

Faith-Based Community Organizing

*Building Democracy
for the New Millennium*



Interfaith Funders

Interfaith Funders wishes to thank

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What is Faith-Based Community

A force for democracy is growing in the United States. The uninvolved are participating, the voiceless are speaking and the powerful are beginning to listen. Marginalized people in countless neighborhoods across thirty-three states are influencing the decision-making institutions that control their quality of life. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians are rolling up their sleeves together to secure living wages, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, and much more for their

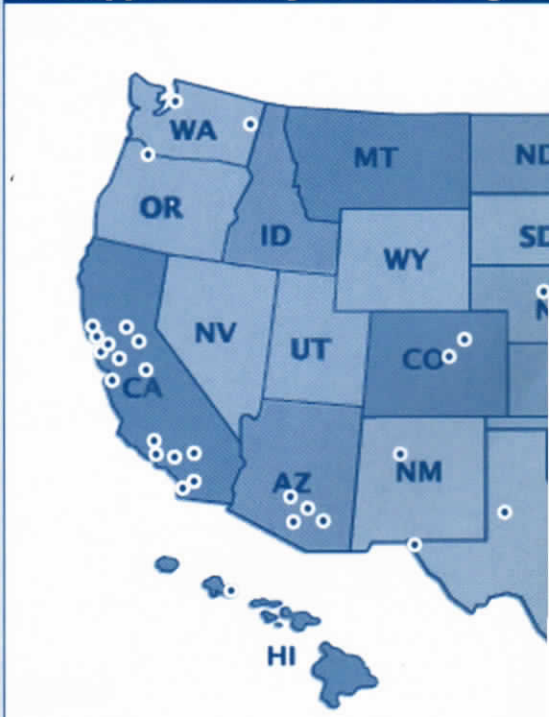
families and communities. Jews, Catholics, and Protestants are planning strategies together, working with school boards, city councils, and state governments to improve public

education and create a more equitable healthcare system. And in the process, they are listening to each other's life stories and building strong new relationships across the barriers that normally keep people apart. Operating largely outside the media spotlight, these efforts represent a significant force for change and for renewed democracy. This force is faith-based community organizing.

Faith-based community organizing (FBCO) groups bring people together primarily through their religious congregations, but also through their unions, community organizations, and children's schools. The vast majority of FBCO groups are made up of racially diverse institutions and involve congregations from different religious traditions, most commonly Catholic, mainstream Protestant and historically black, with smaller numbers of other Christian tradi-

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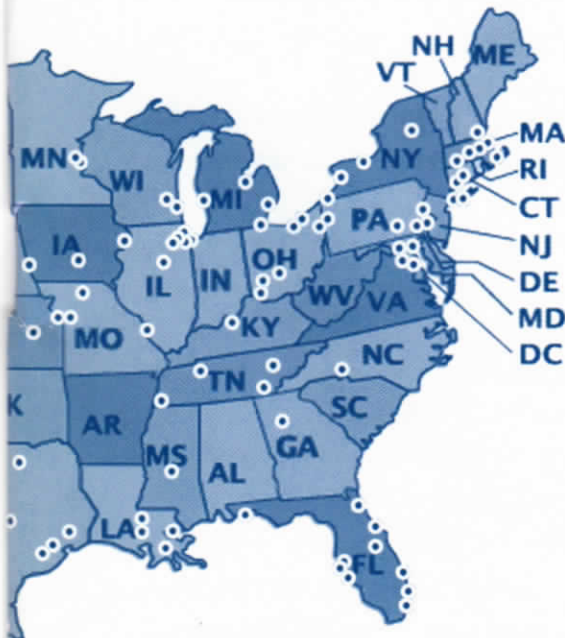
Note: Locations are approximate. Dots often overlap

Organizing?

tions, Unitarian Universalists and occasionally Jewish. There are approximately 134 FBCO groups in the U.S. with more than 4000 member institutions. Because membership in FBCO groups is institutional rather than individual, FBCO is sometimes called "institution-based organizing" and because it is grounded in the values and traditions that come from religious faith, it is also sometimes called "values-based organizing." But whatever you call it, FBCO is a growing force.

Despite its low public profile, FBCO is reaching a huge number of people. About 2,700 people serve on FBCO governing boards, and approximately 24,000 people are core leaders participating regularly at any given moment. More than 100,000 people attended meetings sponsored by FBCO groups during an eighteen-month period in 1998 and 1999. The congregations and organizations that are institutional members of FBCO groups have a combined individual membership of more than 1% of the U.S. population, a figure rarely reached by social movements in U.S. history.

in the U.S.



