a New York Times editorial that quoted one Council member as saying, ‘The old slaves and new slaves, from North and South, are uniting against the same master.’” (*New York Times*, May 7, 2007).

bring workers on H-2B visas. Decatur Hotels then hired a recruiter to find Latin American workers who were subsequently brought to New Orleans from countries such as Peru, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic.

Members of the Black community, including longtime activists, helped the workers organize—arguing the H-2B visa system’s parallels to slavery. “We highlighted the fact that their hotels were actually full of Katrina survivors at a time they claimed no one could do this work. Workers were being brought in and exploited, and the same employer was excluding Black workers from reconstruction work and economic opportunities,” says Hincapié.

In August 2006, just before the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the coalition and the Southern Poverty Law Center brought a lawsuit against the Decatur luxury hotel chain, charging that the company violated the Fair Labor Standards Act when it failed to reimburse immigrant workers who had paid exorbitant fees to recruiters working as agents of the hotel chain. According to court documents, workers from Peru, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic were charged between \$3,500 and \$5,000 to come to the U.S. on H-2B visas, only to find themselves working far fewer hours than promised and living in substandard conditions—trapping them in debt.

A few days after the lawsuit was filed, Latino immigrant workers spoke in solidarity with Katrina survivors at the Katrina commemoration.

In May 2007, the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Louisiana ruled in the coalition’s favor, guaranteeing workers on H-2B visas protection under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and ordering employers to reimburse workers for fees.

According to Hincapié, the Gulf Coast work was organizationally transformative for the fiscal sponsor of New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, as well: the National Immigration Law Center is integrating a racial justice lens to its immigration work and messaging across the country.

“One of our first communications efforts was to take the narrative that was being talked about in the press and give it context, highlighting the government actions and inactions that were creating these tensions.”

MARIELENA HINCAPIÉ
Director of Programs
National Immigration Law Center

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

The Center is dedicated to organizing Black and immigrant workers across the color line for a just reconstruction of post-Katrina New Orleans.

SERVICE REGION

New Orleans, Louisiana

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT

The project receives funding support from the Ford Foundation and Open Society Institute, among others.

NEW ORLEANS WORKERS' CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

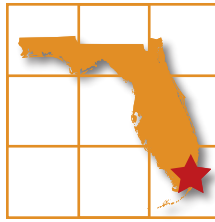
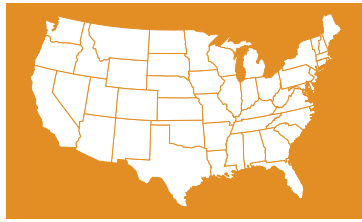
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LEADERSHIP AT NEW ORLEANS WORKERS' CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
STAFF	20%	40%	40%

AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	30%	70%	—
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“Flipping the Script” on the Mainstream Message

MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

In 2005, Miami was in the midst a record real estate boom, fueled largely by luxury development and speculation. For many in the mainstream media and city politics, Miami’s ascension as the U.S. “condo capital” was a positive development—but to many in the city’s historically Black and Latino neighborhoods, the boom was not a boom: apartment buildings were being demolished and redeveloped as upscale high-rises; rents, property taxes, and evictions were quietly but rapidly climbing skyward.

The Miami Workers Center (MWC)—a community-based strategy and action center that brings together low-income Black and Latino communities and strengthens their communications, organizing, and leadership power—had worked since its inception in 1999 to increase and protect affordable housing in the city.

“Suddenly, we stood to lose in a few months the gains we had spent years working to win,” shares MWC communications director Sushma Sheth. Traditional organizing tactics—door knocking, leaflets, and campaigning—would be too slow to keep pace with the market. “The real estate industry was using PR to sell the dream, so we thought, let’s ‘flip the script.’ Let’s lead with a strategic communications campaign that includes organizing elements, but let’s really create a debate around the condo boom and challenge the assumed benefit,” says Sheth.

MWC launched the Regional Equity for Neighborhoods and Tenants (RENT) campaign to educate the public about the downside of the boom. The main goals were to make gentrification a household term, elevate the real costs of development, and to reach, unite, and mobilize low-income communities of color.

The first task was breaking down divisions among communities and illuminating the shared struggle. MWC used community-specific tactics and targeted vehicles. For example, in Liberty City, a largely Black community, MWC focused on the community newspaper; in the Puerto Rican community, MWC used personal relationships and some radio; and in the Haitian neighborhoods, MWC tapped radio as the primary source of information for residents. MWC hosted trilingual town hall meetings on gentrification, with the theme “Our Common Struggle,” and held neighborhood rallies, art shows, and screenings of the Miami documentary *Boomtown*.

FUNDER'S TAKE

With immediate steps needed to try to stop the displacement caused by the Miami development boom, the Ford Foundation chose to support a seemingly indirect activity—communications training for MWC's staff members. While the training was tied to the RENT campaign, funding for something as peripheral as training would not be an obvious option for many funders who require a more tangible link to intended outcomes. However, Alta Starr, the Ford Foundation program officer for the grant, explains, "Without communications training and support for additional communications capacity, MWC's initiatives around gentrification would have been hobbled."

Beyond the immediate benefits of the training for the RENT campaign, longer lasting effects included changes in how the organization approached communications in general and even, according to Starr, altered some of the organization's basic premises. Reflecting on the grant's outcomes, Starr says, "Thinking through a communications strategy also forces a group or a coalition to think more deeply and differently about what it's trying to accomplish, and MWC's communications work in the last few years has shifted how it thinks about and approaches organizing and alliance building."

In Starr's opinion, strategic communications is exactly the type of work that should be funded "to make a difference on poor people's issues anywhere." At the Ford Foundation, Starr has the "luxury" of being able to focus on alleviating poverty without focusing "on specific issues such as housing, education, or the environment." As a result, she can make it a priority to build communications capacity at organizations such as MWC so they in turn "can add capacity to communities, making it more possible for our society's most vulnerable members to have a voice in key public debates and decisions."

Starr is emphatic about the importance of developing organizational infrastructure for strategic communications. "Training and technical assistance are important," she says, "However, without adding staff capacity, these can be limited in their impact. The 'weekend workshop phenomenon,' where staff or leaders get a temporary boost from their participation in a workshop, is one we all know well." While communications skills and tools are necessary to any strategic communications initiative, Starr underscores the value of helping organizations "develop and maintain strategic communications work as a central part of all that they do."



