

Breaking the Wall Between Funding Direct Services and Advocacy

Editor's note: We've heard many grantmakers say that the reason they don't fund advocacy and community organizing is because they fund direct services. They seem to be under the assumption that funding one precludes funding the other. We hope to dispel this myth by featuring two foundations that fund important social services their communities need as well as policy and civic engagement efforts that seek to address the root causes of critical social issues. May their stories inspire other foundations to break the imagined silos.

MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION: Supporting Families, Leading Change

By Kathleen Baca and Cheryl Milloy

Marguerite Casey Foundation is dedicated to creating a movement of working families advocating on their own behalf for change. We fund cornerstone community-based organizations that train leaders, advocates and organizers to work for changes in public policy. We ask grantee organizations to work across issues, regions, ethnici-

ties and egos in support of all families. Our grantmaking and communications support movement building in an effort to bring about much needed change in policy and public attitudes that negatively affect poor and low-income families.

We do not fund direct services but rather provide general support to community organizations, some of which provide direct services along with engaging families in organizing and advocacy. We know from experience that providing unrestricted, long-term grants

is a direct and efficient way to effect change at the grassroots level. Since its inception, Marguerite Casey Foundation has provided long-term general support grants to community organizations. We find these organizations not by soliciting proposals, but by relying on community members to point us toward specific groups already successfully engaging low-income families in policy solutions. We believe that unless poor families are leading the efforts for policy change, their issues will never be addressed.

FOUNDATION FOR THE MID SOUTH: Expanding Knowledge. Improving Lives.

By Chris Crothers

The Foundation for the Mid South is a regional foundation focused on building the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi from within – engaging residents and communities to become more knowledgeable about how to improve their own conditions and quality of life.

Our region continually ranks nation-

ally at the bottom of many quality-of-life indicators, including educational achievement, income and health issues like mental health and obesity. Needs in our region are greater than our states' abilities to meet them. One of the region's biggest challenges is an inability to connect efforts, people and resources, creating an overlap of activities and missed opportunities. The foundation's approach is to support and expand innovative ideas and programs that provide direct services, as well as to work with communities and local and state

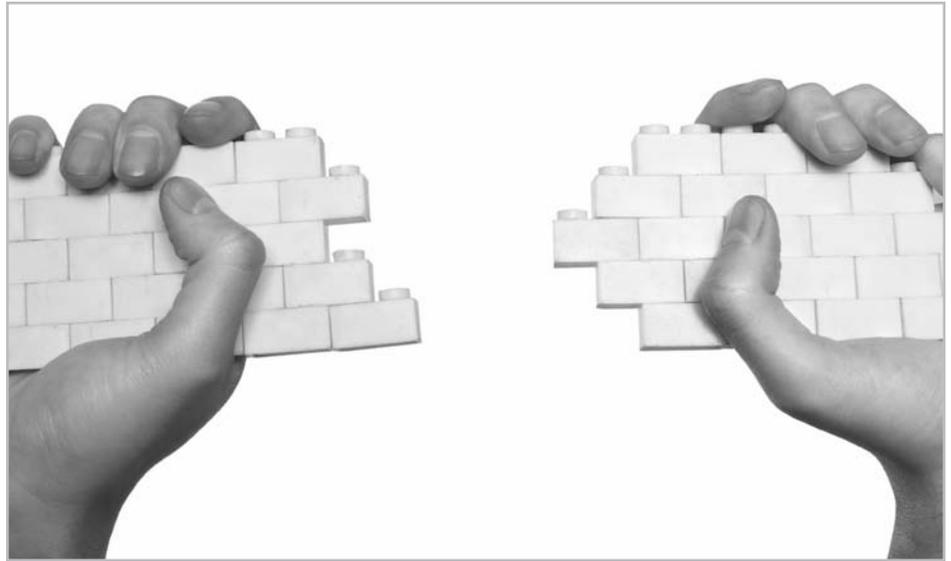
officials to develop solutions and policies that will benefit the public.

The two most important lessons that the foundation has learned are that: 1) it is not all about the money and 2) effective direct services and impact builds a strong case for policy change.

In many of the areas we serve, significant change can occur by simply making connections – large amounts of funding are not always the answer. It can be as easy as bringing people together to create a forum for discussion and conversation, to share their

Cornerstone direct-service providers have a natural base of families that can be empowered and engaged. Marguerite Casey Foundation has learned that long-term general support grants give direct service providers the operational flexibility to turn their attention to organizing and advocacy – critical components of social justice. It takes time, however, to incorporate movement building principles into direct service organizations; thus, multi-year grants are crucial. We also have learned that direct service organizations sometimes are unable to incorporate movement building into their operations. It requires staff and board commitment, as well as funding.

After nearly 10 years, the results are in. Our approach has created networks of low-income communities that rolled back payday loans in New Mexico, provided improved support for ex-felons reentering society in Illinois and, in 2010, increased voter participation by 246 percent in two of the poorest precincts in South Texas. In addition, our grantees have developed hundreds of thousands of community leaders, both youth and adults. Overall, our approach to philanthropy is to create strong organizations on the ground,



engaged and informed families that can advocate on their own behalf, and networks of organizations working to ensure the well-being of all of America's families.

The advice we would give to other funders interested in supporting direct service as well as organizing and advocacy is that long-term general operating support is a critical grantmaking strategy. Such support allows community organizations to incorporate organizing and advocacy into their service programming. Direct services can empower as well as stabilize families

when they are provided with tools for systems analysis, organizing and policy advocacy. Working together across issues, geographies race and ethnicity, families and organizations then can advance a common agenda to achieve prosperity for all America's families. ■

Kathleen Baca is director of communications, and Cheryl Milloy is evaluation and research officer of Marguerite Casey Foundation. For more information about the foundation's programs, visit www.caseygrants.org.

resources and ideas, or to leverage existing resources with others that may be available. Oftentimes, nonprofits and sometimes even elected officials might not be aware of effective programs and approaches at their disposal that can be used to improve their communities

It is in grantmakers' best interests to inform policymakers of the effective services and outcomes their investments generate. When advocates reference data-driven research and proven, successful models in their dialogues with policymakers, they build a more

compelling case to influence how public resources should be used to bring proposed efforts to scale.

The foundation believes that progress in each area is required to create impact and sustainability. Our advice to grantmakers interested in adopting a comprehensive approach is to understand that progress sometimes is slow and success will not occur overnight. It takes time to develop trust and build the capacities necessary in communities for long-term sustainability. We also suggest taking time to understand the procedures and

processes of government at the local and state levels. It is important to create relationships and establish communications among funders, nonprofits and elected officials, informing policymakers how best public sector resources should be used to benefit communities and their people. ■

Chris Crothers is director of communications for the Foundation for the Mid South. For more information about the foundation and its priorities, visit www.fndmidsouth.org.