

The Social Service & Social Change Series

**ALLIANCES  
FOR  
CHANGE**  
ORGANIZING  
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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# Introduction

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## Where Are We? Changing the Landscape

The election of President Obama with his history and identification as a community organizer sent a message of hope and possibility to the community organizing world. For decades, community organizing groups in the U.S. grappled with the form and consequences of the state's strike-back against hard won anti-poverty and civil rights gains of the 1960s. Privatization of state services led to an increasing reliance on nonprofit organizations to meet basic individual needs and to do more with less.<sup>1</sup> Today organizing groups face the community impact of the acute crisis of economy and ecology spurred at the global scale. At the same time, for those organizations engaging in critical analysis, reflecting on lessons learned, and developing new capacities at the grassroots, current political opportunities present a demanding and urgent opening for re-visioning and shifting power. As a result, across the U.S., accelerated forms of community response are taking shape.

Workers' centers, youth-based action groups, and urban justice organizations are among those changing the face of traditional community organizing. Many of these groups engage a range of approaches beyond targeted campaign work—from service delivery to media ownership to voter engagement. This report looks at nearly a dozen examples of organizing efforts rising to scale and adapting to the urgent challenges and political opportunities at the beginning of the 21st century. These groups reinforce grassroots democratic practices, achieve concrete wins, and build, sustain and connect diverse bases of power for long-term systemic change, all while creatively incorporating structures and programs that respond to the everyday needs of their participants.

### Organizations Interviewed:

- » **Casa de Maryland**  
Takoma Park, Maryland
- » **Chinatown Community Development Center**  
San Francisco, California
- » **Greater Birmingham Ministries**  
Birmingham, Alabama
- » **The Farmworker Association of Florida**  
Apopka, Florida
- » **Make the Road New York**  
Brooklyn, New York
- » **Miami Workers' Center**  
Miami, Florida
- » **Philadelphia Unemployment Project**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- » **Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (PCUN)**  
Woodburn, Oregon
- » **Southern Echo**  
Jackson, Mississippi
- » **Strategic Action for a Just Economy**  
Los Angeles, California
- » **Tenant and Workers United**  
Alexandria, Virginia

1 Collectively, U.S. non-profits constitute the world's sixth largest economy, growing in number by 68% between 1993 and 2003. In 2003 there were 837,027 non-profits, excluding foundations and church congregations. Human services represent the largest subsector, making up 34% of the 501c3s that report to the IRS. Source: "U.S. Nonprofit Sector is Sixth Largest Economy in the World." National Council of Nonprofit Associations, 2/21/06.

## Creating a Strategic Exchange

In 2008, the Building Movement Project, Miami Workers Center, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (PCUN), and Tenants and Workers United came together as part of an effort to discuss theories of power and innovative on-the-ground strategies. The three organizing groups first kicked off their discussion the year prior at a gathering of the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation. Miami Workers Center, PCUN and Tenants and Workers United are all constituent-led base-building organizations with track records of significant community wins, such as one to one replacement of public housing in Miami, state legislation for minimum wage increase and paid rest time for farm workers in Oregon, and living wage legislation in Alexandria, Virginia. Each of these groups had also developed non-traditional aspects to their organizing work and were interested in learning from one another (and others), particularly on how to integrate non-campaign activities into their work in order to extend their reach and promote power in low-income communities, especially communities of color. The Building Movement Project agreed to document these practices and to share organizational successes and challenges among a larger audience around the country.

Directors as well as member leaders of the four groups, with support from a W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant, came together for several days in late February 2009 at PCUN in Woodburn, Oregon to learn more about PCUN's integrated approach to building community power (see box\*). They were joined by representatives from Oregon's Rural Organizing Project and two other affiliated groups: the Social Justice Fund Northwest and the Funders Committee for Civic Participation. The visit was the first step in a cross-organizational learning process that will bring together additional organizations sharing east/west coast and urban/rural perspectives for forging new models of civic engagement.

## Building from Experience

The Building Movement project carried out separate interviews that focused on the experience of the three organizing partner groups that

## Learning Together at PCUN\*

The 2009 partner visit to PCUN centered on critical intergroup dialogue between the learning partners combined with multimedia informational presentations, hands-on tours at four housing sites, and participant observation at two mass membership gatherings organized by PCUN and its eight sister organizations. This intensive and exhilarating exchange on the very grounds of where PCUN's model has been formed brought out lively discussion and new questions relating to the lessons of PCUN's approach and its application to other groups.