GENTRIFICATION / JANTIFIKASYON / DESPLAZAMIENTO — OWNING THE WORD AND ITS DEFINITION IN SOUTH FLORIDA

“In our conversations with one consulting group, they emphatically suggested that we not use the term ‘gentrification’ because it wouldn’t be accessible to our target audience,” shares Sushma Sheth. “But The Praxis Project asked more questions: How else are people understanding this process? Is anyone else using the term and for what agenda? We found that folks did not have a way to comprehensively talk about the process and that no one else was using the word.”

With the encouragement of The Praxis Project, the Miami Workers Center took ownership of the term “gentrification” in its messaging and, as Sheth puts it, “ran with it.” The goal of the RENT campaign was to make gentrification a household word—and one that identified how low-income communities would be negatively impacted by Miami’s real estate boom.

Given the diversity of communities of color in Miami, this also meant taking ownership of the term in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. Using “jantifikasyon” as the cognate translation for Haitian Creole and “desplazamiento” as the Spanish translation, the Miami Workers Center was able to strategically gain a monopoly over how the term was used and conveyed in its communication campaigns and outreach to Miami residents.

RENT’s aggressive media campaign netted 55 hits in mainstream and ethnic community media within two months and succeeded in sparking public debate. Gentrification framed the following municipal election; it was one of the top three issues to which all candidates had to respond.

As the concept of RENT was in formation, MWC received a Ford Foundation grant to work with The SPIN project and improve its already effective strategic communications. SPIN conducted a detailed evaluation of MWC’s communications and trained staff. The Miami Workers Center also benefited from the technical assistance and training it received from The Praxis Project and its collaborative work with “We Interrupt This Message,” a media strategy and training center. MWC then arranged for this training to be passed on to colleague organizations in South Florida.

“Up until then, our understanding of communications and media work was a tactical knee-jerk relationship with reporters. We’ve learned that working with media is not dissimilar to working in communities: through creating relationships, you can build power and access and can raise consciousness and stir up debate. Because we have dedicated capital and capacity, we have been able to build long-term relationships with the mainstream and ethnic press,” says Sushma Sheth.

A QUICK PAYOFF

Later that year, Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma further “flipped the script”—for the first time, poverty and housing became newsworthy nationwide in the mainstream press. The media training was quick to pay off; MWC had cultivated media relationships and was able to steer the *Miami Herald* to a developing story with the county’s HOPE VI housing project.

Intended to revitalize distressed neighborhoods by replacing public housing units with houses that residents could own, HOPE VI had failed to meet its promise. After six years, the city’s Housing Agency had spent millions, but only three houses had been built, leaving more than 800 families displaced. The two-year *Miami Herald* series on the issue, “House of Lies,” won a 2007 Pulitzer Prize and helped spark national attention. The city was forced to take action immediately.

MWC capitalized on this and the coverage generated by the 2007 Super Bowl in Miami. The organization hosted a “Glitz and Glam Granny Cheer Squad”—with grannies and young people alike sporting pom-poms to raise awareness of the less-than-cheery HOPE VI housing crisis. *The Los Angeles Times*, the *UK Guardian*, national radio, and local news outlets picked up the story.

Shortly thereafter, the county commission and the mayor signed an agreement with MWC and the residents, the United Community Vision Agreement for Scott Homes, to rebuild all 850 low-income homes that were torn down, and to find and reintegrate the displaced families. This work began in February 2007.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

Founded as a volunteer organization, the Miami Workers Center is a community-based strategy and action center for low-income Black and Latino communities in Miami. The Center initiates grassroots organizations and develops their leadership capacity through high-impact community organizing campaigns and education programs. The Center also actively builds coalitions and enters alliances to amplify progressive power and to win racial and economic justice.

SERVICE REGION

Miami, Florida

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Miami Workers Center has received philanthropic support from the Tides Foundation, Ford Foundation, the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, and the Maurice Falk Fund, among others.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ In 2000, the Miami Workers Center won \$3 million for subsidized childcare for low-income families in Miami Dade County.
- ❖ In 2004, the Miami Workers Center’s “Fill the Vacancies” program was adopted by Miami Dade County government and reduced the vacancies to less than 5%.
- ❖ In 2007, the Miami Workers Center won the 6-year Scott Campaign when Miami Dade Housing Agency signed an agreement that acquiesced to all of the demands of the campaign, including the right to return for over 1,100 displaced residents and one-for-one replacement of low-income homes in the area.

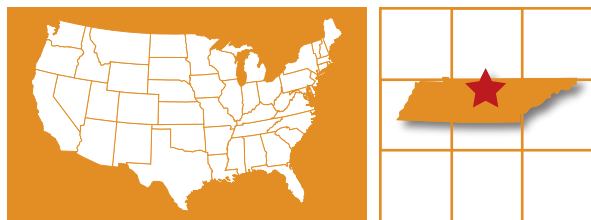
MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

Gihan Perera
Executive Director

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LEADERSHIP AT MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	37.5%	25%	37.5%
STAFF	25%	12.5%	62.5%
AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	55%	37%	8%



Building Alliances Against “Wedge Agendas” in a New Gateway State

TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION

Tennessee has one of the fastest growing rates of immigration in the country. Between 1990 and 2000, the state’s foreign-born population increased by 169 percent, four times the national average; it jumped another 43 percent between 2000 and 2005, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. As it emerges as a new “gateway” state, Tennessee is confronting many of the issues that California, New York, and Texas faced in previous years—including tensions among communities and in politics. On local AM radio stations, conservative talk show hosts, Black and White alike, decry illegal immigration; immigration was a heated issue in the state’s 2006 U.S. Senate elections.

“There are a lot of ‘powers that be’ that are attempting to use immigration as a wedge issue to divide communities and further their own agendas,” explains Jessica Baba, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition’s former public awareness coordinator. “We saw the need for a campaign to counter this, a strategic communications approach to a problem that would be hard to deal with without mass media.”

From its start, the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) has worked to head off divisiveness and build alliances among low-income communities and communities of color. It was founded in 2001 as a grassroots coalition in support of a bill in the Tennessee legislature that would give immigrants increased access to driver’s licenses. The bill passed and other successes followed. In 2005, TIRRC launched its largest and most successful campaign to date: the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative.

OPPORTUNITY TIP FOR PHILANTHROPY

Resources from private foundations, suggests TIRRC's public awareness coordinator Catalina Nieto, should support the capacity of organizations to grow and diversify. She observes, "More than just funding programs, grantmakers should support the building of a strong organization to better serve our communities."