Faith-based community organizing groups should not be confused with the social service and community development groups described in President Bush's new faith-based initiative. FBCO groups do not receive government funds. They see their primary role not to provide services (although some do) but to develop participants' leadership skills, build a strong web of relationships through congregations and other institutions, and turn those relationships into a civic power capable of making change to promote the public good.

What Have FBCO *Groups*

FBCO groups have achieved significant accomplishments in three broad areas: building relationships and community, making concrete changes to promote the public good and developing community leaders.

Building Relationships and Community

FBCO is based on the belief that healthy democracy is dependent on mutual ties of trust and shared interest among an active and involved citizenry. A decline in participation in groups of all kinds and an increasing isolation of individuals are weakening U.S. democracy. FBCO seeks to rebuild community and strengthen “third sector” organizations, such as congregations and community groups, which can act to mediate the power of the public (government) and private (business) sectors.

FBCO groups get people talking to each other and building relationships, both within FBCO member institutions and between them, across the chasms of race and religion and class. These new relationships cause a powerful transformation at several levels. As isolation crum-

bles, individuals grow, and a new community emerges made up of diverse people who have shared their stories with each other. These new relationships often bring life to congregations where people have prayed together for years without ever really getting to know each other. And this is only the beginning. When people are in relationship and have identified common values and interests, they are able to take joint public actions to make civic change. The new community created by FBCO is a source of power that brings positive transformation to individuals, congregations, and society at large.

Making Concrete Changes to Promote the Public Good

FBCO groups work to improve public schools, create good jobs, promote economic justice, increase affordable housing, and make policing more effective and accountable, among many other issues. FBCO groups’ significant accomplishments include:

- ▶ In East New York, an FBCO group built over 2,200 moderately priced homes that helped revitalize one of New York’s poorest neighborhoods.

Accomplished?

- ▶ In Baltimore, an FBCO group and its labor partners secured passage of the nation's first living-wage bill requiring all recipients of city contracts to pay workers enough to support a family above the poverty level. This victory started a movement that has spread across the country, with 60 living-wage ordinances now raising the income of thousands of low-wage workers and their families.
- ▶ In California, several FBCO groups worked together to persuade the state to allocate \$50 million for primary care health clinics, \$50 million for after-school programs, and a \$9.2 billion bond for school repair and construction.
- ▶ In Florida, Philadelphia and Milwaukee, FBCO groups won commitments totaling more than one billion dollars from banks to lend to businesses and homeowners in low-income and minority neighborhoods.
- ▶ In Texas' Rio Grande Valley, an FBCO group brought additional

state funding of \$835,000 to support local public schools and a quarter of a billion dollars to provide water and sewer service to the colonias, which are illegal, residential housing lots lacking basic infrastructure such as water, sewage services and paved roads, inhabited by extremely low-income people along the Texas-Mexico border and beyond the Valley.

- ▶ In Minneapolis and St. Paul, an FBCO group secured \$68 million in state funds to clean up contaminated urban sites for industrial uses.

While no aggregate information is available totaling the gains of faith-based community organizing, it is clear from the anecdotal information that the efforts of FBCO groups have won billions of dollars from government, businesses, banks, and religious denominations to improve the quality of life for low and moderate-income people.

What Have FBCO

Groups

Developing Community Leaders

Faith-based community organizing produces strong community leaders. Groups conduct multi-day leadership training sessions, and education continues “on the ground” as leaders participate in developing and conducting issue campaigns. Leaders-in-training learn the technical skills of organizing including

FBCO’s attitude toward leadership development grows out of the “iron rule,” the guiding principal for this model: Don’t do for others what they can do for themselves. Volunteer leaders are encouraged and expected to share the key roles and responsibilities of the FBCO group – making decisions, recruiting new members, selecting issues, developing strategies, planning issue campaigns, negotiating with public

Leaders-in-training learn the technical skills of organizing including weighing alternatives, negotiating differences, and developing strategic plans.

weighing alternatives, negotiating differences, and developing strategic plans, as well as less concrete skills like clarifying one’s self-interest, viewing and accepting conflict, and analyzing the power dynamics of institutions – theirs and the ones they are calling to accountability.

officials, speaking to the media, and holding members of their own group accountable. Becoming a leader in an FBCO group is often a transformative experience and leaders can have a significant impact not just within the FBCO group, but within their congregation or organization, their families and workplaces, and society at large (see page 8).

Accomplished?