In a rich discussion, the Miami Workers' Center and Tenants and Workers United shared their examples of primarily adding on programs, as well as partnering with organizations. The groups talked about how different political contexts and existing capacity were part of the considerations for weighing the advantages and disadvantages of spearheading programs in-house versus developing new organizations.

During the visit to PCUN's service center which offers translation and immigration legal services to union members, PCUN's services director, demonstrated how a sophisticated yet simple to use member database allows them to link services to membership. Learning about the database tool was especially relevant for Jon Liss, director of Tenants and Workers' United, who described their current in-house efforts to document services and identify members.

Project partners attended a CAUSA (regional immigrant rights coalition) meeting that drew 450 community members. At the same time in a nearby school building, the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality was a prime sponsor of a district-wide meeting on No Child Left Behind, drawing over 1,200 parents, primarily Latinos and African-Americans.

\*Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United



came together for exchange at PCUN. We additionally interviewed representatives from community organizing groups identified by the three partners in order to get a broader sense of what was happening around the country. We asked each organization about how they perceive the components of their multifaceted work as contributing to the power of disenfranchised and marginalized communities to affect decisions about their lives. Most of the interviews focused on the relationship between organizing, services, community and economic development programs, and electoral work.

Cumulatively, the organizations that participated in the interviews as well as the onsite exchange have several centuries of experience under their belt. Half of the organizations have 30+ years in development. Most started off through direct action and community organizing campaigns. However, PCUN, Casa de Maryland and Make the Road began through projects initially dedicated to legal and/or social service assistance to immigrants. Greater Birmingham Ministries also began as a social service crisis center and serves mostly African American individuals and families.

All of the organizations develop what is commonly referred to as a “community base.” Greater Birmingham Ministries is the only organization indirectly connected to individual constituents. (GBM operates as a coalition and its members are faith-based umbrella groups comprised of congregations.) The majority of the organizations interviewed administer a system by which individuals pay dues and become “members” of the organization. Among those with dues-paying members, the organizations focus their membership recruitment towards people directly affected by organizing issues, and members are allotted a certain number of positions on the Board of Directors. All the organizations designated a certain number of seats from their constituents, which ranged from minority 1/3 (Chinatown Community Development Center, San Francisco) to simple majority (Make the Road New York) to total Board control outside of the Executive Director position (Tenants and Workers United).

All of the groups, with the exception of Southern Echo, provide some direct services to individu-

als. Examples of the services include worker transportation, adult education, case management, youth tutoring, housing and public benefits legal assistance, health and safety training and jobs programs. Community development projects focus mostly on affordable housing production, but also include developing community infrastructure for job development, adult educational programs, and cultural spaces. Civic participation work encompasses a broad spectrum of activities within each of the organizations, with some groups having developed citizenship classes, voter turn out campaigns, or aligned with independent sister organizations that lobby or directly support political candidates.

In most cases, the work of organizing, community-based service and development work falls under the umbrella of 501c3 tax exempt non-profit organizations. PCUN is the only union represented in the study with 501c5 labor association tax status, and provides services only in part through foundation support for education and outreach, or donations made to a 501c3 fiscal sponsor. Four of the organizations, including Tenants and Workers’ United, PCUN, Miami Workers’ Center and Chinatown Community Development Center also played a strategic role in the birth of independent 501c4 organizations (a tax status that allows for unlimited lobbying and campaign support). Leaders from Casa de Maryland and Make the Road are currently involved in processes for the formation of separate, independent, 501c4s. PCUN also has a Political Action Committee, or PAC, that collects individual donations designated for specific state and local campaigns, and is separate from members’ union dues.

# Learning Lessons & Overcoming Challenges

Organizations interviewed vary in their approach and practices to combining structures and in the interaction of diverse existing and potential constituents across different programs. What follows are examples of the variance of practices that draw from both common lessons learned, and ongoing challenges.

## Services & Development Foster Constituent-Focus and Base Building

Scott Douglass of Greater Birmingham Ministries first came to the organization as an unemployed worker seeking assistance for his family. Now the executive director,

“To do service work without organizing for justice is a form of paternalism. To organize for justice without having a visceral connection to the people can lead to vanity.”