“Welcoming Tennessee was a low-cost, high-result effort that netted incredible media coverage. People still talk about the artwork and the fact that it was a positive message. It resonated well in general because it targeted many populations.”

CATALINA NIETO

*Public Awareness Coordinator
Tennessee Immigrant and
Refugee Rights Coalition*

Welcoming Tennessee uses strategic paid media, primarily billboards, to generate earned media with the goal of building alliances, educating the public about the value of immigration to the state, and shifting the overall debate. TIRRC has created an advisory committee, a statewide steering committee, and several regional committees of volunteers who spread the strategic message in their areas.

In 2006, TIRRC erected 50 billboards in Davidson County, home to Nashville, at a cost of about \$5,000 from design to completion and installation. The investment earned significant media exposure, including a high-profile article and photograph in *The Tennessean*—the area’s main newspaper—of the first billboard being unveiled.

“It was a big deal for the exposure it got,” says Catalina Nieto, TIRRC’s public awareness coordinator. “Welcoming Tennessee was a low-cost, high-result effort that netted incredible media coverage. People still talk about the artwork and the fact that it was a positive message. It resonated well in general because it targeted many populations.”

Despite its overall success, not all Welcoming Tennessee messages resonated with everyone. In particular, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” was less effective in native-born Black communities where slavery (and not immigration) was a shared memory from their historical past. Although there was no overtly negative feedback, some community members told TIRRC staff that they did not feel the message connected with them personally. This year, TIRRC is using this feedback to develop specific messages targeted to other groups.

BLACK, BROWN, AND BEYOND

In addition, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition is currently in the midst of a formal effort to create and strengthen a statewide alliance of Black and Latino community groups, churches, and grassroots organizations. The project, Black, Brown, and Beyond, is timely: Over the past few



years, tensions between native-born Blacks and immigrants have worsened in Tennessee. The fear of economic insecurity, xenophobia, and even sheer misinformation about the demographic changes have paid their toll on Black and Latino coalition building in the state. This project aims to help immigrants and Blacks in Tennessee build strong relationships and develop mechanisms for objective cross-cultural discussions and joint action. Two Black community activists recently joined the board of TIRRC, and the organization, as part of this project, is working with the state’s legislative Black caucus and the NAACP to oppose immigrant-targeted bills that would also negatively impact Black communities.

TIRRC is also holding conferences, town hall meetings, and other events to facilitate discussion and connection and raise awareness among communities of shared concerns and goals.

Identifying the impact of the work is challenging. To date, much of the information on outcomes is anecdotal or anchored to legislative victories and other concrete results, rather than shifts in public attitude. As TIRRC expands its public awareness efforts throughout the state, it will begin to measure results through a combination of focus groups and polling.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) is a statewide, immigrant and refugee-led collaboration whose mission is to empower immigrants and refugees throughout Tennessee to develop a unified voice, defend their rights, and create an atmosphere in which they are viewed as positive contributors to the state.

SERVICE REGION

State of Tennessee

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition has received funding from the Greensboro Justice Fund, Saguaro Fund, and French American Charitable Trust, among others.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ With partners, TIRRC registered over 1,300 people to vote during its 2006 New American Voter registration campaign.
- ❖ TIRRC successfully stopped 15 anti-immigrant state bills in 2006 and 40 anti-immigrant state bills in 2007.
- ❖ The organization helped obtain \$2 million in increased funding for English Language Learner programs in public schools.

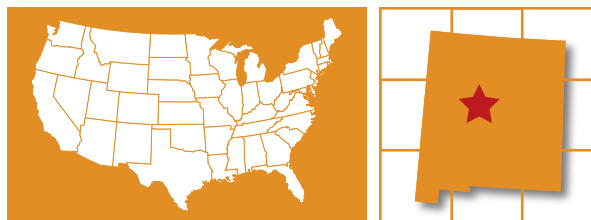
TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION

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Public Awareness Coordinator

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LEADERSHIP AT TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	20%	40%	40%
STAFF	—	36.4%	63.6%
AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	N/A	45.1%	54.9%



Bridging “la división democrática”

SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT

In June and July 2007, the People’s Freedom Caravan accomplished for a week what its sponsoring organizations hope to achieve more permanently and universally: bringing together Black and Latino advocates and community groups from the south and southwest and narrowing the divide separating races, classes, cultures, and regions in the southern United States.

Modeled on the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, the Caravan’s buses wound from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Atlanta, Georgia, discharging their passengers—indigenous peoples, displaced New Orleans residents, migrant workers, youth, and civil rights veterans—at the 2007 United States Social Forum.

“We share the same class and gender divides, but there is a ‘democracy divide’ that Black and Latinos face in particular,” says JoAnne Bejar, communications organizer with the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP), which, along with the Southwest Workers Union, Southern Echo, and the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, sponsored the Caravan. “We’re moving toward fixing this divide. It’s about how the civil rights and immigrant rights movements can come together and learn from each other.”

SWOP created a media team to push for local and national coverage of the Caravan in the 14 months leading up to the United States Social Forum. As a result, there was significant media coverage in all six states the buses traversed.

Since 1981, SWOP has been working to bring communities together to promote gender equality and social and economic justice. Founded by Latino, Native American, and Black activists, SWOP uses strategic communications and community education campaigns to ensure that low-income New Mexicans and those in communities of color have a voice in social, health, economic, and environmental decisions.

FUNDER'S TAKE

SWOP uses effective communication strategies that are often overlooked, according to Millie Buchanan, a program officer at the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation. For one thing, they understand that they have a better chance of getting media coverage through local and regional outlets versus national sources. “National media are a much harder nut to crack, and too often groups (and funders) focus there instead of building momentum locally,” Buchanan observes. For the People’s Freedom Caravan, SWOP and the other organizers had a “savvy” strategy, Buchanan comments, that “focused on local media at each stop of the caravan, based on an understanding of the importance of local names and events to regional and hometown media.” Doing this, they were able to attract significant coverage along the route to Atlanta.

Another example of a smart strategy that SWOP uses to reach a broad audience, Buchanan says, is looking beyond “polling or focus groups” to “long relationship building with a variety of allies.” This is how SWOP approaches the South by Southwest Project, Buchanan says, which is working to develop alliances between Black and Latino communities. Buchanan encourages funders to consider SWOP’s example and view strategic communications as more than the use of media, but also “including less formal attempts to communicate with diverse constituencies.”

