

# Service Delivery and Social Change:

**2010 CONVENING REPORT**

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# Introduction

**T**he past two decades have provided some of the starkest examples in our nation's history of the widening gap between rich and poor, healthy and sick, those with access to education and those without. This same period, however, has also yielded powerful examples of how such inequities can be countered head on by everyday people exercising their own voice and power. Health and human service providers have direct access to individuals and communities often most adversely impacted by such societal disparities and, ironically, also most often excluded from efforts to address these disparities. Given their relationship with these communities, service providers are uniquely positioned to help achieve broader social equity by making social change work a central organizational priority (see opposite page for examples of social change work taking place within social service agencies).

In June 2010, the Building Movement Project held a convening entitled *Service Delivery and Social Change* which brought together organizations already deeply involved in this sort of work at the Pocantico Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in Westchester County, New York. Representatives of 28 organizations from across the country attended the meeting, including 10 nonprofit service providers, 15 intermediaries, and three funders/funder affinity groups (see appendix 1 for a complete list of attendees). The convening provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their own ongoing efforts to integrate social change activities into their service delivery. They also reflected on the evolution that has taken place in the field as a whole towards greater incorporation of these models into the practice of the sector since the Building Movement Project's first meeting on this topic three years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past three years, the Building Movement Project and other intermediaries and service organizations have made enormous progress forward in this area by offering technical assistance, developing toolkits, documenting case examples, presenting at conference workshop sessions, and creating evaluation models – all areas identified in the 2007 convening as necessary for advancing this model. There have also been a growing number of new intermediaries and nonprofit organizations that have expressed an interest in this approach and how to effectively integrate service delivery and social change work. In light of this, the 2010 convening was intended to serve as an opportunity for seasoned organizations to gather ideas for taking their social change work to the next level as well as a space to think more broadly about how their efforts could be deepened and amplified by helping other groups adopt this approach.

Thus, a key framing question for the convening was: **What shifts in practice, organizational structure, relationships, and ways of thinking would need to occur for social change work to become a standard part of existing models of nonprofit service delivery?** In other words, we wanted to find out what participants thought it would take to shift the culture of service delivery so that social change work - including efforts to examine the root cause of problems and issues facing constituents - was viewed as a core part of the way that nonprofit organizations operate.

## ENGAGING CLIENTS BEYOND DIRECT SERVICES

“Social change work” in this report refers to programs and activities that seek to address the larger underlying issues and problems rather than the immediate individual needs of the people and communities service providers assist. Terms such as civic engagement, systems change, advocacy, and advocacy work are used throughout the report in a similar vein.

In a recent survey of California-based health and human service agencies, the Building Movement Project used the following list of activities to describe the ways that organizations are engaging clients beyond direct services:

### **1. My organization provides opportunities for our clients/constituents (i.e., the people your organization serves) to:**

- Attend election-related candidate/issue forums
- Build relationships through shared action (e.g., community gardens, sports leagues, etc.)
- Engage in grassroots/community/youth organizing
- Give testimony to policy-making bodies
- Learn about census participation
- Make calls/visits to legislators
- Participate in educational forums on issues/problems facing their community
- Participate in letter-writing or telephone campaigns
- Register to vote
- Take part in rallies, boycotts, or other types of collective action

### **2. My organization provides clients/constituents with training or skills-building to:**

- Engage in local politics (community boards,

city councils, etc.)

- Enhance their participation at decision-making tables (in and outside of the organization)
- Examine the root causes of issues/problems facing their community
- Increase their civic engagement
- Learn about the legislative process and/or specific policies that affect them and their community
- Prepare them to testify before local, state, or federal legislative or decision-making bodies
- Serve as “promotores” or community/peer educators
- Understand their rights within broader systems (e.g., health, education, criminal justice, etc.)

### **3. Within my organization, clients/constituents:**

- Provide input about our mission/vision
- Participate in organizational decision-making/program-planning
- Participate in program evaluation activities
- Help set organizational goals/priorities
- Participate in board meetings and/or other internal decision-making bodies

# Key Points: Successes and Challenges from the Field

A significant portion of the convening was devoted to panel discussions that highlighted attendees' experiences and provided a picture of the larger context within which their organizations are working. During the first panel discussion, direct service providers discussed the successes and challenges they have experienced in integrating a social change perspective into their work; the second group of panelists addressed the role of intermediary groups in this field; and the third group looked at the larger social, political, and economic context for this work.