**-Scott Douglass**  
Greater Birmingham  
Registries

Douglass puts it this way, “To do service work without organizing for justice is a form of paternalism. To organize for justice without having a visceral connection to the people can lead to vanity.” Most of the organizations spoke of services as both instrumental to base-building and part and parcel with the relational work inherent in community organizing. Oftentimes individuals first learn about the group’s organizing work while seeking services. Among the membership-based organizations, in most groups, individuals do not have to become members to receive services. In other cases, services require active membership:

In the example of **Make the Road New York (MTR)**, an individual’s eligibility for receiving services depends on the type of service and fund-

ing source. MTR health access and food pantry programs are open to everyone. Also, students involved in the MTR college access program do not necessarily get involved in other areas of the organization. However, only dues paying and active members are eligible for employment and public legal assistance services. Legal services may be an incentive for membership, but generally an adult education teacher or an organizer refers someone who is already a member to legal assistance. These services rely on the active membership of individuals who understand and identify with the organization’s systemic and social change aims; their cases may become the basis for collective action and even broader organizing campaigns. Regardless of the potential organizing outcome, Oona Chatterjee remarks that the quality of both services and organizing at MTR is essential for building long term trust with the community, “We meet individual needs but we’re not a charity, we show that person [s/he] is valuable and essential. This comes from a respectful and loving approach to all the work that we do.”

**Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC)** directs its services towards the members of tenant associations involved in their organizing efforts.

For example, they run a weekly food-bank developed specifically for families involved in their Single Room Occupancy (SRO) building campaigns. Other individual services include translation, access to discount utility rates, and tutoring. As much as possible this organization brings

partner groups to come in and provide services to active members. However, CCDC sees some services as useful tools for organizing and important to provide directly

“We meet individual needs but we’re not a charity, we show that person [s/he] is valuable and essential. This comes from a respectful and loving approach to all the work that we do.”

**-Oona Chatterjee**  
Make the Road  
New York

through the organization. For example, CCDC runs a fire safety and disaster preparedness program to educate tenant association members. The election of 150 participating building fire safety captains provides a vehicle for identifying leaders for organizing campaigns; the fire safety captain elections help surface individuals who have existing relationships and trust with their neighbors.

**PCUN** requires union membership for services that go beyond referral. By meeting basic human needs and helping families remain together, PCUN provides an immediate incentive for membership, and builds trust. At the same time, the union has worked to establish additional community resources aimed at farm workers with the intention of expanding the base of regional organizing efforts, rather than solely PCUN-specific membership. This approach differs from traditional labor organizing that seeks to build its numbers for the expansion of the union itself. Oftentimes services also remove inherent obstacles to campaign participants' involvement in organizing. For example, in the early 90s, when farmworkers who joined the union were threatened with eviction by growers, PCUN co-founded the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation – where affordable, green, and quality rental provided a safe space for workers and organizers and brought together an additional base of farm workers unaffiliated with PCUN's existing membership. The housing developments institutionalize resident input in management through elected tenant associations and all residents can participate in educational services, leadership development and community organizing campaigns.

## Services and Development Can Support Campaign Wins

Community organizing campaign wins can result in new services and development projects. Within the context of privatization, however, services are often funded by the state but administered by a private corporation or nonprofit disconnected from the original organizing campaign's larger and longer term goals. By continuing to play a role in administering these services or setting up mechanisms to ensure that these services match the longer term commu-

nity goals, organizing groups assert community control.

At **Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE)** in Los Angeles, a vision for community control also compelled that organization to provide direct services and develop a land trust for affordable housing. After spearheading a coalition win for an unprecedented community benefits agreement, SAJE shifted its work to direct services and development to ensure the community benefits were delivered. By working collaboratively to develop the community benefits services at SAJE and elsewhere, the coalition organizations originally involved in the campaign remained together at the table long after the win was put to paper. Most importantly for SAJE, developing an in-house jobs program and land trust program provided them the opportunity to further their relationships with the benefitting community members in the Figueroa Corridor neighborhood. In the case of the jobs placement program, SAJE anticipated that the services would have a short life-span. Employment opportunities decreased once initial hires were made by the businesses that opened from the new neighborhood development project.

SAJE had developed the land trust in light of the new development as a way of ensuring that low income community residents would be able to remain in the neighborhood and actually benefit from the community agreement. The Figueroa Corridor Community Land Trust was established as a steward of affordable housing, and to increase affordable housing production in the neighborhood. SAJE recently spun off the Land Trust, which now has its own board, but is located in the SAJE office. "We created our own partner," says Gilda Haas, SAJE's executive director. The administration, funding and goals of the land trust would have subsumed SAJE's organizing mission if it remained formally nested as a SAJE project, according to Haas. SAJE has returned its emphasis to organizing, having expanded and deepened its constituent ties and after fulfilling the job placements. Haas explains, "At different moments in organizing, services are going to have different meaning...Whether it's being a social worker or an organizer, it's important to have a strategic view on what you're doing, and knowing when you need to flip [focus on one capacity or the other]."