At an organizational level, Buchanan is also impressed by the way SWOP has intentionally integrated communications into its culture. This fits well with the way the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation typically makes grants—as general operating funds. It gives “groups who view communications as important the ability to use our money for those strategies,” Buchanan says. For organizations that may not be as well versed as SWOP in how to use communications effectively, funders can encourage them to build communications into their initiatives from the onset. Buchanan finds this important because “strategic communications is an essential component of a social justice agenda.”

Strategic communications has always been a major component of SWOP’s work. “We have a strong tradition around communicating with the broader public,” explains SWOP’s director Robby Rodriguez. “There are messages that we deliver to our base constituents—people of color and low-income folks—but also to a much broader audience who will never be members of our organization. We feel it’s important to move them close to our values and we think about that when we create our messages.”

In 2000, SWOP created the position of communications organizer to lead its strategic communications and branding. Based on the belief that unity is a requirement for progress, SWOP carefully vets its messages to ensure that they resonate across groups and do not contribute to marginalization or division. Where possible, SWOP tests its radio, print, and Web communications to see how they translate into Spanish, as well as how they are received by audiences.

“ROCK OUT WITH YOUR CAUSE OUT” YOUTH FESTIVAL

Reaching youth is a challenge—one that can be made more difficult by ingrained anti-youth biases. In 2005, SWOP planned a community festival that included bands, break-dancing, and a canvas graffiti contest on the theme “positive community change.” Voter registration information and tables for community organizations were planned.

“Three days before the event, the mayor pulled the permit,” says youth activist Mónica Córdova. “Using the term ‘ghettoizing,’ he accused us of promoting vandalism.”

The event was permanently shelved, but SWOP designed a positive message to respond to the mayor’s concerns, which was picked up in the media. In 2007, *Alibi*, a local progressive journal, named the mayor’s cancellation of the event among a dubious list: “Worst of 2006—Mayor Shuts down Youth Project.”

Chisholm, Christie, Steven Robert Allen, Marisa Demarco, and Amy Dalness. “Best and Worst of 2006: The Year in Review,” *Alibi* (v.16, No.1, January 4–10, 2007); retrieved on 11 January 2007 at <http://www.alibi.com/index.php?scn=news&story=17531>.

THE CHILI-HEART CAMPAIGN

Reaching audiences can in some cases come down to the right branding and approach. In 2005, SWOP launched the “I Love NM/Campaign for a Better New Mexico.” The group’s first communications organizer designed a chili-heart logo. Some 2,000 bumper stickers, 400 yard signs, and roughly 70,000 pieces of mail bearing the logo were distributed and hooked to state legislative elections.

It was a message few could say no to. “We used a tactic that the other side uses a lot—simple logos that carry a big message and that you can pin specifics to, like the Support the Troops ribbons. Ours too is a positive message that resonates with people,” comments Rodriguez.



The next challenge is linking the campaign with specific legislative issues, so community members can identify which proposals are part of the “I Love NM” message; SWOP plans to focus on this in the coming legislative session.

USING THE AIR WAVES

For SWOP’s core audience, radio is one of the most cost-effective vehicles to spread the message, in addition to the Internet for youth.

In 2007, SWOP launched a radio campaign to oppose the state’s Administrative Accountability Act, a proposal that would weaken environmental regulations and health and safety protections for workers. Working with its partners—including the Center for Civic Policy, the League of Young Voters, and Conservation Voters of

“There are messages that we deliver to our base constituents—people of color and low-income folks—but also to a much broader audience who will never be members of our organization. We feel it’s important to move them close to our values and we think about that when we create our messages.”

ROBBY RODRIGUEZ

*Director
SWOP*

New Mexico—the ad featured a baseball theme: “It’s the bottom of the ninth ... big tobacco’s on first, big oil on second, and the pharmaceutical industry on third.” The ad depicted the Democratic legislator who sponsored the bill as “pinch hitting for the [industry] team.”

The campaign involved a \$2,000 radio buy; the advertisement itself cost less than \$200 to produce. It was picked up by several outlets and referenced in an editorial in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. Within a week of running the ads, the bill was defeated in the House.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

SWOP is a statewide multi-racial, multi-issue, community based membership organization. Since 1980 it has worked to make it possible for thousands of New Mexicans to begin to have a place and voice in social, economic, and environmental decisions that affect their lives.

SERVICE REGION

State of New Mexico

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

SWOP receives funding primarily from private foundations, including Solidago, French American Charitable Trust, and the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ SWOP’s efforts have registered over 30,000 New Mexicans as voters; it has also surveyed neighborhoods as part of these drives.
- ❖ SWOP worked with a broad coalition to pass a Clean Election Reform bill (2005).
- ❖ Governor Richardson signed an executive order on environmental justice due to the work of SWOP and allies (2005).
- ❖ SWOP youth held the first Graffiti Battle at the State Capitol with over 100 youth (2005). This event was part of a month-long campaign that successfully defeated a proposed Statewide Youth Curfew.

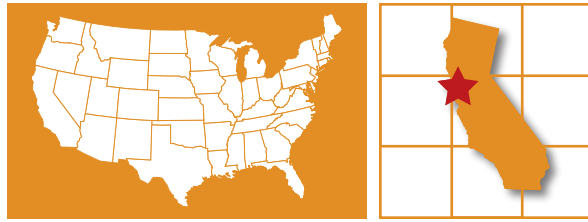
SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT

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LEADERSHIP AT SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	—	66.7%	33.3%
STAFF	—	91%	9%



Raising the People’s Voices: Building Capacity for the Long Run

THE CENTER FOR MEDIA JUSTICE (formerly Youth Media Council)

In 2001, 106.1 KMEL, “the People’s Station”—a hip-hop and R&B radio station in the Bay Area—fired popular host and community affairs director Davey D. Cook the day after he broadcast anti-war statements by Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA). The station, which is owned by Clear Channel, said it was a planned downsizing, but to many in the listening area, the timing was a clear indication that “The People’s Station” was a corporate shell.

Just months before, the media strategy center “We Interrupt This Message” had launched The Center for Media Justice (formerly Youth Media Council) to counter anti-youth bias in the mainstream media and news and to equip young people to spearhead media reform efforts. Several local Black and Latino community groups—whose members were KMEL’s primary audience—asked The Center for Media Justice (CMJ) to join a campaign to reinstate Davey D.