The following is a summary of the key points which emerged during the three panel discussions.

## THE SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

### Panelists:

- **Moderator: Shelley Zuckerman**, Executive Director, North York Community House, Toronto, Ontario
- **Jaime Alvarado**, Executive Director, Somos Mayfair, San Jose, California
- **Lisa Richter**, Outreach Coordinator, Capuchin Soup Kitchen, Detroit, Michigan
- **Lauren Banks**, Economic Justice Community Organizer, Greater Birmingham Ministries, Birmingham, Alabama.

During this discussion, panelists already deeply engaged in service and social change shared the experiences of their individual organizations to seed a larger conversation amongst the convening participants about *why* and *how* nonprofit service providers are incorporating social change activities and practices into their work. The panelists described their progress over a three year period and demonstrated that this integrated approach is taking root at a deeper level in their organizations.

This progression is evident in the main points that emerged from this panel discussion:

- **By and large, constituents and front-line staff do not need to be convinced of the importance of this integrated approach and the inherent value of social change work, but it can be challenging to translate those values into practice at the organizational level.** Panelists and participants reflected that their constituents and front-line staff have had little difficulty grasping the value and importance of adopting a broader social change framework given that they are “closest” to the problems that need to be addressed. However, the bigger challenge these service providers face is how to consistently implement this approach within an organization’s structures, operations, and day-to-day activities—particularly given unprecedented fiscal challenges facing many nonprofits.
- **Direct service providers committed to a broader social change agenda see grassroots community organizing as an important strategy for achieving desired systemic changes; but**

**they lack the capacity, experience and relationships to engage in this approach.** The panelists talked about the process of assessing their organization’s capacity to engage in community organizing, asking questions such as: *Does it make sense for us to do this kind of work?* and *Do we have the expertise to engage in community organizing?* Many participants concluded that the most realistic role they could play—given their capacity and mission—would be to focus on leadership development, outreach, and engagement with their own clients and build strong partnerships with groups that are successful at doing community organizing.

- **Service providers need more resources, support, and space for peer-to-peer discussions about the conceptual and practical aspects of integrating a broader social change approach into their work.** A major theme that emerged from the convening is the need to address the isolation that many organizations experience when they attempt to make the shift from being strictly a direct service provider to one that has a dual approach to service and social change. Participants expressed a strong desire to be able to connect with other groups at different stages of organizational development and to share relevant skills and experiences related to implementing a broader social change agenda in the context of delivering direct health and human services.

## THE INTERMEDIARY PERSPECTIVE

### Panelists:

- **Moderator: Bo Thao**, Bridge Director, AAPIP, Minneapolis, MN
- **Doua Thor**, Executive Director, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Washington, DC
- **Jill Schumann**, President and CEO, Lutheran Services in America (LSA), Baltimore, MD
- **Judi Sherman**, Project Manager, Strategies, Camarillo, CA

Intermediary organizations - networks and associations which connect and support nonprofit service organizations - play an important role in strengthening the nonprofit sector by providing a range of professional services and support (including funding) to their members and other groups they serve.

The panelists for this discussion reinforced one of the key points that emerged during the service providers’ panel: most direct service organizations in their networks that are already engaged in this work have progressed beyond conversations about definitions and are more interested in how to put theories of social change into practice. Specifically, intermediaries that provide technical assistance to members of their networks—or to a broader cross-section of nonprofits—report that service providers are increasingly making requests for support that reflects a deeper level of engagement on a wide range of social change activities.

Other key points that emerged from the discussion include:

- **Intermediaries need to develop a common set of principles, values, and target outcomes related to integrating service delivery and social change work and to articulate them clearly with the organizations in their networks.** Nonprofit networks are extremely diverse and can include, for example, organizations with multi-million dollar budgets and other groups with budgets under \$20k. All of these groups, however, are looking to intermediaries for leadership and guidance on how to develop best practices regarding service delivery and social change—regardless of their size, resources, or focus

area. Therefore, it is important for intermediaries to establish clear standards and expectations for this work among their members.

- Intermediaries should focus their investments of time, energy, and resources on organizations that are ready to embrace a service delivery model that incorporates social change goals and activities. While it is important for intermediary groups to continue to offer a range of supports for groups at different stages of interest and action for incorporating social change work into their service delivery models, it is strategic to place a greater focus on organizations that are ready and able to make a commitment to move ahead. Representatives from intermediary groups reported that it is important to “go where the energy is” in order to: 1) develop and cultivate a broader culture for this work within the nonprofit sector; 2) build momentum within a given network for an integrated approach to service delivery and social change; and 3) develop opportunities for organizations within a network to be able to serve as leaders and to provide support to their peers on this approach.

