

# Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities

## IMPACTS OF ADVOCACY, ORGANIZING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA

### Executive Summary

by Lisa Raghelli and Julia Craig

North Carolina has large and vibrant nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. When nonprofit organizations and foundations partner to tackle urgent issues in the state, they can achieve tremendous success—especially when they use public policy advocacy and engage affected constituencies directly in the problem-solving process.

This report is the second in a series being produced in regions across the country. It demonstrates that in North Carolina, a sample of local and state organizations and their allies leveraged millions in foundation resources to secure almost two billion dollars in benefits for North Carolinians. These groups also brought into the process thousands of residents such as individuals from low-wealth communities; African Americans; Latinos; immigrants; Native Americans; farmworkers; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) residents; senior citizens; youth; people living with HIV/AIDS and other historically disenfranchised populations. These monetary impacts, as well as nonmonetary and civic engagement efforts, benefit all of North Carolina, strengthening its social fabric and helping government and the private sector serve residents and their communities better.

NCRP studied 13 organizations that worked with underrepresented constituencies<sup>1</sup> in North Carolina on a range of issues, including poverty, worker issues, education, health care, housing, environment and civil rights. These organizations used a variety of strategies to achieve change, including building coalitions, mobilizing affected communities, partnering with policymakers, conducting research, reaching out to the media, creating new institutions and employing legal strategies. The report examined the groups' accomplishments over a five-year period (2003–2007):

- > For impacts that could be quantified, the aggregate monetary benefit of the groups' accomplishments was more than \$1.8 billion.
- > For every dollar invested in their advocacy and organizing work (\$20.4 million total), the groups garnered \$89 in benefits for North Carolina communities.
- > Foundations provided critical support to these successes, contributing \$17.5 million or 86 percent of all funding for advocacy and organizing among the nonprofit sample.

These numbers and equally important non-quantifiable impacts translated into concrete improvements in people's lives. For example, homeowners avoided losing their homes to foreclosure. Senior citizens gained access to affordable medications. Low-wage workers earned more income and the unemployed received temporary compensation until they could find new jobs. Students benefited from supplemental education services and renovated schools. Youth had training and summer job opportunities. Farmworkers and other residents had decreased exposure to toxic chemicals and pollutants. Rural communities made progress in building sustainable local economies. Same-sex partners secured the right to visit their companions in the hospital. Communities became more socially cohesive, building bridges across race, class and other divides.

Strategic foundation support for these efforts was central to their success. Funders exercised leadership in a variety of ways, both individually and collectively, to leverage their grantmaking and help nonprofits achieve demonstrable community benefit. These impacts will continue to aid North Carolina communities well into the future. Yet, the state still faces many pressing challenges that require bold and continued action. Nonprofit

organizations need sustained resources and capacity to respond effectively to these challenges. North Carolina grantmakers can build on the many positive philanthropic strategies already underway in the state to achieve even more powerful impact. Foundations can make a measurable difference; they can ally with national funders and partner with effective grassroots and statewide nonprofits to advocate and organize for long-term, meaningful change.



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