Initially, CMJ demurred. “We sat on it for a year, because a lot of these fights tend to focus on supporting a good leader or firing a bad apple, and we wanted it to go deeper than that,” admits Malkia Cyril, The Center for Media Justice’s director. “We felt that with monitoring and analysis, we could launch a far more significant campaign, hooked in with his firing but not with that as the sole goal and demand.”

In 2002, CMJ launched a month-long, youth-led analysis of KMEL’s content and audience. They found that while 82 percent of the audience was Black and Latino and under age 30, only 12 percent of the on-air voices represented these groups. In keeping with Clear Channel’s approach, there was no news programming, local or national; and the “news” covered by the hosts focused overwhelmingly on youth crime, drugs, and violence without policy context or solutions.

FUNDER'S TAKE

“[The Center for Media Justice] has helped to build a more strategic and effective movement and increase the power of youth-focused and anti-racist organizations in a way that no one else has,” says Anna Lefer, a former program officer with the Open Society Institute. The Open Society Institute has supported The Center for Media Justice through its Youth Initiatives Program.

The Center for Media Justice has a reputation in the grantmaking community for providing resources to which very few community-based, youth-led, and youth-serving organizations have access: press lists; pitch-perfect analysis of communications outlets and their market penetration; skilled spokespeople; and training on how to get the message out. The organization also helps groups come up with a compelling frame to educate local, state, and national policymakers.

What makes The Center for Media Justice stand out among peers, suggests Lefer, is not only that it focuses on strategic communications and its relevance for today's society, but it also anchors its work in media policy and reform. The Open Society Institute is a private operating and grantmaking foundation with the explicit mission of shaping public policy to promote equity and democracy in society. With its Youth Initiatives Program and other grantmaking programs, the foundation is looking to impact social change and reform. Organizations such as The Center for Media Justice play an important role in helping the field think and act critically on policy issues that affect how messages are controlled, framed, and shared in the media.

“[The Center for Media Justice] has been strategic about building a media justice movement and making grassroots organizations understand that all of them should be working on media policy,” shares Lefer. “Because without media reform, youth are going to be shut out from the debate. And you can't be a full participant in our democracy if you can't get your voice heard in the public square.”



Armed with data proving that the People’s Station was anything but, The Center for Media Justice and several partners kicked off a six-month communications campaign to raise public awareness and challenge KMEL’s license renewal with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC); they flooded the station and the FCC with nearly 2,000 postcards calling for community-led content. To train young spokespeople, CMJ launched the “Si Se Puede” fellowship, a 10-week media advocacy training program for Black and Latino youth organizers.

“When you do direct PR without capacity building, no one learns how to do it; when you do capacity building without PR, the feedback we’ve gotten is that implementation becomes a huge problem.”

MALKIA CYRIL

Director

The Center for Media Justice

The effort netted nearly 40 stories in a range of outlets, including *Essence Magazine*, and forced KMEL and Clear Channel to respond. In 2003, KMEL added a local artists show to its lineup, and worked with The Center for Media Justice to host a two-hour broadcast, “360 Degrees of Violence,” to let local youth and community members discuss pressing issues, including allegations of police brutality. In a 2006 monitoring follow-up, CMJ noted an 80 percent increase in the voices of youth, people of color, and local artists, and it was credited in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* for creating the conditions in radio that gave birth to the independent region music movement called “the Hify Movement” in the Bay Area. In addition, the FCC just announced in November 2007 that while all four station licenses were renewed, Clear Channel was fined \$20,000 for failure to adequately maintain its public files.

Training young people, supporting community-led actions—this is typical of The Center for Media Justice’s approach. The organization works to build the communications capacity of grassroots groups that otherwise have little access to the tools, resources, and knowledge to wage effective communications campaigns.

“Most communications institutions focus either on doing direct public relations or doing capacity building—rarely does an institution do both,” says Malkia Cyril, director of The Center for Media Justice. “When you do direct PR without capacity building, no one learns how to do it; when you do capacity building without PR, the feedback we’ve gotten is that implementation becomes a huge problem.”

With media outlets increasingly owned by fewer, larger corporations, Black, Latino, and youth voices risk getting lost in the cacophony.

THE “SHARED VALUES” MESSAGE: USE WITH CAUTION.

CMJ, like many communications initiatives on behalf of people of color, works to reframe mainstream assumptions and, where useful, make use of a “shared values” message: we have common goals, common concerns. However, it has learned to do so with care, because spotlighting the most mainstream voices may actually harm the cause in the long run.

Take, for example, a recent progressive communications effort to oppose a state bill denying social services to illegal immigrants and their children. “To paraphrase, the message that came out was: ‘If children of immigrants can’t get services, they’ll get sick and they’ll be in the public schools and make our kids sick, so they should have services.’” says Cyril. “That’s adopting the shared values, but it will backfire against the communities. That’s not an effective strategy.”

Organizations need time, staff, and resources to be able to effectively grapple with messaging and reframing, and to figure out how certain conventional communications approaches—even in the progressive communications movement—may not work or may carry unintended consequences. As a

new and innovative organization, The Center for Media Justice works according to a long-range vision for the field: to build cross-cultural alliances and individual groups’ strategic communications capacity, while staying true to its commitment of lifting up the dialogue about society’s need for racial and economic justice.

MEDIA ROOM

MISSION

The Center for Media Justice (CMJ) builds communications power and defends the communication rights of youth, communities of color, and organizing groups working for racial and economic justice. Launched in 2001 to counter racial stereotypes and anti-youth bias in the news, CMJ is a media strategy and action center dedicated to building a strategic and collaborative movement for justice by strengthening media strategy, capacity, and action in California and beyond.

SERVICE REGION

State of California (with priority in the Bay Area); National (with priority in the Gulf Coast)

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORTERS

The Center for Media Justice has received support from several foundations, including the Open Society Institute, the Surdna Foundation, and the San Francisco Foundation, among others.

OTHER NOTABLES

- ❖ In 2001, The Center for Media Justice’s technical assistance to Youth Force Coalition on the “Stop the Superjail Campaign” in Alameda County, California, helped the campaign win its demands to stop the use of state and federal funds to expand and relocate a juvenile hall in the county. The State Board of Corrections withdrew already-approved state funding for the expansion and relocation, and the Board of Supervisors then agreed to cut the size and capacity of the jail by fifty percent.