Story of a Leader

Virginia Ramirez is one faith-based leader who underwent a transformation through her participation in the COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service) organization in San Antonio. Before her participation, Mrs. Ramirez was afraid to speak out because she felt she wasn't educated. But she was angry at the injustice in her neighborhood, like the neighbor who died because she did not have heat in the winter. COPS taught Mrs. Ramirez to tap that anger and forge it into a tool for the renewal of hope in herself and her community. She learned to speak publicly, to lead actions, to take risks for herself, and to guide others. The FBCO process taught her to develop relationships within which she could challenge the indifference and apathy of officials. She learned how to work with others to negotiate with the holders of power: to compromise, to confront when necessary, and to rebuild collaboration. She gained the confidence to lead negotiations with the city council and mayor. She went back to school at age 44, earned her GED, and entered college. Virginia Ramirez is now president of her parish council. She is also co-chair of COPS and represents her community at the negotiating table with the head of the Chamber of Commerce, the mayor, and the bankers of San Antonio. She leads a team of leaders and pastors engaged in transforming the public hospital system to truly serve the inner city. She also mentors and guides other leaders like herself.

(Profile derived from page 8 of *Reweaving the Fabric*, an article by Ernesto Cortes)

How does Faith-Based *Community*

While all FBCO groups vary to some degree, they typically engage in the following organizing methodology:

- 1.** Recruiting local clergy and organizational leaders from key congregations and organizations. Winning the support of these “gatekeepers” is a first step to involving the lay leadership.
- 2.** Holding a process of conversation and relationship-building through an essential tool of FBCO, the one-to-one meeting. One-to-one meetings help find leaders; identify issues, hopes and dreams; and build community. Typically, an FBCO group will conduct thousands of one-to-one meetings over a one- to two-year period to discover shared concerns that FBCO participants can work together to resolve, before it holds its founding convention or begins to work on an issue.
- 3.** Raising funds to hire a professional organizer to provide training and help build a strong organization.
- 4.** Researching a problem and possible solutions by holding seminars with experts, meeting with public or private officials, and talking with people experienced in the issue.
- 5.** Negotiating with public officials about the solutions. Typically, the leadership holds a series of smaller meetings with officials, culminating in a large public meeting, often involving thousands of people, where the official is asked to publicly announce his or her support for the FBCO group’s campaign.
- 6.** Winning the issue and moving on to a different issue.

Organizing Work?

Once established, FBCO groups continue to focus on recruiting new members, developing new relationships, and training new leaders. Historically, these groups have been organized at the neighborhood or metropolitan level, but increasingly they are broadening their territory and linking up with other groups to impact regional and state policy. As they address various issues, FBCO groups are explicitly political--they engage with political figures to make changes on issues identified by their members. But they are also non-partisan--they do not endorse candidates or promote political parties.

Most FBCO groups belong to one of the four major "networks" or umbrella organizations: the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART) and Gamaliel Foundation, although a few are independent or belong to smaller networks. Network affiliation allows groups to join together to work on a larger scale while still maintaining strength at the local level. While each network differs in emphasis, they all provide ongoing support, training and mentoring to organizers and leaders and help local groups share information, strategies, and tactics. Some of the networks have begun to strategize about how to bring groups in their network together to have a national impact.

How did Faith-Based *Community Organizing Begin?*

Faith-based community organizing began with Saul Alinsky, a sociologist at the University of Chicago who founded the first FBCO group in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood in 1939. A year later, Alinsky founded the first FBCO network, the Industrial Areas Foundation, to build new FBCO organizations across the country. Between 1939 and 1972, the year he died, the IAF built ten organizations. By the time of Alinsky's death the majority of these organizations were in decline or had already ceased to exist, due primarily to lack of leadership. Alinsky's successors realized that professional organizers were necessary on an on-going basis to ensure that new leaders were recruited to keep the organization fresh and strong. The first, and still active organization to be formed along the lines of this revised organizing model was COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service) in San Antonio in 1974.

Starting in the late 1930s, Alinsky organized people to gain power and act on their own behalf. More than half a century later, current models of faith-based organizing build on his legacy to advance long-range responses to the economic and social decline of communities and civil society, fight poverty, and establish accountability of government and the private sector.

Sources

The description of FBCO in the introduction is drawn largely from *Faith-Based Community Organizing: The State of the Field, 2001*, by Mark R. Warren and Richard L. Wood.

The examples of concrete changes brought about by FBCO groups were taken from *Building Democracy: Faith-Based Community Organizing Today* by Mark R. Warren, *Community Organizing Toolbox: A Funder's Guide to Community Organizing* by Larry Parachini and Sally Covington, *Interfaith Funders' 1999 Annual Report*, and reports from individual faith-based organizing groups. The East New York group described is East Brooklyn Congregations, an IAF affiliate. The Baltimore group is Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development (BUILD), another IAF affiliate. The California groups are all

part of the PICO California Project. Groups working on bank lending included several DART affiliates in Florida; Milwaukee Interfaith Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), a Gamaliel Foundation affiliate; and Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP), a PICO affiliate. The Texas group described is Valley Interfaith, an IAF affiliate. The Minneapolis group is ISAIAH, an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation.

