

CHALLENGING GRANTMAKERS TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES



Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities

IMPACTS OF ADVOCACY, ORGANIZING, AND
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA

by Julia Craig

I. Executive Summary

When foundations and other institutional grantmakers invest in nonprofit organizations engaged in policy advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement, does it make a difference for Pennsylvania communities?

This report describes, measures and—where possible—monetizes the policy impacts of 13 organizations in Pennsylvania, achieved largely with foundation support. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) analyzed data on the organizing, advocacy and civic engagement these groups undertook during a five-year period (2005-2009).

The research reveals impressive results. Collectively, the groups garnered more than \$3.1 billion for marginalized communities in the state and achieved many equally significant non-monetary benefits. The groups studied worked with underrepresented constituencies in Pennsylvania on a range of issues, including poverty, low-wage worker issues, education, access to affordable health care, environmental issues, affordable housing and civil rights. These organizations utilized a variety of strategies to achieve change, including working in coalition, mobilizing affected communities, conducting research, employing legal strategies, reaching out to the media and engaging in direct legislative advocacy.

Using these strategies and others, the groups achieved significant accomplishments. Key findings were:

- > For impacts that could be monetized, the aggregate benefit over five years was \$3,175,929,346, including:
 - \$1 billion in additional wages for minimum-wage and low-wage workers in the state, primarily coming from the private sector;
 - \$827 million in new state funding for public schools; and
 - More than \$49 million to support the creation and preservation of affordable housing in Philadelphia.
- > Foundations and other institutional grantmakers provided critical monetary, capacity-building and convening support to these efforts. Funders contributed \$22.1 million, or 85 percent, of all advocacy and organizing funding over a period of five years.
- > For every dollar invested in their advocacy, organizing and civic engagement (\$26.1 million total), the groups garnered \$122 in benefits for Pennsylvania communities.¹ This return on investment is consistent with our findings in other sites.
- > Non-monetizable impacts also benefited tens of thousands of underserved Pennsylvanians, including:
 - Protecting clean water in rural communities;
 - Providing inclusive education opportunities for students with cognitive disabilities; and
 - Preserving neighborhood stability through foreclosure prevention.
- > The organizations creatively engaged constituencies across the state, helping marginalized groups find a voice in the democratic process and marshaling the people power to make change by:
 - Collectively training more than 10,000 leaders;
 - Growing their membership by more than 10,000 individuals; and
 - Helping 14,000 people communicate directly with policymakers.

Civic engagement strategies included providing basic training in organizing fundamentals, involving youth in the development of an advocacy agenda, ensuring community input on a housing trust fund oversight board and holding community accountabili-

ty sessions with local elected leaders.

Grantmakers were critical to the success of these organizations, providing the lion's share of support for their advocacy and organizing work and giving non-monetary support by leveraging media contacts, connecting grantees to like-minded funders and convening coalitions. Many Pennsylvania philanthropies supported these groups, as did several national level funders.

However, NCRP's research indicates that Pennsylvania's nonprofit infrastructure is in jeopardy. More than any other site included in this series, NCRP found that the state's nonprofit organizations engaged in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement work were struggling. Many groups experienced executive turnover, were operating on reserves or reduced budgets and scrambled to do more with less as their constituents faced financial strain in their own lives. A few organizations were dormant or closed their doors altogether.

This report demonstrates the value that these organizations bring to communities in Pennsylvania and should serve as a wake-up call to philanthropic partners in the state. When nonprofits that advocate lose capacity, so does the broader nonprofit infrastructure that provides vital contributions to the state's democratic processes.

The state continues to face many urgent issues in areas such as education, immigrant rights, health, housing, low-wage work and environmental justice. Much remains to be done. In the current economic environment, the risk of losing ground looms. As one advocate noted, "There is a human capital cost to not funding advocacy ... There is a cost-savings to changing bad policy. We know what that cost is—give us a chance to tell you."

NCRP urges nonprofits and funders to use this report to educate others about the ways in which philanthropists can leverage their grant dollars for significant community benefit.