## THE CURRENT CONTEXT: A WIDER VIEW

### Panelists:

- Moderator: Linda Nguyen, Civic Engagement Director, Alliance for Children and Families, Washington, DC
- Jeff Bauer, Director of Public Policy and Civic Engagement, Family & Children’s Service, Minneapolis, MN
- Karen Heller Key, Vice President for Programs, National Human Services Assembly, Washington, DC.
- Samantha Bickham, Coordinator/Consultant, Gulf Coast Funders for Equity, New Orleans, LA

During this discussion, panelists shared their perspectives on the current social, political, and economic context in which nonprofit service providers are operating, and how this environment impacts their ability to pursue an agenda focused on social change. Across the country, many service organizations find themselves in the worst financial position in their history. The clients and communities they serve are facing unprecedented challenges stemming largely from the economic recession, which has served to exacerbate long-time community problems and divisions. Nonetheless, participants were quick to agree that as much as this is a moment of crisis, it is also one of opportunity.

More than ever before, nonprofit service providers must be prepared to develop constituent leadership and facilitate client engagement in order to insure greater accountability in the public policy arena. For example, panelists described frequent rhetoric from legislators and well-intentioned organizations promising “equity and engagement” in their efforts to distribute federal stimulus money or direct Hurricane Katrina recovery spending. However, service organizations and other grassroots groups reported that those dollars were not directly benefitting poor communities and communities of color unless there was active involvement of those directly impacted by the problems these policies seek to correct. The experience of community-based service providers have shown that when those directly impacted by problems are excluded from public conversations and processes, they may end up with additional services but not the type of economic investment that leads to long-term social change. Given this reality, the need for a deep bench of community members prepared to lead efforts to implement and sustain systems change initiatives is even clearer.

Other key points from this discussion include:

- **While service providers' constituents see the value in pursuing a broader social change agenda, the current economic environment has created a heightened sense of urgency for more immediate relief.** Uncovering and examining the root causes of the issues that create a demand for direct health and human services is important, but it is often a slow and deliberative process. Many service organizations are grappling with how to keep their constituents who are struggling to meet their basic needs focused on the big picture (e.g., race equity, economic justice, etc.). The panelists stressed that one way service providers can strike a balance between maintaining a broader commitment to social change while meeting the demand for more immediate relief is by linking systems change work with campaigns that have shorter term outcomes for community members. (See below for an example.)
- **Constituents must directly inform service providers' social change agenda and goals.** Direct service organizations must be willing to allow the needs and interests of community members to lead the way when it comes to shaping their work beyond service delivery. They also need to provide the type of leadership development support that allows constituents to participate meaningfully in social change activities. For example, many service providers have succeeded in getting constituents involved in advocacy activities, but these efforts have largely been focused on securing organizational funding and/or preventing cuts in services. The next step is to engage constituents as thought partners to find solutions for the problems that directly impact them, their families, and their communities.

## BALANCING LONG-TERM SOCIAL CHANGE GOALS WITH IMMEDIATE IMPACT

**M.O.V.E.** (Mobilizing and Organizing for Victory and Empowerment) coordinated by the Family Partnership (formerly Family and Children's Service) in Minneapolis, MN is an excellent example of how service providers can keep community members engaged by addressing systemic problems in a way that will also have an immediate impact on their lives.

The Family Partnership describes M.O.V.E. broadly as “a multicultural coalition to build leadership and power around issues of racial and economic justice, uniting communities to achieve social change.” Members, however, have the opportunity to engage in this overarching goal at a more direct level by joining any of the coalition's sub-committees: Community Peacekeeping and Action, Immigrants Rights, School Change and Welfare Reform, and White Guys for Racial Equity. Two examples would be the Immigrant Rights group that is currently working to improve the services offered by the Mexican Consulate in St. Paul and the School Change group that is working with the Minneapolis School District to introduce a Hmong Sufficiency Test so that students can "test out" of the second language requirement citing their proficiency in English and Hmong.

To learn more about M.O.V.E. and other ways that the Family Partnership is integrating social change work into their social services, visit [the Family Partnership website](#) or read the [case study about the Family Partnership](#) in the Building Movement Project's *Making Social Change: Case Studies of Nonprofit Service Providers*.