**Tenants and Workers' United** in Alexandria, VA is in the process of developing a more formal system for tracking and providing services at the organization. Until now, many services such as translation are offered ad hoc through personal relationships. TWU recognizes that providing services strategically and consistently allows the organization to monitor campaign victories. For example, the organization won a \$2million+ victory for medical debt relief for the indigent who receive care at area hospitals. TWU's community organizer working on health access issues assists individuals to apply for debt relief as a way to ensure the program functions and to continue to build their base from the campaign's initial win. Individuals who receive assistance from TWU are invited to join the group's health access organizing committee to participate in issue campaigns. A MSW student intern is in the process of assisting TWU to assess and formalize services in order to better understand how to most effectively provide quality individual support that also contributes to TWU's organizing mission.

On the other hand, for example, in Miami, a developer unaligned with the **Miami Workers' Center's (MWC)** mission around strengthening community capacity and power was selected to build the replacement of public housing. The replacement victory was the result of a ten year struggle led by MWC. Director Gihan Perera points out that imbued in their organizing efforts for housing is a longer-term vision for democratic forms of community control of decision processes, as well as infrastructure and space; the housing itself is not the end-goal.

## Consciousness is the Cornerstone of Movement Building

A crucial component cited for building power from non-campaign activities is maintaining shared values and critical analysis among staff not dedicated to full-time organizing. Ongoing consciousness raising and reflection are also

imperative to helping bridge the gap between a new generation of organizers with perspective in emergent movement-building, and older leaders with experience in protracted struggle. This involves continuous leadership development and moving forward a framework grounded in social change through all aspects of the organization's work. In many of the organizations, direct service staff receive community organizing training and take part in regular joint meetings with organizers around organizing goals. In turn, staff who primarily occupy an organizing role also remain grounded in an awareness of the day-to-day needs of group members.

“At different moments in organizing, services are going to have different meaning...Whether it's being a social worker or an organizer, it's important to have a strategic view on what you're doing, and knowing when you need to flip [focus on one capacity or the other].”

-Gilda Haas  
*Strategic Actions for a Just Economy*

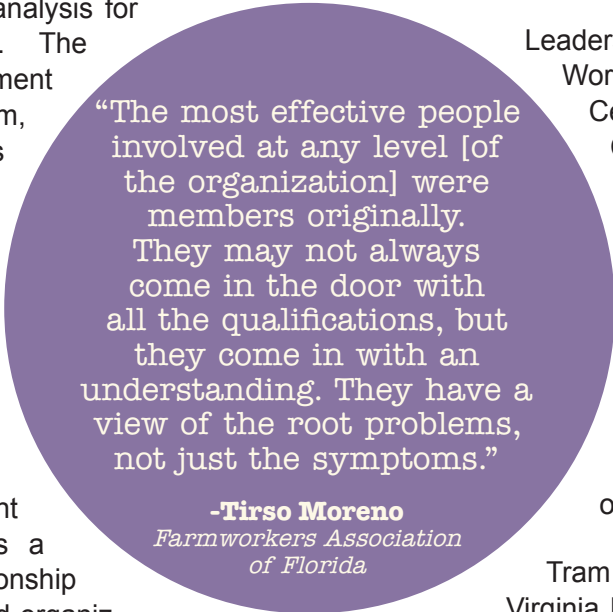
Leadership development for both staff and constituents at the Miami Workers' Center hinges on moving forward a framework that questions the institutional arrangements behind inequality. Articulating this framework and shifting the policy debate is part

and parcel to its internal leadership development and external organizing and policy work. Through popular education, the MWC facilitates staff and constituent critical thinking around root causes of gentrification, colonialism, imperialism and globalization, white supremacy and racism, and homophobia. Embedded in this work is an alternative vision for community land control through efforts that build and reinforce Black/Brown solidarity.

Tirso Moreno, Director of the Farmworker Association of Florida, comments that “The most effective people involved at any level [of the organization] were members originally. They may not always come in the door with all the qualifications, but they come in with an understanding. They have a view of the root problems, not just the symptoms.” Moreno explains that he calls all of his staff organizers, regardless of whether they spend their time in organizing campaigns, services, or administration.