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LEADERSHIP AT YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL ADVISORY BOARD

	% BLACK	% LATINO(A)	% OTHER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	25%	12.5%	37.5%
STAFF	25%	25%	50%
AGENCY POPULATION SERVED	30%	20%	50%

Lessons Learned: Reflections on the Profiles

The organizations featured in this publication demonstrate innovative methods of addressing the difficulties inherent in building alliances among Black, Latino, and other under-served communities. While each of the strategic communications efforts of the featured organizations varies in size and scope, some common themes stand out as important lessons for implementing successful projects that make use of Black and Latino alliances to move public opinion and influence policy reform:

Surveying the Local Context.

The first step for most successful communications campaigns is to understand the context—the history of an issue, the major proponent and opponent voices, and the public perceptions and opinions. Housing Illinois, for example, received support to undertake the largest study to date about housing attitudes in the Chicago area; it surveyed 1,000 people and conducted ten demographically representative focus groups.

The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice used data gathered by the Advancement Project, a Washington, DC-based democracy and justice action group, to get a picture of the landscape. This data included more than 700 interviews and oral histories and a comprehensive survey of the employment situation in the region.

Identifying the Target Audience.

The projects diverged on how they defined the target audience, but each made sure to define it early in the communications planning process. Some efforts chose to present (and represent) the perspectives of the Black and Latino communities they were attempting to bridge; others, however, felt reaching a broader audience would be more productive in moving their work forward.

Housing Illinois' "We Need the People Who Need Affordable Housing" campaign exemplifies the latter approach. The campaign was designed to target a broad audience; particularly, the (mainly White) residents who reported being "undecided" in the initial survey of public attitudes toward affordable housing. The public service ads feature predominantly White characters—a decision that sparked some controversy in the field, based on concerns that it downplayed the perspectives of Black and Latino Chicagoans.

"There was a concerted effort to make sure that the message could reach decision-makers and policymakers," says Kevin Jackson. "You're balancing a lot of different interests because you want people to use these ads." Housing Illinois did hold focus groups to see how the messages and language resonated in Black, White, and Latino communities alike.

Appealing to a broad base may help move policy, according to The Praxis Project's Themba-Nixon. "You don't hear a lot about involving Whites in alliances, even though having White alliances with people of color is more transformative to progressive discourse than Black-Brown alliances alone, simply by sheer numbers of who votes," she says.

Themba-Nixon argues that progressive infrastructure itself must be examined and strengthened; and Black, Brown, and White communities alike must play a role. “We need a change model that makes it clear that we’re trying to move majorities.”

At the same time, communications efforts must do more to elevate and include the voices of people of color, adds Malkia Cyril, director of The Center for Media Justice. “There is a tendency to want to put as many mainstream spokespeople out front as you can, which in some cases can actually reinforce the right’s position,” Cyril explains.

She cites the 1994 campaign to oppose California’s Proposition 187 (see The Center for Media Justice profile), which denied undocumented immigrants access to social services. “The message that came out of the progressive camp is an example of an ineffective strategy, of adopting a ‘shared value’ approach without dealing strategically with what it ultimately will mean for communities,” she states. “It will backfire in the long run.”

Whether targeting the public writ large, specific communities, or segments of communities, each of the profiled projects gave careful consideration to whom to target and how. In some cases, messages and approaches were adapted to better reach and move the audience.

Crafting Messages that Build Alliances.

Each of the projects was led by, involved, or worked to bridge Black and Latino communities. Understanding assumptions and blending organizing and communications to bring communities together are critical. The work in the Gulf Coast illustrates the tensions—and the power of communications—in this work.

In the aftermath of Katrina, the prevailing media story quickly became: here come immigrants to take jobs away from residents. The New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) flipped the script to tell the real story. Through town hall forums, meetings, and demonstrations, the project broke down biases and connected the communities. “We were honest about the stereotypes each group had, and the assumptions they were making. We helped each group tell the real stories,” says Marielena Hincapié, director of programs for the National Immigration Law Center. Community members—not just leaders—attended the forums and forged the alliances.

The ultimate message was that Latinos are being *exploited* and Blacks *excluded* from reconstruction work and economic opportunities—by the same forces and entities. Together, the unified voice is stronger and more effective.

Speaking Plain, Speaking Simple ... and Repeat.

As with many organizations whose focus is public policy and appropriations, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity faced a significant challenge in conveying information about complex issues in a manner that was accessible to its audiences. Without a clear—and clearly relevant—message, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity would never find traction to move people to support its fiscal reform goal.

“Trying to explain what this is all about, what the funding and regulations are for, and getting it across to the media and the public is really the challenge,” observes director Geri Palast. “You have to boil it down to a few key points that resonate.” CFE offered a simplified central message—all students deserve a sound basic education—and five specific elements to look for in each school. The public had something clear and tangible to understand.

The SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) in New Mexico also demonstrates the effectiveness of easily identifiable and memorable messages and images—and the importance of using multiple vehicles to get the messages into household familiarity. “When we do our door-to-door outreach, we want the people to have heard our message on the radio a couple of times, have gotten a direct mail piece at home, and know us before a door-knocker ever shows up. That repetition is essential to branding,” says Robby Rodriguez, SWOP’s director.

Testing and Adapting Messages.

In its effort to take on a large-scale development that threatened residents of Midtown Miami, a predominantly Puerto Rican community, the Miami Workers Center (MWC) developed a communications campaign around a character and image called the Midtown Monster. Just before planned release, MWC met with its members (from a range of communities around the city) only to discover that the idea of a Midtown Monster fell utterly flat.

“They told us that what really resonated with people in the community were sharks,” says Sushma Sheth, the communications director at Miami Workers Center. “We changed the whole campaign because that’s what people associated with impending danger. It was much more effective.”

The bottom line: do your research and analysis, and then you test it within the community—and be prepared to make adaptations.

Similarly, despite the success of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition’s Welcoming Tennessee campaign, the messages did not resonate with everyone. One tagline in particular—“I was a stranger and you welcomed me”—did not resonate with native-born Blacks in the state. TIRRC is using this feedback to develop specific messages targeted to other groups. “We learned from these and there are going to be more targeted messages in the future,” says Catalina Nieto, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition’s public awareness coordinator.

Tapping all the Outlets for the “Air War.”

“Strategic communications often gets stuck at the level of news and mass communications. If it’s truly strategic it must consider several levels of mass and personal communications. It’s through interactions with people whom we trust that we start to revise our political beliefs,” says Makani Themba-Nixon from The Praxis Project.

The Praxis Project equips community change-makers for victories on a smaller scale by offering tools for organizers to use in conversations and by training ministers and faith leaders to include policy, funding, and alliance-building messages in sermons, for example.