# Building a Movement for Social Change Among Service Providers: What Would it Take?

**B**uilding on the key points that emerged from the panel discussions, as well as the learnings from our 2007 convening, we asked participants to consider what it would take to build and support a movement to shift the current service delivery model among nonprofits in the United States to include a larger agenda for social change. Meeting together and in small groups, the participants came up with an extensive and very pragmatic list of resources and activities that would not only help to achieve the goal of building a movement for social change among direct service providers, but also help to move their own work forward.

The activities and resources participants suggested include the following:

## **DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK FOR AND ASSESS THE IMPACT OF SERVICE PROVIDERS ENGAGED IN SOCIAL CHANGE WORK.**

- **Create a map of the field.** Survey direct service providers across the country to develop a more comprehensive picture of which organizations are doing social change work and to collect basic information about effective practices and strategies.
- **Develop a framework.** Collaborate with a small core group of representatives from organizations that are involved in or support social change work among direct service providers (e.g., funders, intermediaries, front-line staff, and clients) to identify principles, values, and best practices that can guide other groups interested in this approach.
- **Assess the impact of an integrated approach to service and social change.** Work with a team of evaluation professionals and representatives from direct service organizations that have successfully integrated a social change approach to develop a set of indicators and implement a pilot study to assess the impact of this work.

## **INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS CURRENTLY DOING SOCIAL CHANGE WORK.**

- **Provide support to groups already engaged in this work.** Hold conference calls, webinars, and in-person gatherings to provide ongoing support to direct service providers integrating social change into their work to share implementation strategies, challenges, and other related issues. These events could be organized on the basis of different categories, such as roles within their organizations (e.g., executive director, front-line staff, etc.), issue area (e.g., child care, housing, multi-service, etc.), geographic region and so on.

- **Involve intermediaries and nonprofit networks.** Conduct a series of individual meetings and group convenings with intermediaries to develop shared strategies for encouraging and supporting the integration of service delivery and social change work among the organizations in their networks.
- **Funder briefings.** Host a series of funder briefings to introduce grantmakers to the impact service organizations can have on social change.<sup>2</sup>
- **Gather and disseminate tools.** Continue to collect—and vet—tools and resources that service providers can use to implement and assess the impact of social change-oriented programs and activities.

### **CREATE PATHWAYS FOR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS TO ADOPT THIS APPROACH IN THEIR WORK.**

- **Provide ongoing opportunities to learn more about service and social change.** Host regular webinars/conference calls to introduce new groups of service organizations to the service and social change framework and highlight similarly situated groups that are successfully engaged in this work.
- **Train trainers to introduce this framework to a wider audience.** Develop and conduct a train-the-trainer curriculum to help increase the visibility of service/social change work and to offer technical assistance for implementation.
- **Increase online visibility.** Highlight opportunities to connect to online resources such as newsletters and a web portal where groups can learn about the social service/social change framework, post information about themselves and their work, and find others doing similar work.

# Conclusion & Next Steps

It is clear that there is still a considerable amount of work that needs to be done to build the nonprofit sector's capacity to support service organizations interested in social change work. But the prevailing sentiment at the *Service Delivery and Social Change* meeting was that we are already in the midst of an exciting and growing movement. The number and diversity of service organizations engaging their clients in activities beyond direct services has grown considerably since 2007 and there is an urgency to act now. Participants wanted to set ambitious goals for shifting the culture of service delivery so that social change work is viewed as a core part of the way that nonprofit organizations operate.

With this in mind, the Building Movement Project has already begun to incorporate some of the recommendations from the convening into our broader work and we are seeking funds to support these and other activities that will continue to increase the number of service providers doing social change work.

The first steps include:

- **Convene a core advisory group.** Building on the momentum of the Service Delivery and Social Change convening, we have pulled together a small number of advisors who attended the meeting who will set priorities from the full list of recommendations and help us to identify and implement key projects. This group will also develop a set of principles and values, and a narrative to anchor and expand the work.
- **Develop Trainings and Peer Exchanges.** We will create trainings and peer exchanges for groups to learn the nuts and bolts of how to incorporate social change models into their current practice, as well as the challenges associated with this approach. These will be offered via webinar and conference calls starting in early 2011 as a strategy for sustaining momentum among groups as we continue to develop a broader framework.
- **Build a Network.** Building Movement Project has been exploring different mapping techniques used to start the process of identifying and formalizing networks. With the help of the advisory group, we will choose a network mapping technique to apply to the service/social change field. This mapping, the first steps identified above and the broader set of recommendations are key components of a larger strategy to build a formal network of service providers, intermediary groups and other partners interested in shifting the current culture around service delivery to include a social change approach and deepen the impact of this work.