In the case of PCUN, service staff participate in house meetings oriented to campaign organizing, and services may close when there is a mass mobilization. PCUN also brings together its staff and sister organizations to create a framework of analysis for movement building. The leadership development and training program, called CAPACES, is directed at staff of different organizations with very different positions and expertise in service, development, electoral, and organizing work. In addition to their leadership development series, that includes a module on the relationship between services and organizing, CAPACES sends out a weekly bulletin called “Consciousness in Five Minutes.” The email distills a policy issue being tackled by the different organizations, especially pertinent in anticipation of a mobilization or action will involve members of the different groups.



## Flexibility and Adaptation Build Momentum Beyond Movement Moments

Many organizations mentioned that a variety of approaches helps create a dynamic energy and momentum to their work. Campaign-based organizing that limits its focus on targets alone can exhaust member leaders who work years for a single policy reform. Organizations with flexible capacity take advantage of opportunities within their long-term goals. For example, groups engaging in voter mobilization were able to capitalize on the fervor of the recent presidential elections and infused new energy into their base. Get out the vote efforts were accompanied by new skills and capacity development such as the use of sophisticated voter databases, and a return to the nuts and bolts of door-to-door outreach. (Make the Road knocked on 23,000 doors leading up to the national elections). But for many of the organizations, outreach to get

out the vote and to raise issue awareness isn't enough. Limitations of 501c3 status constrain potential organizing power and can frustrate leaders who feel compelled to identify and promote candidates.

Leaders from PCUN, Tenants and Workers United, Miami Workers' Center as well as Chinatown Community Development Center have successfully helped to envision alternative 501c4 institutions to leverage electoral power and build a progressive voting block. And, for the first time, this year San Francisco voters elected a Chinese American who is a close ally of CCDC to City Supervisor.

Tram Nguyen, director of the 501c4 Virginia New Majority (VNM) explains that the organization was started directly through TWU's assessment of the need for a vehicle to build off of civic engagement among immigrants, as well as to unite immigrants with African Americans and progressive whites. Virginia New Majority develops chapters throughout the state, focusing on Northern Virginia in areas where TWU has previously struggled to address back lash against immigrants. In addition to lobbying and voting outreach, Virginia New Majority conducts Democracy Schools to prepare immigrants for citizenship exams.

Miami Workers' Center established its Race and Citizenship organizing committee this year to further build from the voter mobilization momentum of 2008 and to focus on census advocacy and outreach. The committee brings together leaders from its grassroots African-American based leadership group LIFFT, and its Latino-based leadership group Miami en Acción. The Black-Brown alliance effort focuses on analysis and strategy development to involve hard-to-reach low income and immigrant populations to be counted in the U.S. Census 2010. The group will work to build a collective voice in political redistricting at the city, county and state scales.

## Negotiating Funding: Transparency with Targets – Accountability to Constituents

One of the most challenging aspects of developing multiple organizational forms as part of a coherent strategy for building power is negotiating funding issues that involve government sources. An inside/outside approach tied to governance can undermine community power through cooptation, requiring a strong organizational commitment to the mission of systemic social change:

“We never mobilize our community around services, we can do that ourselves through professional advocacy... It’s not honest because the agenda of the community is so large that we need to identify their issues first...”

**-Gustavo Torres**  
*Casa de Maryland*

Casa de Maryland receives more than \$2million of its budget through the Montgomery County Executive. Recently, the County Executive’s office collaborated with US Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE.) Casa organizers did not hesitate to

take immediate direct action against the County Executive’s office, but its Board was not as willing. Casa did take a very confrontational and aggressive approach with a public letter and action against the County Executive’s partnership with ICE when it first learned of the issue. Ultimately, however, Casa decided to have a closed meeting off the record between the County Executive and Casa lawyers, which led to a resolution against the County’s collaboration with immigration enforcement. In this case, direct action was used initially in an effort to protect the community, but is never used for service gains, according to Gustavo Torres, Casa’s Executive Director. He explains that the organization never uses organizing tactics to seek funding for the organization, “We never mobilize our community around services, we can do that ourselves through professional advocacy... It’s not honest because the agenda of the community is so large that we need to identify their issues first...” He also notes, however, that Casa’s active base contributes to the government’s overall perception of the organization’s political

power, which in a politically sympathetic county aids Casa’s successful staff-led advocacy for the organization’s service budget needs.

## Promote Direct Democracy while Leveraging Constituent Power

Groups also spoke of the importance of exhibiting leadership through an extensive array of enterprises and a quantifiable base, while also ensuring community access to organizing resources, democratic practice, and autonomous community control.