The section on developing community leaders is drawn from *Dry Bones Rattling* by Mark R. Warren and *Interfaith Funders' 1999 Annual Report*. The profile of Virginia Ramirez is adapted from the article, *Reweaving the Fabric*, by Ernesto Cortes.

Additional *Introductory Materials*

Books

Hart, Stephen (2001). *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics*. University of Chicago Press (See chapter 2 and appendix A).

Horwitt, S.D. (1989). *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky – His Life and Legacy*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf.

Parachini, Larry and Covington, Sally (2000). *Community Organizing Toolbox – Types of CO Groups and the Work They Do, Case Study #3: Pacific Institute for Community Organization and How National and Regional Networks Provide Training, Technical Assistance and Other Support for CO; Case Study #4: Developing a Faith-Based CO Organization*. Neighborhood Funders Group.

Warren, Mark (2001). *Dry Bones Rattling*. Princeton University Press.

Articles and other Publications

Coleman, John A. *Under the Cross and the Flag: Reflections on Discipleship and Citizenship in America*. America 174, no. 16 (11 May 1995): 1-9.

Cortes, Ernesto. *Reweaving the Fabric: The Iron Rule and the IAF Strategy for Dealing with Poverty Through Power and Politics*. Study produced for the Center for Urban Policy Research, 1993.

Community Change: Organizing Around the Church, Issue 13. Center for Community Change.

Garland, The Most Rev. James H. *Congregation-Based Organizations: A Church Model for the 90's*. America (13 November 1993).

Kromrey, Michael. *Apathy, Civic Engagement and Community Building: The PICO Network Response*. Pacific Institute for Community Organization.

Miller, Donald E. and Gustafson, Roger (2000). *Power, Justice, Faith: Conversations with the IAF*. The Center for Religion and Civic Culture.

Warren, Mark (Jan/Feb. 2001). *Building Democracy: Faith-Based Community Organization Today*. Shelterforce.

Wood, Richard L. *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*. Book manuscript under review, based on ethnographic study of faith-based and race-based civic engagement among Hispanic, African-American and Anglo residents of low-income neighborhoods in six U.S. urban areas.

Information on the Four Largest FBCO Networks

Direct Action Research and Training Center
P.O. Box 370791, Miami, FL 33137-0791
305-576-8020

Gamaliel Foundation
203 N. Wabash Ave., Ste. 808, Chicago, IL 60601
312-357-2639

Industrial Areas Foundation
220 W. Kinzie St., Fifth Floor, Chicago, IL 60610
312-245-9211

Pacific Institute for Community Organization
171 Santa Rosa Ave., Oakland, CA 94610
510-655-2801

Obtaining IF Publications

If you would like copies of Interfaith Funders' research report, *Faith-Based Community Organizing: The State of the Field, 2001*; or IF's grantee profiles piece, *Faith-Based Community Organizing in Action: Five Stories of Community Change*, or additional copies of this document please call IF's Philadelphia office at 610-284-5744 or email at maflahertyif@yahoo.com.

What is Interfaith Funders

Interfaith Funders (IF) is a network of nine faith-based and three secular grantmakers committed to social change and economic justice. IF's mission is to act as a collective voice for faith-based funders and to advance social and economic justice through support of grassroots community organizing. To fulfill its mission, IF launched an Initiative to support and advance the field of Faith-Based Community Organizing (FBCO) that has taken the following forms:

- **Collaborative grantmaking:** over the last five years, IF has awarded nearly \$1.8 million in grants to faith-based community organizing groups and networks, that have enacted some of the most innovative organizing strategies nationally to promote living wages, school and welfare reform, and economic development for impoverished communities;
- **Collaborative research:** IF conducted the first ever field-wide, national study of FBCO, the findings of which are documented in *Faith-Based Community Organizing: The State of the Field (2001)*. Through its current study on congregational development, IF seeks to increase support for and engagement in FBCO among congregations and faith traditions;
- **Strategic convenings** of stakeholders in the field: organizers, leaders in faith traditions, funders, and scholars - who typically don't have the opportunity to develop relationships, discuss the current state and future of the field, and other topics of mutual interest, such as the role of FBCO in strengthening congregations; and
- **Education and Outreach** sessions and workshops on FBCO at funder conferences and briefings, and gatherings of religious communities, as well as individual meetings.

Current members of Interfaith Funders include: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Domestic Hunger Program, One Great Hour of Sharing Fund of the Presbyterian Church USA, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, Jewish Fund for Justice, Dominican Sisters of Springfield, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Claretian Social Development Fund. The Mott Foundation, Needmor Fund, the New York Foundation, and the Marianist Sharing Fund are Associate Members. Each IF member also supports a broad range of community organizing groups in low-and moderate-income communities around the country, including faith-based groups and those using other organizing models.



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