Veteran network builder, Marco Davis, was quoted as saying in a recent article “Networks are not social movements; but social-justice movements need networks.”<sup>3</sup> We see these as the key immediate next steps in what has already been a long but exciting journey for the Building Movement Project and the many other organizations involved in these efforts. The lessons from the Service Delivery and Social Change meeting will guide our efforts over the next several years as we continue to build towards our larger goal of achieving a more just and equitable society in which nonprofit service providers recognize and exercise the critical role that they play in movements for social change.

# Endnotes

1. For a summary of the proceedings of this 2007 convening, see Nonprofit Service Organizations and Civic Engagement: Addressing Challenges and Moving Forward: <http://buildingmovement.org/news/entry/2>
2. For example, see Barbara Masters and Torie Osborne, “Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building,” *The Foundation Review* 2, no. 2 (2010): 12-27.
3. Robin Katcher, “Unstill Waters: The Fluid Role of Networks in Social Movements,” *The Nonprofit Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2010).

## APPENDIX: SERVICE DELIVERY AND SOCIAL CHANGE CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

### ORGANIZERS

**Linda Campbell**

*Project Team Member  
Building Movement Project  
Detroit, MI*

**Frances Kunreuther**

*Director  
Building Movement Project  
New York, NY*

**Linda Nguyen**

*Director of Civic Engagement  
Alliance for Children and Families  
Washington, DC*

**Trish Tchume**

*Director of Civic Engagement  
Building Movement Project  
New York, NY*

**Bo Thao-Urabe**

*Director, BRIDGE  
(Building Responsive Infrastructure to  
Develop Global Equity)  
Asian Americans/Pacific  
Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP)  
Minneapolis, MN*

**Sean Thomas-Breitfeld**

*Deputy Director of Idea  
Generation and Dissemination  
Center for Community Change  
New York, NY*

**Shelley Zuckerman**

*Executive Director  
North York Community House  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

### ATTENDEES

**Jaime Alvarado**

*Executive Director  
Somos Mayfair  
San Jose, CA*

**Lauren Banks**

*Economic Justice Community Organizer  
Greater Birmingham Ministries  
Birmingham, AL*

**Kate Barrow**

*Founding Director  
RISE  
Brooklyn NY*

**Jeff Bauer**

*Director of Public Policy and Civic Engagement  
The Family Partnership\* (formerly Family & Children's  
Service)  
Minneapolis, MN*

**Samantha Bickham**

*Coordinator  
Gulf Coast Funders for Equity  
New Orleans, LA*

**Monica Castillo Maggiano**

*Director of Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America  
Catholic Charities USA  
Alexandria, VA*

**Heather Cronk**

*Managing Director  
GetEQUAL  
Riverdale, MD*

**Bob Feikema**

*Director of Community Initiatives  
Family Resources  
Pittsburgh, PA*

## APPENDIX: SERVICE DELIVERY AND SOCIAL CHANGE CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

### ATTENDEES CONTINUED

**Karen Heller Key**

*Vice President for Programs  
National Human Services Assembly  
Washington, DC*

**Ann Hilbig**

*Vice President of Program Planning and Evaluation  
Neighborhood Centers Inc.  
Houston, TX*

**Terri Johnson**

*Vice President of Public Policy & Advocacy  
Jane Addams Hull House  
Chicago, IL*

**Ellie Klerlein**

*Associate Director, National Campaigns  
NCLR  
Washington, DC*

**Linda McKnight**

*Chief Program Officer/Director of Consumer Credit  
Counseling  
Family Service of the Piedmont  
Jamestown, NC*

**Larry Ottinger**

*President  
Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest  
Washington, DC*

**George Pillsbury**

*Managing Director  
Nonprofit Voter Engagement  
Network - NonprofitVOTE  
Boston MA*

**Dennis Redmond**

*Director of Planning & Special Projects  
Queens Community House  
Forest Hills, NY*

**Lisa Richter**

*Outreach Coordinator  
Capuchin Soup Kitchen/Earthworks Urban Farm  
Detroit, MI*