Rev. Norman Fong of CCDC explains, “We don’t want everything to be stamped as the Chinatown Community Development Center. I know this is the opposite of the union philosophy, but we want the power to go to the people through their own committees [that CCDC catalyzes and helps resource], and to not be so centralized. There are about 10,000 residents we work with, but really no one knows our real base.” For example, CCDC’s tenant association building members each have separate dues-paying membership systems and leadership structures. Although internally organized in different forms, the building associations come together under an umbrella CCDC tenant union.

Make the Road New York represents the 2007 merger of two organizations, the Latin American Integration Center and Make the Road by Walking. Rather than continue a sister-organization approach, these organizations decided to integrate constituents into a single membership base. MTR NY now has a city-wide face, leveraging the leadership and power of a larger dues-paying membership, which now has a presence in three different NY boroughs.

Although several of PCUN’s sister groups are housed in PCUN, union President Ramón Ramírez says that the intent is not to build up PCUN itself, but instead to foster new leadership, capacity, and power that goes beyond the limitations of one organization. In this way, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Ramírez points out that independent organizations provide expanded opportunity for direct constituent participation in organizational governance.

# Conclusion: Questions & Next Steps

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## Conclusion

This is an exciting time for organizers and social change. The challenge for many will be to re-think their work in ways that take advantage of this moment in the U.S. The groups that we talked with realized that the opportunity to make significant gains for low-income communities of color meant that they had to use all available methods, working together in new ways, and often redefine their approaches and structures.

Through the conversations with organizers and the visit to PCUN, we identified a set of questions in four key areas that groups asked for help to build capacity for their work and several next steps in order to capture the current changes and help others join in to gain new ground...

## Four Questions

### **ONE: Going to scale, either statewide or regionally to maximize impact:**

- » What is the timeframe for developing to scale and remaining a member-driven organization?
- » Can groups scale up initiatives over a compressed period?
- » Where is the funding for these activities and do organizations have the flexibility to grow and contract depending on campaigns and resources?

### **TWO: Non-Campaign Activities**

- » What is political analysis and the role of organizing work vis-à-vis the responsibility of government in cases where groups are taking public funds?
- » How do you offer services without turning members into clients?
- » When does accepting public funds constrain campaigns?

### **THREE: Membership and Impact**

- » What are the specific challenges to building membership across race and ethnicity?
- » In what ways do an array of service, community building, and electoral work contribute to Black/Brown alliance efforts, and what are the pitfalls that exacerbate divides?
- » When does it make strategic sense to focus on building one's own membership, versus moving a organizing agenda rooted in an analytical framework regardless of membership gains?

### **FOUR: Alliance Building**

- » How will alliance building at the national level among rural organizers provide a vehicle for interfacing with other national scale urban-centric alliances, such as Right to the City<sup>2</sup>?
- » In what ways does the new formations and alliance building at the national scale allow for a role for U.S. organizing to link with and learn from movements internationally?

## Next Steps

- » Conducting a Larger Survey of Organizations. These are just a few examples of the advancing work of community organizing around the country. In order to go deeper to find out what works and what the challenges are, we would conduct a broader survey of organizations.
- » Creating More Opportunity for Dialogue around Lessons Learned. The organizing groups who came together at PCUN noted that the site visits were a way to develop deeper engagement and to consider application of lessons learned to accelerate the institution of different organizing forms. They suggested more visits and inviting additional organizing groups to join the learning process.
- » Creating an Informational and Data Hub. Through ongoing exchange, research and documentation, we can identify expertise among similar organizations and others who can add important additional resources around the changing practices of community organizing. Individual organizations each have their own documents, narratives, curricula, video documentaries, etc. that they can add to the data hub in order to deepen the understanding and mutual benefit and learning.
- » Application of 21c Organizing. The survey and learning process met an immediate need or many of the groups to help with building their capacity. More needs to be done to help groups apply what others are doing to have more impact. Identifying people and practices that can help with this process would benefit grassroots groups nationwide and strengthen their work.