Based on in-depth research about nonprofit advocacy and its philanthropic support in Pennsylvania, NCRP recommends that funders:

1. **Increase the percentage of grant dollars devoted to advocacy, organizing and civic engagement for marginalized communities.** Some funders already recognize the significant return offered by investing in policy advocacy and organizing, consequently devoting a substantial percentage of their grant dollars to these efforts. Those who do so find that it helps them be more effective and achieve their philanthropic goals. If more grantmakers increase the proportion of their grant dollars devoted to these strategies, they will increase the capacity of underserved communities to engage in participatory democracy and contribute to solving the state's pressing problems. Without such support, nonprofit advocacy capacity and gains could be lost, especially as community action groups in Pennsylvania have been struggling to stay afloat since the recession began in 2008.
2. **Be a responsive partner.** NCRP found that advocates highly valued honest relationships with Pennsylvania grantmakers and appreciated their efforts to be responsive by providing funding at critical times as well as in ways that go beyond the grant. Examples include providing emergency funding, connecting grantees to one another to foster coalitions, building specific capacities and helping a group gain media access. Such strategies build strong relationships while ensuring greater success and impact.
3. **Strengthen nonprofit advocacy and organizing infrastructure.** The study found that coalitions can achieve significant statewide policy impacts. Grantmaker collaborations can aid such efforts. Yet, the state's advocacy and organizing infrastructure is fraying. Pennsylvania-based funders can communicate with each other to leverage their resources effectively to address pressing issues in the state, work together to ensure a robust advocacy and organizing nonprofit infrastructure, and identify ways in which to support bottom-up collaboration among nonprofits.
4. **Combine funding for services and advocacy.** Many Pennsylvania organizations featured in the study are adept at combining direct services with advocacy and organizing work to achieve remarkable results. Foundations can support these hybrid organizations to meet immediate community needs while addressing the root causes of problems.
5. **Provide general operating support and multi-year grants.** As nonprofits balance the immediate basic needs of their constituents with their long-term advocacy and organizing strategies to eliminate those needs, their funding partners can be of the greatest help by investing in a way that enables them to achieve the highest possible impact.

Pennsylvania groups reported that core support and multiyear funding are critically important to their ability to achieve success and respond to policy opportunities.

Pennsylvania nonprofits and grantmakers have partnered to achieve significant policy reforms, helping make government more efficient and effective. These efforts have both generated new resources for underserved communities and saved resources for all taxpayers. Yet, the recent recession has threatened the fabric of the advocacy infrastructure, and many gains are at risk. Funders can ensure that ground is not lost and enhance their impact by increasing grants for civic and policy engagement.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY, INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES

Impacts of Advocacy, Organizing and Civic Engagement in Pennsylvania

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Funding advocacy and advocates is the most direct route to supporting enduring social change for the poor, the disenfranchised and the most vulnerable among us, including the youngest and oldest in our communities.

—Gara LaMarche, President and CEO
The Atlantic Philanthropies*

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) aims to ensure that philanthropic institutions practice Philanthropy at Its Best® – philanthropy that serves the public good, supports nonprofit effectiveness and responds to those in our society with the least wealth, opportunity and power. NCRP believes that one of the most effective ways to address the needs of the disenfranchised is by providing support for advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement.

NCRP's *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best*, published in March 2009, challenges grantmakers to promote the American values of opportunity and inclusion by contributing to a strong, participatory democracy that engages all communities. One way they can accomplish that is by providing at least 25 percent of their grant dollars for advocacy, organizing and civic engagement. This aspirational goal is one of ten benchmarks in Criteria.

Many grantmakers invest in advocacy, organizing and civic engagement as a way to advance their missions and strengthen communities. A sizable number of foundations, however, have not seriously considered investing in these strategies, partly because they have difficulty measuring impact and fully understanding how effective these strategies can be. The Grantmaking for Community Impact Project (GCIP) addresses these concerns by highlighting the positive impact that communities have seen through funder-supported nonpartisan advocacy and organizing.

To provide foundations with useful information that can help them consider supporting these strategies at higher levels, each GCIP report documents impact and demonstrates how advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement result in community-wide benefits and can advance a foundation's mission. This report on Pennsylvania is the sixth in the series.

Additional information is available online at www.ncrp.org.

* The Atlantic Philanthropies (2008). *Why Supporting Advocacy Makes Sense for Foundations*. Atlantic Reports, Investing in Change.

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