Many of the projects effectively leveraged earned media. When done strategically, even relatively moderate investments can generate larger-scale media attention. TIRRC and Housing Illinois, for example, used their campaigns to garner local and statewide media coverage.

Despite a lingering digital divide that leaves Blacks and Latinos disproportionately on the wrong side, several of the organizations we studied used new technologies and a variety of media (including radio, which has a wide reach) for their messages. Multimedia, the Internet, and blogs can be a cost-effective way to showcase and incorporate the perspectives of different members and communities.

“The Internet is evolving into a pretty good forum that conveys the experience and work of the organizations,” according to Sushma Sheth of the Miami Workers Center, which pitches its blogs as letters to the editor in local papers.

Infrastructure and System Reform.

The Center for Media Justice has done extensive, innovative work to move the field of strategic communications and ensure a space in the debate for Black, Latino, youth, and other voices. Its work across the country aims to restore fairness in media ownership and representation, empower spokespeople of color to counter wedge issues, and reverse the prevailingly negative images of youth and people of color in mainstream media.

“Much of the work of the traditional communications market is short term in focus. A more movement-oriented communications approach would look at the longer-term vision: What do we want the public debate to look like in 20 years, not just the end of this campaign?” asks Malkia Cyril.

Whether it is for affordable housing, education finance reform, workers’ rights, or health care, every campaign that builds alliances in Black and Latino communities has the power to shape, and yes to distort, future and concurrent efforts and the field as a whole.

Through its experiences with the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice in the Gulf Coast, the National Immigration Law Center came to see this point firsthand. “It made us realize that we need to do more to bring a racial justice lens to our programmatic work and overall messaging around immigrant’s rights more broadly. It’s critical,” says its director of programs Marielena Hincapié.

Recommendations for Grantmakers

Foundations often overlook strategic communications and inter-community alliance building in favor of research, publications, direct service, and project support. In hindsight, it frequently becomes clear that an otherwise well-designed initiative could have improved its chances for success with better communications strategies. Keeping that in mind, foundations can weave communications planning into program design as well as into ongoing foundation functions such as strategic planning, program planning, and grantmaking. The following suggestions are intended to help integrate strategic communications into your foundation's practices and ultimately advance social change in Black and Latino communities. Many of these recommendations can be accomplished through grantmaking, the most obvious way for foundations to achieve their goals. However, a comprehensive approach also includes high-level foundation strategy, nonfinancial assistance, and informing other funders about how they can support strategic communications.

STRATEGY

Identify how support for strategic communications on Black and Latino community issues fits within your foundation's theory of change.

Clearly articulate how strategic communications fits into your overarching strategy framework. Foundations with logic models that address social and economic justice have a ready-made rationale for integrating messaging and alliance building into core practices. For others, the link may be less direct. Make sure that key decision-makers, including board members, senior managers, and program officers, understand why communications is integral to achieving your goals.

Understand the steps before “policy, reports, and education.”

Some funders shy away from communications and advocacy, focusing instead on narrowly defined work that includes policies, reports, and education. Consider offering support for polling, message development, focus group work, and ways to convene community members. These are critical steps in developing effective strategic communications.

GRANTMAKING

Fund communications personnel and external resources.

Communications does not typically have a funding niche. As a result, essential communications work often gets sidelined. This is especially true in grassroots or small Black and Latino organizations. As Sushma Sheth, the communications director at the Miami Workers Center, and Makani Themba-Nixon, executive director of The Praxis Project, note, without funding, organizations do not have the resources to dedicate staff to communications functions. Lacking that capacity often means even hiring outside firms. While this outsourcing might be helpful, it sometimes provides minimal impact, since organizations need the capacity to figure out how to make effective use of such assistance.

Fund high-impact projects such as paid media promotions and advertising.

As repeatedly illustrated in the profiles of promising practices, the most appropriate communication channels differ by community. Reaching some groups requires persuading journalists to write articles, enlisting faith leaders, or incorporating information into Web sites. For others, paid advertisements or promotions are more likely to be effective. Despite this, some foundations have balked at funding paid placements. The SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP), for example, met foundation resistance to funding paid media efforts when they sought that type of funding. If your foundation would hesitate to fund paid advertisements, public service announcements, or other promotions, address the rationale for such reluctance and construct a persuasive argument, emphasizing the potential benefits to reach a broad group for relatively low cost. Many of the profiles in ON MESSAGE provide strong examples of successes linked to vehicles such as paid radio spots, television announcements, and billboards, and thus they could be presented within your foundation to sway opposing opinions.

Fund planning.

Identifying target audiences, developing strategies around how to reach each audience, and testing messages are critical aspects of strategic communications work that may require analysis and outside assistance. Up-front research, such as the focus groups Housing Illinois conducted, is critical to success. Through the focus groups, Housing Illinois was able to learn how messages and language resonated with their targeted audience, which enabled it to choose the right phrasing to help shift undecided voters in favor of affordable housing.

Identify organizations that with a little support could be much more effective.

Seek out the groups that, with minimal assistance, could develop their systems and infrastructure to take their work to the next level. Target the groups and networks that reach across communities. In the interviews for this publication, several grantmakers and advocates suggested that there would be value in finding a few key players who have the influence to affect change and then providing substantial funding to increase their capacity and reach.

Fund outcomes and output measurement.

Focus groups, polls, surveys, and scans (such as monitoring news media coverage of an issue or related Internet activity) can give a strong indication of the effect that communication campaigns are having. These time-limited research projects can be relatively inexpensive ways to quantify and qualify success. Following its campaign to change a Bay Area radio station to be more relevant and representative of its listeners, The Center for Media Justice was able to measure its effect by counting the number of news stories covering the events. Learning that almost 40 stories ran in various media sources provided a compelling explanation for the radio station's subsequent programming changes. Furthermore, it had the opportunity to analyze the radio station four years later and found an 80 percent increase in diverse voices. Neither of these analyses was costly or lengthy, and both provided reliable, useful outcomes data.

Are you interested in learning more about the nuts and bolts of supporting strategic communications in your grantmaking? Check out these recommended resources:

THE FUNDER'S GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL MEDIA INVESTMENTS (1996)
Douglas Gold and Company

VALUES AND VOICE: ADVANCING PHILANTHROPY THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS (1998)
Benton Foundation and The Communications Network

BRIDGING THE GAP: CONNECTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND PROGRAM GOALS (2003)
FoundationWorks

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS (2004)
Communications Consortium Media Center

INVESTING IN YOUTH MEDIA: A GUIDE FOR GRANTMAKERS (2006)
Open Society Institute

Note: Citations are available in the Further Reading section of this publication.