2 Right To The City is a diverse movement-building alliance organized into geographical regions, thematic working groups, resource allies and a national center. The backbone of the Right to the City Alliance is comprised of dozens of community-based organizations which organize thousands of RTTC constituents for urban justice and democracy every day. <http://www.righttothecity.org>



# Partner Profiles

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## **PCUN Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United**

PCUN's multi-faceted model reflects its self-identity as a movement. That movement was founded out of an immigration organizing and legal defense organization more than 30 years ago. PCUN emerged in 1985 and developed into a 501(c)5 farm worker union with 5,000 members, who have contributed more than \$1.5 million in dues to the organization since its founding. At the same time, PCUN has spearheaded the development of eight other intimately connected and, for the most part, independently governed sister organizations. These include unincorporated groups, 501(c)3s, a 501(c)4 and a PAC all located within the agricultural region of the Mid-Willamette Valley Oregon south of Portland. Together, the sister organizations live out their movement principles of building and reinforcing a strong base through democratic practices, supporting collective leadership development, and examining the different roles needed within a comprehensive systemic change strategy. Unlike the proliferation of unaligned nonprofits in many urban settings, PCUN's sister organizations have been built through collaboration and from the ground up within a model now referred to by PCUN as its "pyramid of power".

At the top of PCUN's strategy pyramid lies its primary institutional impact initiative and social change objective: To win and institutionalize collective bargaining on a major scale in Oregon's \$5 billion agribusiness sector. PCUN anticipates that this systemic change will ultimately alter the balance of institutional control in the state through the realization of immigrant labor power. However, as seen in the pyramid diagram, the potential of this win rests on PCUN's base building capacity connected to direct individual and family services, as well as to key victories in community organizing, such as comprehensive immigration reform.

PCUN's efforts reflect a regional alliance, building up to the scale of the political challenge of

achieving state-wide legislative and institutional change. The scope of the work, including ownership of a low-power farmworker radio station, and electoral action by a Political Action Committee comprised of Latino voters, creates additional resources and power for sustaining momentum beyond incremental policy wins. Building to scale for PCUN also necessarily involves work with progressive allies such as the Rural Organizing Project who have a seat at the table in the state wide immigrant rights coalition, CAUSA. Another sister group, the Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality has galvanized parents in communities of color to hold schools accountable for disproportional disciplinary and drop-out rates among their children. Acting on a strong set of principles, PCUN also was a visible participant in fighting Oregon's anti-gay ballot initiatives.

## **MIAMI WORKERS' CENTER**

The Miami Workers' Center (MWC) began in 1999 as a volunteer organization. Their organizing work has gained momentum through multiple approaches to resisting top down development decisions in the largely African-American working class center-city neighborhood of Liberty City, Miami. For example, after a ten year campaign that included multiple arrests, marches, walk-ins and sit-downs at the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offices in Miami and in Washington, DC the group won an agreement for full one to one replacement of all units of the Liberty City 42-acre public housing project HUD had destroyed. "Find Our People" became the slogan of the Miami Workers' Center's efforts to locate families originally evicted from the public housing in order to make room for mixed income housing. One developer intended to seize upon the need to replace the low income housing by making an agreement with the county to create publicly subsidized affordable housing in the Everglades. The Miami Workers Center and the residents of Liberty City put a stop to that plan through a "Black-Green" alliance with environmental justice activists. The local coalition refused to allow the residents to be displaced from

the city's center, and a neighborhood of political, cultural and historical significance.

MWC Director Gihan Perera explains that the value of the political and social capital gained through organizing diminishes when the economic capital flows outside community control. Ultimately a developer unaligned with the organization's mission was selected to build the replacement of public housing. MWC has begun to pursue new partnerships for community development, including infrastructure for green jobs programming. MWC anticipates that in addition to community control of urban space, providing infrastructure and programming will also help meet resident immediate needs and further build MWC's constituent base.

MWC currently builds its constituent membership through two nested grassroots structures, each working around housing and development issues that their member leaders identify. One is the African-American led group Low-Income Families Fighting Together (LIFFT), and the other is the Latino-based group *Miami en Acción*. Moving forward a framework that questions the institutional arrangements behind inequality hinges on the on-going leadership development of both staff and constituents. Stamping out alternative analysis, and shifting the policy debate is part and parcel to its internal leadership development and external organizing and policy work. Through popular education, MWC facilitates staff and constituent critical thinking around root causes of gentrification, examining colonialism, imperialism and globalization, white supremacy and racism, and homophobia. African American and Latino members often participate in joint workshops, and have also formed a joint Race and Citizenship organizing committee to develop a collective campaign around the U.S. Census outreach and voter redistricting. Badili Jones, MWC Co-Director, says the organization is also setting up Spanish classes for African American members at their request, "African American members are learning Spanish, and we want to see how to bring together both the English and Spanish speakers to build relationships and learn from each other." Embedded in this work is an alternative vision for community land control through efforts that build and reinforce Black/Brown solidarity.