**Jill Schumann**

*President and CEO  
Lutheran Services in America  
Baltimore, MD*

**Judi Sherman**

*Projects Manager  
Strategies  
Camarillo, CA*

**Ben Shute Jr.**

*Program Director of Democratic Practice and Corporate  
Secretary Emeritus  
Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
New York, NY*

**Doua Thor**

*Executive Director  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
Washington, DC*

# Additional Tools & Resources

We also encourage you to consult the following Building Movement Project resources and publications for additional frameworks for approaching social change works: All are available under the “Reports” tab at [www.BuildingMovement.org](http://www.BuildingMovement.org)

## **CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE: HOW CALIFORNIA NONPROFITS CAN DELIVER DIRECT SERVICES AND TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES**

Catalysts for Change is a two-part report that offers a snapshot of how California-based health and human service providers are engaging in activities beyond services to address the causes of the problems facing their constituents. **Part One** of the report presents findings from a survey of more than 450 California nonprofit service providers, describing the ways in which these groups are (or are not) integrating practices - ranging from client leadership development to advocacy to internal capacity building - into their work. **Part Two** offers five in-depth case studies of California-based health and social service providers that are engaging in non-service activities to address systemic issues - such as poverty, inequality, and health disparities - as well as build the voice and power of their constituents.

## **TOOLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

This online resource center provides dynamic exercises and engagement models for organizations ready to take the process of incorporating social change models into traditional service work to the next level. The toolkit is targeted to service providers but written to be useful to all groups interested in this area. The goals of the toolkit are to:

- Reinvigorate the nonprofit sector as a site for social change,
- Help organizations identify where their work currently fits along the continuum between charity and empowerment, and
- Encourage organizations, boards, and funders to see this transformation process as doable.

Opportunities for learning, reflection, and evaluation are consistent throughout the online resource, along with tools and models that focus on culturally relevant models of engagement.

## **EVIDENCE OF CHANGE: EXPLORING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION**

In many cases, not knowing how to demonstrate results of civic engagement and social change work has hindered service providers from adopting these activities and has prevented them from receiving funding for this work. The Building Movement Project, the Alliance and the Ms. Foundation, came together to draw on their collective experience with their networks and respond to this call for methods and tools for measuring the impact of social change work. This report examines how organizations currently view their relationship with impact measurement, presents a brief summary of the key findings that came out of the Civic Engagement Evaluation Summit convened by the partner organizations and ends with a set of recommendations for how to increase the nonprofit sector’s capacity to respond to the increasing need for tools to measure the impact of civic engagement and social change work.

## **MAKING SOCIAL CHANGE: CASE STUDIES OF NONPROFIT SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Building Movement Project developed this set of case studies as a response to numerous requests from groups looking for real-life examples of the often-challenging process of incorporating social change models into social service work. The organizations highlighted were selected not to lay out a set of best practices for all organizations but to serve as practical illustrations of how groups decide to extend their work to promote client/community voices and the challenges posed by that decision. The case studies - geared toward practitioners, board members, and funders interested in this work - include organizational profiles, a reflection guide and a list of additional web resources.

## **SOCIAL SERVICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A PROCESS GUIDE**

This guidebook was developed for staff and board members of nonprofit service organizations who are interested in learning how to incorporate progressive social change values and practices into their work. It introduces a step-by-step process for nonprofit organizations that can be used to identify how groups can address systemic problems through social change work within the context of their usual services and activities. The process proposed in this guide can help organizations decide which strategies and actions will work best for them.

## **THE BUILDING MOVEMENT PROJECT ENEWSLETTER**

Stay up to date on the work of the Building Movement Project and featured movement-building organizations by signing up for our monthly eNewsletter.

## ABOUT THE BUILDING MOVEMENT PROJECT

The goal of the Building Movement Project is to build a strong social justice ethos into the nonprofit sector, strengthen the role of nonprofit organizations in the United States as sites of democratic practice, and promote nonprofit groups as partners in building a movement for progressive social change.

Many individuals in the nonprofit sector are strongly motivated by the desire to address injustice and promote fairness, equality, and sustainability. The Building Movement Project supports nonprofit organizations in working toward social change by integrating movement-building strategies into their daily work

To learn more about the Building Movement Project and our work, please visit [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org)

To learn more about this initiative and the follow-up of this work, please contact:

Trish Tchume at [ttchume@demos.org](mailto:ttchume@demos.org)

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### **Building Movement Project**

220 Fifth Avenue, Second Floor, New York, NY 10001

T: 212.633.1405 | F: 212.633.2015