Be creative about ways to enhance existing initiatives.

If communications work does receive funding, it is often for the type of work most clearly tied to outcomes, such as messaging, advocacy, and Web site development. In Miami, as the RENT project, which publicized the harm caused by the development boom, was underway, Miami Workers Center received a grant to work with The SPIN project to conduct a detailed evaluation of MWC's communications and to train staff. This grant for highly useful assistance improved an already effective initiative.

NONFINANCIAL ASSISTANCE***Connect organizations and initiatives to affordable, effective communications assistance.***

A grantmaker's knowledge of organizations that have attempted similar projects as well as the landscape of national, regional, and local intermediaries can help program leaders who are stretched too thin to adequately scan for potential consultants and partners. Groups that haven't previously focused on strategic communications may not be aware of providers such as The Praxis Project, The Center for Media Justice, the Progressive Communications Network, The SPIN Project, and others. Even those that have strong communications experience may not have the same exposure to national or regional consultants that foundations have.

Encourage the creation and/or strengthening of relevant multi-ethnic alliances.

Your knowledge of community players provides an opportunity for connecting groups. Introductions, facilitated meetings, workshops, and other means of developing linkages between groups can be of valuable assistance. If there are tensions, such as in New Orleans where Black and Latino communities were often at odds after Hurricane Katrina, the foundation's bird's eye view can help. This bird's eye view can also help when groups have a history of mutual trust and shared interests as in New York, where Black and Latino groups came together to improve education through the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Convene and facilitate learning communities.

Foundations often bring community members together for peer-to-peer interactions and learning. In aiming to foster Black and Latino alliances within the context of a strategic communications initiative, learning communities can improve understanding of historical context and divisive messages and catalyze information sharing and partnerships.

INFORMING OTHERS***Engage and encourage other funders to support strategic communications that benefit Black and Latino communities.***

If you know other funders who support community organizing, advocacy, or social and economic justice, open a dialogue about the opportunities to use strategic communications. Invite their questions and suggestions and encourage them to partner with you on your initiatives in addition to developing their own. If you have collected outcomes data on effective projects or have stories of impressive initiatives, you can benefit the field by sharing them within your foundation and will multiply that impact by using the information to pique other funders' interests.

Join the Conversation

Black and Latino communities face a future of continuing challenges and opportunities. We hope that this publication has demonstrated that most of them can be addressed by the two communities working hand in hand, and that carefully planned, collaborative communications strategies are an effective, if not indispensable, factor in the achievement of common goals for social change. The featured organizations and campaigns vary in age, duration, budget size, purpose, and geographic focus. All involve Black and Latino leadership in communities. Some were conceived by an existing or new alliance of Blacks and Latinos. Others served to build such alliances. Some involved other ethnic groups, as well. A number of common themes emerge from their experience in strategic communications. The profiled organizations framed the issues themselves. They developed relationships—with usual and unusual partners and with the media—and demonstrated the power of Black and Latino collaboration to advance social change. They built communications capacity within their own and other organizations. They took time to lay the groundwork, carefully crafted their messages, and used multiple strategies. Last, they had the resources to undertake communications efforts in a comprehensive and effective manner.

It is clear that without the support of local and national foundations, the victories achieved by and on behalf of Black and Latino communities across the organizations and campaigns featured here would likely not have been possible. When it comes to “leveling the playing field” and making voices of color heard in the public sphere in America, commitment, effective strategy, *and* funding are required. The many messages received daily by American newspaper readers, radio listeners, and television viewers are the fruit of all three. It is not surprising that it is not any different for nonprofit organizations. Across the country there are communities, organizations, and campaigns of Latinos and Blacks that, with support and guidance, can have the impact that both nonprofits and philanthropy are seeking. We have aimed in this publication to provide examples, lessons, inspiration, and recommendations for the philanthropic community to support and engage Blacks and Latinos in boldly and effectively uniting their voices. With ON MESSAGE, ABFE and HIP offer a call to action to philanthropy to invest in and expand these vital efforts. Join the conversation online at www.abfe.org or www.hiponline.org.

Postscript

KENNETH W. AUSTIN

The advancement of Black-Brown strategic collaborations appears to be a natural assignment for philanthropy. Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to engage in work ‘outside of the box.’ Yet, Black-Brown alliance building is also hard work, which requires nurturing, patience, and trust. Fortunately, over the past three years, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has provided the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) and Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) with a planning grant that has enabled the groups to engage each other in honest relationship-building efforts. Today they aim to lead by example and serve as a model for alliance building across our communities.

ABFE and HIP have not taken any shortcuts to arrive at this point where they are publishing this path-breaking publication on the use of strategic communications. Recently, I reviewed the records relating to the joint work of ABFE and HIP during my tenure at ABFE. We did our first project together, a panel on demographic trends, back in 2002. We conducted more ad hoc joint panels and board receptions in 2003 and 2004. Trust developed between the two organizations over time and we began to think more strategically about ways to collaborate. It was at that time that we agreed to engage in a research project that would advance and leverage our respective efforts to support more effective and responsive philanthropy for Black and Latino communities.

ABFE operates a year-long leadership training program for emerging philanthropic leaders. From its inception, we were intentional about including members of HIP in the Connecting Leaders Fellowship Program to extend our dialogue beyond the Black community. Recognizing that it is the grassroots nonprofit organizations that are engaged in the work of advancing social change, we put our collective heads together to develop a research agenda that would advance the policy and advocacy work of these nonprofits operating for the betterment of Black and Latino communities.

Strategic communications is crucial to the effectiveness of Black and Latino nonprofits. Organizations working to advance social change in both communities are facing a daily assault by well-resourced organizations using media and communications vehicles aimed at dividing our communities and attacking our policy efforts. The organizations and projects outlined in this publication are doing extraordinary work, often with limited operational resources. This is an excellent opportunity to review the best practices around using strategic communications to support social change in Black and Latino communities, as well as the operational investments necessary to expand these efforts.

Kenneth W. Austin

Former President (2003–2007), Association of Black Foundation Executives

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Founded in 1983, Hispanics in Philanthropy's mission is to strengthen Latino communities by increasing resources for the Latino and Latin American civil sector; by increasing Latino participation and leadership throughout the field of philanthropy; and to foster policy change to enhance equity and inclusiveness.



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