## TENANTS AND WORKERS UNITED

Tenants and Workers United initially drew its organizing strength through a campaign to stop the mass eviction of thousands of mostly Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants from the city of Alexandria, Virginia as a result of a class action lawsuit in the 1980s. Also known as *Arlandria* by the Latin American immigrant residents, Alexandria is located within the inner beltway ring of the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Their ultimate victory inspired the organization to dedicate itself to a membership-based community organizing model, which also led to the development of 300 resident controlled affordable housing units. Nearly twenty-five years later, TWU has increased its infrastructure and base, expanding its organizing to healthcare, immigration, workers rights, and education. This organizing entails far more than the bread and butter issues of immediate every day needs, and reaches to build a broader political framework to tackle the root causes of inequality.

At the forefront of TWU's strategy is building power through efforts that inherently link its primarily Latino immigrant membership to other immigrant groups, and African Americans. TWU strategically develops campaigns that bring together African American and Latinos, including parents and youth for school system reform, childcare providers who successfully won increased reimbursement rates, and municipally contracted workers who won living wage ordinances, first in the city of Alexandria and then in Arlington. The organization also brought together African, Caribbean, Arab and South East Asian taxi cab drivers to win legislative changes that allowed them to establish a democratically run, worker-owned taxi cab cooperative, which is located at TWU's office. TWU understands that pushing a broader political framework also necessitates organizing beyond the local level, and engaging allies to participate more directly in leveraging their power to the scale of regional, state, and national-level institutional change.

Creating the new capacity of a 501(c)4 was envisioned as a next step for building off their local successes, while also continuing TWU's local organizing efforts to remain intimately connected to their initial base. Tram Nguyen, Associate Director of the 501(c)4 Virginia New Majority

explains how the organization began in 2007, “TWU’s board of directors decided [to start Virginia New Majority] coming out of the 2006 immigration reform movement... Here was this exciting opportunity to capitalize on the involvement of immigrants and people really wanting to change something...people were actually out there raising their own voices and not letting somebody else do it for them.” Jon Liss serves as the executive director for both groups, and TWU has an official seat on the Virginia New Majority board; the organizations, however, operate independently of one another. Virginia New Majority will develop chapters throughout the state, first focusing on Northern Virginia in areas where TWU has previously struggled to address backlash against immigrants. In addition to lobbying and voting outreach, Virginia New Majority holds 9-week Democracy Schools to prepare eligible immigrants not only for citizenship exams but also to continue to raise their voices in community campaigns.

# Acknowledgements

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# 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.

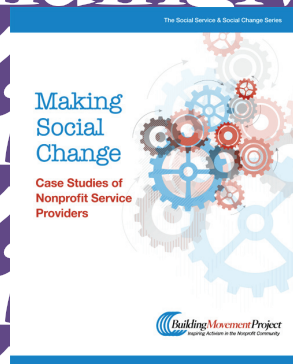
To accomplish its goals, the Building Movement Project makes use of four core strategies:

1. Changing the discourse and practice within the nonprofit sector to endorse social change and social justice values.
2. Identifying and working with social service organizations as sites for social change activities in which staff and constituencies can be engaged to participate in movement building.
3. Supporting young leaders who bring new ideas and energy to social change work.
4. Listening to and engaging people who work in social change organizations—especially grassroots and community-based groups—to strengthen their ability to shape the policies that affect their work and the communities they serve.

## About the Author

Marnie Brady, a PhD student in Sociology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY), served as the primary interviewer and author for this report: [mbrady1@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:mbrady1@gc.cuny.edu).

We also encourage you to consult the following Building Movement Project resources and publications for additional frameworks for approaching social change work:



## Contact

To offer feedback, comments, questions, or examples of your work in this area, please contact us:

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**[www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org)**

Or, visit the websites of the learning partners:

**PCUN [www.pcun.org](http://www.pcun.org),**

**Miami Workers' Center**

**[www.miamiworkerscenter.org](http://www.miamiworkerscenter.org),**

**Tenants and Workers United**

**[www.tenantsandworkers.org](http://www.tenantsandworkers.org), Rural**

**Organizing Project [www.rop.org](http://www.rop.org).**

The Miami Workers' Center and Tenants and Workers United are founding members of the Right to the City Alliance, a grassroots alliance of community organizing groups across the U.S. working for urban justice

**[www.righttothecity.org](http://www.righttothecity.org).**

